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Teacher Attitudes Toward Collaboration in an Independent Elementary School to Improve Instructional Practice

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Abstract

Research has confirmed that teachers who work collaboratively have the opportunity to exchange ideas and instructional methods to enhance their performance in the classroom. Using this as a guiding premise, the purpose of this study was to better understand teacher attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school setting. The study examined the complexities of collaboration in an effort to make a connection between collaboration among teachers and teacher learning. The study sought to identify the conditions that support opportunities for collaboration employing the definition and framework for a professional learning community. The setting for the study was a K-8 independent day school serving families in a suburban area located in New York. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, ten experienced teachers described their own lived experiences of collaboration in an independent school. Findings from this study revealed factors that are integral to establishing the conditions for collaboration in independent schools and provided data to support the implementation of certain structures and behaviors to improve organizational goals within independent schools. Recommendations resulting from this study included replicating the study in larger independent school organizations with a broader student population in order to further explore the impact of school size and composition. This type of study could also be conducted nationally in independent schools using quantitative methods to identify best practice for collaboration. Other recommendations include the development of formal and informal structures to support collaborative work among teachers; the implementation of teacher training in collaborative practice; attention to the communication of shared vision within the school community; reinforcement of attributes of school culture; and, leadership training and support of collaborative practice.

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Dedication

I believe in the divine order of our lives, and that people, places and experiences are set along our path for a higher purpose. This journey is no different. I believe that I am a mere instrument of God's mighty power and I promise to fully utilize the gifts bestowed upon me. The lessons learned in the classroom and outside its walls have been immeasurable and the overall impact of this experience has been profound.

This work is dedicated to my loving family. I could not have completed this journey without their love and support. I am especially grateful to the unwavering support of the love of my life, Mr. John J. Gilstrap. His quiet, patient understanding of the arduous weekend schedule, late nights buried in research or at my computer, and the temporary absences from our precious family have been invaluable. *You are my rock.*

I thank my sons (Evan T. Booker, II, 23; Corbin Mackenzie Booker, 22; and Blake Peterson Booker, 19) for their infectious humor, constant encouragement and daily inspiration. I embarked on the daunting task of completing a doctorate, in part, to demonstrate to them the value of intellectual curiosity, perseverance and leadership. I offer special thanks to Noah and Nyla, whose words of encouragement and curiosity about how to write such a "huge paper" nourished my soul. I hope that each of you will find passion in your work and help to make our world a better place.

I must also thank my parents for instilling in me the value of education and my commitment to excellence. I am especially grateful to my father, Mr. James E. Royal, Jr., for being an academic trailblazer in our family. His commitment to social justice and

civil rights during my childhood helped to lay the foundation for me life's work as a mother, educator, and change agent. I am also grateful to my extended family and devoted friends for their constant support, prayers and encouragement. I deeply love you all.

Special acknowledgement must be given to my dissertation committee, Dr. Steven Block and Dr. Pamela Njapa-Minyard. I am thankful for your collective wisdom and guidance throughout this demanding process. Additionally, I would like to thank my SJFC cohort family for their dedication and commitment to achievement. The collective energy and support has fueled me along this process. I will be forever grateful.

Biographical Sketch

Stephanie Ann Royal was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, yet grew up in the Hudson Valley in New York. She integrated her elementary school, and later went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Virginia in 1986, double majoring in finance and English. Her Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership was conferred by Cabrini College in 2005. In her early career, Stephanie served as a financial analyst at the former Morgan Guaranty Trust (J.P. Morgan Chase) and a boutique investment banking firm. She retired from finance after the birth of her sons and embarked upon a career in independent education.

Stephanie leveraged her broad experience to obtain various leadership positions within the education, business and non-profit sectors. She is an educator, diversity practitioner and entrepreneur. She has been recognized nationally for her work related to diversity, equity and social justice in her roles as an instructional designer, facilitator and presenter.

Upon entering the doctoral program at St. John Fisher College, Stephanie studied executive leadership and conducted research on pedagogical approaches to teacher professional development. She chose to focus on the practice of collaboration in independent schools, seeking to understand teacher attitudes about collaboration in an effort to determine the conditions for collaborative best practice in independent schools. Under the guidance of her dissertation chair, Dr. Steven Block, and committee member, Dr. Pamela Njapa-Minyard, Stephanie conducted a qualitative study on teacher attitudes

toward collaboration in an independent school setting using an interpretative

phenomenological approach.

Abstract

Research has confirmed that teachers who work collaboratively have the opportunity to exchange ideas and instructional methods to enhance their performance in the classroom. Using this as a guiding premise, the purpose of this study was to better understand teacher attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school setting. The study examined the complexities of collaboration in an effort to make a connection between collaboration among teachers and teacher learning. The study sought to identify the conditions that support opportunities for collaboration employing the definition and framework for a professional learning community. The setting for the study was a K-8 independent day school serving families in a suburban area located in New York. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, ten experienced teachers described their own lived experiences of collaboration in an independent school. Findings from this study revealed factors that are integral to establishing the conditions for collaboration in independent schools and provided data to support the implementation of certain structures and behaviors to improve organizational goals within independent schools. Recommendations resulting from this study included replicating the study in larger independent school organizations with a broader student population in order to further explore the impact of school size and composition. This type of study could also be conducted nationally in independent schools using quantitative methods to identify best practice for collaboration. Other recommendations include the development of formal and informal structures to support collaborative work among teachers; the

implementation of teacher training in collaborative practice; attention to the

communication of shared vision within the school community; reinforcement of attributes

of school culture; and, leadership training and support of collaborative practice.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Research in educational reform suggests that professional development for teachers is a key component of change and an important link between teacher performance and improved student learning (Borko, 2004; Guilfoyle, 2006). Research has found that professional development within the setting of a professional learning community promotes an exchange of ideas and co-creation of knowledge (Desimone, 2009; Wei et al., 2010). Despite compelling evidence that working collaboratively represents best practice, teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation (Musanti & Pense, 2010). Even in schools that endorse the idea of collaboration, the staff's willingness to collaborate often stops at the classroom door (DuFour, 2004, 2011). Schools often associate the term *collaboration* with collegiality and group camaraderie, but faculty members can build a *consensus* on operational procedures, such as managing tardiness or supervision at lunch or recess, without the interaction of collegiality. Committee structures may emerge as a means to establish operational policy for use of technology, social events, or community service. While each of these activities certainly serves a useful purpose, none represent the kind of professional dialogue that can transform a school into a professional learning community (DuFour, 2004, 2007; Fullan, 2001, 2006; Hughes & Kristonis, 2008; Little, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Meirink, Meijer, & Verloop, 2007).

The dynamic collaboration that characterizes a professional learning community (PLC) is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practices (DuFour, 2004, 2007; Fullan, 2001, 2006; Riveros, 2012). Teachers work in teams, engaged in an ongoing cycle of questions and reflection, to promote deep team learning (DuFour, 2004, 2007; Hughes & Kristonis, 2008). This process, in turn, leads to higher student achievement (Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton, 2012; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2012). Research conducted on teacher learning in professional learning communities has been conducted in public school settings (Billet, 2004; Jenkins, 2010; Poulos, Culberston, Piazza, & D'Entremont, 2014; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007), yet independent schools offer a unique opportunity to explore collaboration. There is a paucity of research related to independent schools and collaboration, most likely due to the rich history of academic freedom afforded to independent school teachers. Independent school teachers participate in a tradition of independence in the classroom where they are able to teach without the strict oversight characteristic of public school settings (Cutler, 2000; Hadar & Brody, 2010; Musanti & Pense, 2010).

Independent schools provide unique challenges when considering the development of a professional learning community. U.S. independent schools have long been characterized by a culture where teachers work in isolation (Hadar & Brody, 2010; Musanti & Pense, 2010). Training in instructional methods beyond subject matter expertise and pedigree from a top-tier university has not been customarily expected of independent school teachers (Cutler, 2000; Dronkers, 2008; Trickett & Castro, 1982). Further, the mantra of academic freedom for independent school teachers and the absence

of required licensing, prescribed curricula, and lesson planning support professional isolation (Cutler, 2000; Dronkers, 2008). Independent school teachers are not only isolated from each other in separate classrooms, but they are also insulated from professional critique and the need to demonstrate their professional growth (Dronkers, 2008).

There has been no public demand for improved professional learning opportunities for independent school teachers; however, the president of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), and other independent school leaders, have begun to emphasize the need for greater professional learning opportunities in independent schools (Bassett, 2006; Jorgenson, 2006; Murray, 2012. Wilson (2006) argued that the traditional conferences and workshops are no longer sufficient for developing innovation and instructional expertise that teachers need. Bassett (2006) suggested that to best prepare students for their role in the 21st century, schools must commit to ongoing, engaging learning opportunities for its teachers.

In an effort to obtain information about the status of teacher learning in independent schools, this qualitative study used interview data to examine teacher attitudes toward collaboration to improve their teaching practice. Interview data was used to obtain data on the climate and culture of the participating school. In the context of the interviews, I attempted to discover respondents' attitudes regarding policies, programs, and organizational structures as they relate to improved instruction. This data provided additional context for individual interviews to be held with randomly selected faculty members that will focus specifically on teachers' attitudes toward collaboration. Through the analysis of reported teacher attitudes, the study sought to understand factors that

influence collaboration aimed at improving teaching practice within an independent

school. This study seeks to provide a better understanding of the challenges faced by

teachers with respect to collaboration for the purpose of improving instruction.

Statement of the Problem

There is a paucity of research on collaboration in independent schools (Hoge,

2013; Kaufman, 2012). This lack of research was corroborated by John Chubb, president

of the National Association of Independent Schools and Hilary LaMonte, senior vice

president at NAIS (personal interview, November 5, 2014). At present, no specific

instrument exists to assess teachers' attitudes toward collaboration in an independent

school (H. LaMonte, personal interview, November 5, 2014; Murray, 2012). Since U.S.

independent schools are not required to administer high-stakes tests in the way that public

schools are, the impetus to create an assessment tool for teachers' professional learning is

low. One assessment tool related to professional development for independent schools

discovered in the literature is the Independent School Teacher Development Inventory

(ISTDI) developed by John M. Murray at Auburn University, published in 2012 (Murray,

2012). One of the relevant aspects of this inventory to the research study is the

examination of the working relationships within academic departments or grade levels.

Murray refers to this as collective participation (Murray, 2012). The research study

contributes to the scarce body of scholarly work related to independent education by

examining teacher attitudes toward collaboration to improve teaching.

Independent schools present a unique perspective when considering collaboration

(Calder, 2007; J. Chubb, personal communication, October 28, 2014; H. LaMonte,

personal interview, November 14, 2014; NAIS, 2012, 2013; Torres, 2011). Independent

schools are characterized by the freedom of choice for teachers and administrators with respect to curriculum design and instructional practice (J. Chubb, personal communication, October 28, 2014; H. LaMonte, personal interview, November 5, 2014; NAIS, 2012, 2013; Torres, 2011). As a result of this academic freedom, independent school teachers are less inclined to work together in planning to improve instruction. They have the freedom not to do so. Yet, independent school teachers can benefit from collaborative practice in the same manner that public school teachers can; however, there are cultural and institutional differences in independent schools that make the need for the proposed research study unique (J. Chubb, personal communication, October 28, 2014; H. LaMonte, personal interview, November 5, 2014). The autonomy and academic freedom that characterize independent schools could certainly encourage collegiality and cooperation (Bassett, 2006; Dronkers, 2008; Jorgenson, 2006). Unfortunately, this does not equate to collaboration as described in the definition of a professional learning community (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010; DuFour, 2004, 2007; Levine & Marcus, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2012). Implications for the autonomous culture of independent schools is worthy of study, particularly as it relates to collaboration.

Collaborative work in professional learning communities is supported by a school culture that values collaboration (Zwart, Wubbels, Bolhuis, & Bergen, 2008). This type of collaboration is directly tied to the development of a culture devoted to improving all aspects of teaching practice to benefit student learning. Attitudes toward collaboration by the teachers, themselves, are another factor. Further, conditions within the school setting, such as workday hours, scheduling, the physical plant, budget for professional development, as well as formal and informal communications among colleagues, all

contribute as factors that support a collaborative professional learning community (Poulos et al., 2014; DuFour, 2004, 2007; Fink, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2004; Hord, 1998; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton, 2012; Sergiovanni, 2012) and may therefore influence teacher attitudes. School leadership also plays a pivotal role in the development of collaboration in a professional learning community. The school leader has the authority to make decisions regarding budget and participation in professional development. Moreover, the school administration's style of leadership has direct influence on the culture of a particular school (Bakkenes, Vermunt, & Wubbels, 2010; Levin & Marcus, 2010).

Given my 15 years of experience in independent schools, the study is certainly within my scope of understanding. I have worked in independent schools in the northeast, Midwest, and southeast United States, ranging in student population from 325 to 1,500 students. I have worked as a teacher, administrator and curriculum designer developing innovative curriculum to support the varied needs of students. During the course of my career, I have been involved in various initiatives in each independent school including development of mission statements, discipline policies and scheduling. I have worked with colleagues to review math and literacy curricula, develop musical theater productions, and design class configurations. My professional work experience in independent schools lends itself to a greater understanding of the importance of the research study.

The setting for the research study was a K-8 independent day school serving families in a suburban area located in the metropolitan New York City region. The mission of the school is to guide students to reach their intellectual, creative, moral, and

physical potential. The school values the imagination and curiosity of children and respects childhood as an integral part of life. Teachers set high academic standards and challenge students to question, think, collaborate, and act with integrity. The school works in partnership with families to teach personal, social, and environmental responsibility and to create a community that honors diversity and our common humanity. The participating school inspires students to be lifelong learners with the courage and confidence to make a positive contribution to the world (Keystone School Handbook, 2014).

The school prides itself on teachers working collegially, but, based on the definition by scholars, it does not truly operate as a PLC. The systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve classroom practices characterizes professional learning communities. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions and reflection that promotes deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). In a professional learning community, the focus shifts from teaching to learning as a fundamental purpose. Adults in the community are continually learning in support of student learning (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002).

By contrasting the purposeful definition of a professional learning community within the context of the research site, this study will consider whether the conditions for collaboration with the intention of improving teacher learning and instruction actually exist. The study will also uncover the conditions by which attempts at collaboration fail or succeed. Prior to the start of the research process, a poll of faculty morale indicated that a problem existed at the research site (Thomas, 2014). Faculty members reported

distrust of school administration, dissatisfaction with recent policy decisions, and complete objection to a new initiative that teachers were required to endorse. This provided a backdrop of the recent conflict between faculty and administration. The reported conflict represented a serious issue for any independent school given that their greatest asset is their faculty (NAIS Trendbook, 2014; School Handbook, 2014). Completion of the research study provided data that will be useful in correcting at least some of the existing problems, particularly those related to building consensus and decision making. The data can also be useful to school administrators as they plan for the long-term sustainability of the school. Most importantly, the study revealed opportunities to create a professional learning community at the school, which can, in turn, lead to improved student learning.

Research shows that teacher professional development that is focused on pedagogical content knowledge, alignment with school goals, implementation over time, active teacher learning, and collaboration can boost student achievement (Poulos et al., 2014; Jenkins, 2010; Munson, Martz, & Shimek, 2013; Wei et al., 2010). These practices have a measurable effect on students' basic skills. More recent research suggests that the depth of student learning is related to the depth and subject specificity of teacher learning (Avalos, 2010; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Jenkins, 2010; Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegers, 2010; Poulos et al., 2014). Schools that foster collaborative learning and a culture of collegiality and continuous improvement are better able to support and retain new teachers, pursue innovation, respond effectively to external changes, and secure teacher commitment and overall job satisfaction (Avalos, 2010; Liu & Ramsey, 2006; Moolenaar, 2010). Russell (2002) supports the use of collaboration based on shared

vision, goals, and trust. His work acknowledges the need for mutual respect, planning, and shared risk. Given the low morale, need to enhance instructional practice, and competition from area schools, the research study will likely benefit the school. Findings revealed compelling evidence supporting teacher attitudes toward collaboration for the purpose of supporting student achievement at the proposed research site.

Theoretical Rationale

Collaborative learning in a professional learning community is built upon a social construct. It includes personal interaction, whether in person or via technology. Face-to-face dialogues and computer discussions (online forums, chat rooms, Skype, virtual communities) are included in the definition of collaborative learning (Biddle, Brown, Gossage, Hack, & Wilson, 2013; Billet, 2004; Olson & Craig, 2001; Payne & Howes, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2012). Research also finds merit in the implementation of collaborative learning communities in the classroom among students (Seidman, 2012). Teachers who engage in collaborative practice within a professional learning community further support an inviting, supportive, and safe environment from which student collaboration can thrive (DuFour, 2007). Research supports the connection between teacher collaboration and student collaboration. Student collaboration allows for better student engagement, enhanced problems solving and critical thinking, improved understanding of subject matter, greater interest and an overall more positive learning experience (Shull, 2005). Clearly, teacher collaboration and student collaboration both show merit in the classroom.

Studies show the importance and efficacy of collaboration across various disciplines, and collaboration is becoming widely supported—not just in education—but

in corporations as well (Abele, 2011; McAfee, 2009; Pisano & Verganti, 2008. As such, if teacher collaboration can be used to improve student learning, students who collaborate will achieve better outcomes when they learn to collaborate themselves (Danielowich, 2012). Collaboration in professional learning communities requires trust built in a social context (Covey, 2006; Fleming & Thompson, 2004). Professional learning communities become authentic learning organizations when an underlying premise of trust exists (Abele, 2011; McDermott & Archibald, 2010). Teachers' attitudes about collaboration to improve instructional practice will be examined in the research study.

Collaborative learning in independent schools presents a unique opportunity to explore the concept of collaboration. Independent schools are non-profit institutions that are self-determining with regard to their mission and program. They are not regulated by the government, but they are accountable to the students they serve and the parents that enroll them (Bassett, 2003; Blackburn & Wise, 2012; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009).

Independent schools are private, not-for-profit elementary, middle, and secondary schools, which are governed by a board of trustees. They are funded by tuition, endowment, private gifts, grants, and annual giving (Blackburn & Wise, 2012; Cutler, 2000; Glenn, 1997; Hussar & Bailey, 2011). They range in size from under 100 students to several thousand students. They may begin instruction with nursery or pre-school and end in 8th or 9th grade or continue through high school (12th grade). Some schools provide a post-graduate (PG) year for students who can benefit from an additional year in high school before transitioning to college (Cutler, 2000; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009).

Independent schools may be single-sex or coed, operating as a day, boarding, or a day school with a boarding option. They are located in rural, suburban, or city centers.

Generally speaking, they are selective schools, offering high-quality education, including a vast array of athletic offerings, visual, and performing arts courses, and co-curricular leadership opportunities (Cutler, 2000; Glenn, 1997).

The pedagogy, or instructional style, of an independent school varies. Some schools may be traditional, others progressive. They may follow the specific philosophy and methodologies guided by educators like John Dewey, Rudolph Steiner, Maria Montessori, or Jean Piaget. They may use a combination of these theorists, or they may create their own unique teaching strategies (Cutler, 2000; Glenn, 1997).

In all cases, independent schools report high academic expectations of its teachers, and they, ideally, attract and admit motivated students and involved parents (Interschool, 2014). Class size tends to be small, varying from a one-on-one independent study in the upper grades to about 24 students, depending on the subject, the popularity of the instructor, the frequency the course is taught, and the interests of the students. Student/faculty ratios are small, with most teaching sections averaging 16-18 students. As a critical component of modern education, technology resources are generally abundant (Interschool, 2014).

The following theoretical foundation will support the study of teacher attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school setting.

Social development theory. Social development theory supports the dissertation research study by providing a theoretical framework for the study of collaboration among teachers. The process of collaborative learning is rooted in the social constructivist theory of psychologist, Lev Vygotsky in 1978. Vygotsky (1978) outlined the theoretical structure for considering collaboration as a social process in which meaning is

constructed from group members. Vygotsky's collected works were published almost 40 years after his premature death. He theorized than man learns through social engagements with others. Vygotsky saw development as continuous and that "knowledge construction is a social cooperative venture" (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003, p. 142). In his research with children, Vygotsky (1962, 1978) further defined his premise that learning was a socially constructed experience involving more capable learners guiding those less capable beyond their developmental level. He called this the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Although the theory of the zone of proximal development is generally discussed in relation to children, its meaning has been expanded to include relationships among adults and is applicable to the relationships between teachers and students and among colleagues serving on school faculty (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003).

To Jean Piaget (1936), a contemporary of Vygotsky, cognitive development was a progressive reorganization of mental processes resulting from biological maturation and environmental experience. Piaget's theory is based on assumptions about how learners interact with their environment and how they integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge. He believed that children construct an understanding of the world around them after which they experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment. The awareness of this disequilibrium promotes assimilation and accommodation allowing for complex cognitive development. This cognitive conflict leads to learning (Piaget, 1936). Piaget concentrated on the universal stages of cognitive development and biological maturation, unlike Vygotsky (1978), who considered the effect that the social setting, activities, and culture could have on cognitive development during his studies.

During the period of 1926 through 1930, Vygotsky worked on a research study investigating the development of higher cognitive functions of logical memory, selective attention, decision making, and language comprehension, from early forms of primal psychological functions (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky guided his research to identify three distinct phenomena: (a) the instrumental angle, which tried to understand the ways in which humans use objects as aides for mediation in memory and reasoning; (b) a developmental approach, which focuses on how children acquire the higher cognitive functions during development; and, (c) a culture-historical approach, which is a study of the ways in which forms of mediation and developmental trajectories are shaped by different social and cultural patterns of interaction (Montiel-Overall, 2005).

Each of these themes is interconnected in Vygotsky's (1978) work. In fact, Vygotsky, himself, never discussed these themes in discreet terms. *Studies on the History of Behavior: Ape, Primitive and Child* is one of Vygotsky's (1930) most important works. This study was co-authored by Aleksandr Romanovich Luria and outlined their general developmental (genetic) method. Vygotsky and Luria's (1993) definitions of genetic domains differed markedly from other contemporary scholars. They argued that genetic analysis must address the ways in which knowledge contributes to our understanding of behavior and mental functioning. Vygotsky and Luria mapped phylogenies, socio-cultural history, and ontogenesis.

Vygotsky and Luria (1993) focused on critical turning points in the development of behavior. For apes, it was the use of tools. For the behavior of man, it was labor and the use of psychological signs. For the child, the split of the developmental line into natural psychological and cultural psychological is most significant (Vygotsky & Luria,

1993, 2013). Vygotsky's social constructivism emphasized the critical importance of culture and the importance of the social context for cognitive development. Key elements of the social development theory include the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the more knowledgeable other (MKO).

ZPD is defined by Vygotsky (1978) as the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student's ability to solve a problem independently (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, important learning occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. The tutor may model behaviors and/or provide verbal instructions for the child. Vygotsky referred to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. The learner seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) then internalize the information, using it to guide or regulate his or her own performance.

Vygotsky's (1978) work is significant in that it provided the foundation for future scholars' work in studying collaboration. The work of Drucker (1999), Elliot (2001), Friend & Cook (2000), Inger (1993), Jenni & Mauriel (2004), Kukulska-Hulme (2004), Riordan (1995), Rogoff (1990), and Senge (1990) is grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. These scholars conducted research on collaboration based on a philosophy of interaction among peers and a process of shared creation. Van Huizen, van Oers, and Wubbels (2005) also supported a Vygotskian perspective on teacher education. I contend that learning and development in a sociocultural context promotes teacher learning by offering the possibility for integrating approaches that emphasize development toward a "standard of competence, development of a personal orientation

towards teaching, and reflective inquiry" (Huizen et al., 2005, p. 235). They further

stated:

> The professional identity of teachers includes their identity as members of a
>
> professional learning community . . . . Developing a professional identity requires
>
> the ongoing exchange of experience and views with trainees, teachers, and teacher
>
> educators. Possibilities for such an exchange may be provided in both formal
>
> settings, such as collegial consultation and intervisitation, and through conditions
>
> promoting informal contacts . . . . These situations are by themselves of a nature
>
> to encourage negotiation of meaning between participants and a prerequisite for
>
> cooperation. (p. 235)

Social constructivist theory contends that learning is promoted through

collaboration. Vygotsky's theory (1978) specified collaboration among students and

between students and teacher. From Vygotsky's social constructivist perspective, as

students share background knowledge and participate in the give and take of

collaborative and cooperative activities, they are actually negotiating meaning. They are

building knowledge, not as individuals, but as a group. People who surround the

individual student and the culture within which that person lives greatly affect the way he

or she makes sense of the world. Vygotsky's social development theory asserts that social

interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development (Vygotsky,

1978). Vygotsky proposed that social learning precedes development. He stated, "Every

function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and

later, on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological) and then inside

the child (intra-psychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978).

Theory of convergent conceptual change. Jeremy Roschelle (1992) presented a theory of convergent conceptual change. In *Learning by Collaborating: Convergent Conceptual Change*, Roschelle analyzed collaboration as a process that can gradually lead to shared meaning (Roschelle, 1992). Roschelle's work with Smith and diSessa (1994) presented a constructivist analysis of knowledge acquisition. Roschelle's work supports my efforts in preparing the dissertation as a continuation of the social constructivist theme found in Vygotsky (1978). According to the work of Roschelle, the crux of collaboration is in convergence, the understanding of conversations, concepts, and experiments used to construct meaning (Roschelle, 1992). Specifically, knowledge convergence is the process by which two or more people share mutual understanding through social interaction.

Knowledge convergence is believed to reflect the social nature of the knowledge construction process (Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991; Rogoff, 1990 Roschelle, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978). Collaboration is a process that can gradually lead to convergence of meaning. Roschelle stated that successful collaboration involves a large degree of mutual engagement, joint decision making, and discussion (Shechtman, Roschelle, Haertel, & Knudsen, 2010). Roschelle further stated that collaboration occurs via engagement with an emergent, socially negotiated social set of knowledge elements that create a context for solving problems or reaching defined goals (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995). Roschelle (1992) argued that collaboration takes place in a "negotiated and shared conceptual space, constructed through mediational framework of shared language, situation, and activity, not merely inside the cognitive contents of an individual's head" (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995, p. 71).

Within cognitive developmental psychology, the interest in conceptual change was motivated by problems identified in the stage theory of cognitive development proposed by Jean Piaget (1936). In Piaget's theory of cognitive development, he claimed that the developing child passed through a series of four distinct stages of thought and that concept development reflected these broad transitions between stages. However, it increasingly became apparent that children's conceptual development was best described in terms of distinct developmental trajectories for each conceptual domain considered (e.g., knowledge about numbers, knowledge about the motion and interaction of inanimate objects, and knowledge about goal-directed intentional entities). The term *conceptual change* was increasingly used as work on these distinct developmental trajectories, which led to the discovery that a variety of types of changes occur in the content and organization of concepts (Roschelle, 1992).

The work of Roschelle (1992) found its underpinnings in Jean Piaget's (1936) work in cognitive developmental psychology (Roschelle, Pea, Hoadley, Gordin, & Means, 2000; Roschelle & Teasley, 1995; Smith, diSessa, & Roschelle, 1994). Roschelle's interest in conceptual change was motivated by problems identified in Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development (Piaget, 1936). Piaget's discrete stages of development are marked by qualitative differences, rather than a gradual increase in number and complexity of behaviors and ideas (Montiel & Overall, 2005).

Roschelle's (1992) theory of convergent conceptual change was also influenced by Suchman (1987). Suchman is widely known for foundational work in the field of human-computer interaction (2007). She argued that human action is constantly constructed and reconstructed from interactions within the material and social worlds

(Suchman, 1987). Suchman emphasized the importance of environment as an integral part of the cognitive process. Thus, the relations of actions and situations—*situated actions* are the essential units to which participants orient themselves in their efforts to succeed in convergent conceptual change (Suchman, 1987). This view of knowledge is called a *relation theory of meaning* (Barwise & Perry, 1983). The central claim here is that conversational interaction can enable students to construct such relational meanings incrementally. Specifically, it was argued that conversational interaction provides a means for students to construct increasingly sophisticated approximations to scientific concepts collaboratively, through gradual refinement of ambiguous, figurative, partial meanings.

Roschelle (1992) also referenced John Dewey (1916) in his work in convergent conceptual change, noting that a socialized mind has the power to understand concepts in terms of the use they have in joint or shared situations (Dewey, 1916). Roschelle's work also built on social constructivist (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989) and situated action perspectives (Suchman, 1987) in order to account for students' achievement of convergent conceptual change. It is the discourse and exchange of ideas that leads to learning. Roschelle's theory of convergent conceptual change provided an integrated approach to collaboration. Roschelle contended that the crux of collaboration is found when two or more people construct shared knowledge. He analyzed collaborations as a process that can gradually lead to convergence of meaning (Roschelle, 1992). There are four features of convergent conceptual change. The process is characterized by "(a) the production of deep-featured situation in relation to (b) the interplay of physical metaphors, through the constructive use of (c) interactive cycles of

conversational turn-taking, constrained by (d) the application of progressively higher standards of evidence for convergence" (Roschelle, 1992, p. 235).

Roschelle's (1992) process of conceptual change involved primary features that suggested an alternative way to think about collaborative learning. Roschelle's vision of collaborative learning featured collaboration as a theory of instruction. The theory of collaborative learning asserts that learning is enhanced when learners are placed in situations involving "coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem" (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995, p. 34). This theory has been incorporated into a variety of well-known instructional methods, including problem-based learning, some versions of cooperative learning, and project-based learning (Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Buzzeo, 2002).

Roschelle's (1992) work in computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) was an extension of his theory in convergent conceptual change. CSCL is an emerging branch of the learning sciences concerned with studies on how people can learn together with the help of computers. This concept may seem simple; however, the intersection of learning with technology turns out to be quite complex (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995; Roschelle et al., 2000; Roschelle, Rosas, & Nussbaum, 2005).

The combination of collaboration, computer mediation, and distance education has introduced a distinct perspective in the study of learning. Roschelle (1992) questioned prevailing assumptions about group learning and how to study it (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995). The study of group learning began long before CSCL. Since at least the 1960s, before the advent of networked personal computers, there was considerable investigation of cooperative learning by education researchers. Research of small groups

has an even longer history within social psychology (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995). In 1987, Yrgö Engeström drew upon a set of distinctions, originally proposed by Bernd Fictner in 1984, between coordination, cooperation, and reflective communication in learning. These two scholars contended that the difference between coordination and cooperation has to do with the degree to which a learning task involves a prescribed division of labor among participants (Dettmer, 1999, 2003; Dillenbourg, 1999).

To distinguish CSCL from this earlier investigation of group learning, the candidate must draw the distinction between *cooperative* and *collaborative* learning. In a detailed discussion of this distinction, Dillenbourg (1999) offered his definition of cooperation. In cooperation, work partners split the work, solve sub-tasks individually, and then assemble the partial results into the final output. In collaboration, partners do the work together (Dillenbourg, 1999).

By contrast, in the Roschelle & Teasley (1995) characterization of collaboration, learning occurs socially as the collaborative construction of knowledge. According to Roschelle (1992), individuals are involved in collaborative construction of knowledge as members of a group, but the activities that they engage in are not individual-learning activities but group interactions like negotiation and sharing. The participants do not go off to do things individually but remain engaged with a shared task that is constructed and maintained by and for the group as such. According to Roschelle and Teasley, the collaborative negotiation and social sharing of *group meanings* is central to collaboration. Their work together focused on the process of collaboration through the microanalysis of social interactions among peer groups (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995). The process of creating shared understanding through the social construct of a relationship is critically

important. Roschelle and Teasley acknowledged the social aspects of collaboration, studying knowledge convergence, common ground, and transactive reasoning (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995; Teasley, 2008).

Social network theory. In the past 30 years, educational researchers and policy makers have become increasingly interested in teacher relationships and teacher collaboration to support professional development of teachers in schools. Judith Warren Little (1993) examined the relationship among teachers and their colleagues and their professional success and satisfaction with their students, their engagement in their work, and their commitment to a career in teaching.

Warren-Little's (1990) social network theory examined the connection between teachers' collegial involvement and productivity in schools. Warren-Little's social network theory acknowledges the importance of teacher collaboration for strengthening schools and building individual teacher's knowledge.

Her work sparked further research by other scholars into the meaning and potential of teacher collaboration in student learning (Louis & Marks, 1998), teacher learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006), and school improvement (Fullan, 1992; Hargreaves, 1991).

Social network theory examines networks among teachers and school leaders, contrasting formal and informal organizational structures, and exploring the mechanisms by which ideas, information, and influence flow from person to person and group to group. Social network theory contends that the success or failure of education reform ultimately is not solely the result of technical plans and blueprints but of the relational ties that support or constrain the pace, depth, and direction of change. The work of

Warren-Little (1990) informed the research of Wheatley (1999, 2002), a scholar in organizational design. Wheatley is known for her writings that argued that organizations are complex living systems rather than mechanical systems. Wheatley maintained that although systems are naturally occurring, they do not form at random. She wrote that a living system forms itself as it recognizes shared interests. Systems form through collaboration from a realization that humans need each other in order to maintain life (Wheatley, 1999, 2002). Processes of collaboration and symbiosis characterize life. As such, organizations thrive when systems of interdependency exist and are nurtured (Wheatley, 1999). Wheatley's work provided clear indicators of how people adapt in order to manage learning and change.

Social network theory also attempts to provide evidence for why educational reform is hindered by relationships that exist. Warren-Little's (1990) theory is applied to the work of improving education at national, school, and instructional level.

Warren-Little's (1990) development of the social network theory is supported by Ball and Cohen (1999) who urged for more opportunities for teachers to learn from each other through professional practice. They developed the Instructional Triangle in which teachers learn from each other for the benefit of student achievement. Ball and Cohen stated that the relationships among teachers, students, and content encompass the triangle, one that is decidedly dynamic, fluid, and complex.

An examination of social network theory and the work related to the development of the theory supports the dissertation research on teacher attitudes toward collaboration. The theory also serves to underscore the significance of teacher interactions in a professional setting. Social network theory reveals how these interactions promote a more

collaborative workplace to support instruction. Warren-Little (1990) applied the social network perspective to study student collaboration. By examining social networks among the teachers in a school, the study identifies patterns of social relationships among teachers that result from their interactions in practice. According to the data, these social relationships inform teachers' attitudes about collaboration. Furthermore, the social network theory supports the dissertation research as the theoretical foundation for the analysis of teacher behaviors during collaboration and the factors within a school community that support collaboration.

Research Questions

Research has confirmed that teachers who experience frequent, rich learning opportunities are able to teach in more ambitious and effective ways. In schools, collaboration is seen as an opportunity for school renewal (Fishbaugh, 1997; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2000; Council for Exceptional Children, n.d.). Teachers who work collaboratively have the opportunity to exchange ideas and instructional methods to enhance their performance in the classroom. Teachers can promote student learning by working collaboratively to improve classroom instruction (Achinstein, 2010; Daly & Finnagan, 2011; Danielowich, 2012; Eaker et al., 2002; Hughes & Kritsonis, 2006; Kuusiaari, 2014; Overall, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2004). Yet, the autonomy of independent school teachers may lead to feelings of isolation, low morale and ineffectiveness in teaching (Bassett, 2006; Dronkers, 2008; Jorgenson, 2006; Trickett & Castro, 1982), thereby removing the promise of collaboration.

This study examines teacher attitudes toward collaboration and how the application of collaborative learning communities in schools informs instructional practice. The essential questions include the following:

1. What are teacher attitudes towards collaboration as a means to improve teaching at an independent school?

2. Are there formal structures and policies in place that support opportunities for collaboration to improve instructional practice?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of teacher attitudes toward collaboration to improve teaching in an independent school setting. U.S. independent schools have been characterized by a culture where teachers work in isolation (Dronkers, 2008). Further, independent school teachers benefit from a mantra of academic freedom where prescribed curricula, lesson plans, and strict oversight are not the norm (Dronkers, 2008). Teachers in independent schools are not only isolated from each other in separate classrooms, but they are also isolated from the opportunity to observe one another within a professional context in order to learn and grow in their practice (Dronkers, 2008; Trickett & Castro, 1982). Independent school leaders have begun to support the need for greater attention to teacher learning (Bassett, 2006; Jorgenson, 2006). The research participants in the study represent a typical independent school. The study took place in an independent elementary school (K-8) setting. Individual semi-structured teacher interviews with experienced teachers provide the data to help discern and identify attitudes toward collaboration in a professional learning community. The study explored the formation of teacher work groups (pairs or larger

groups), development of vision, social and professional interactions, elements of school culture, and the role of school leadership.

An examination of teacher attitudes toward collaboration for the purpose of professional development will contribute to the scholarly work that has been primarily focused on public schools. To date, no instrument exists to adequately assess the extent to which professional learning opportunities in U.S. independent schools meet the research-based standards for teacher professional learning (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Vaden-Kiernanm, Jones, & McCann, 2009; Wei et al., 2010). These standards include pedagogical content knowledge, coherence with school goals, implementation over time, active teacher learning, and collaborative work groups (Desimone, 2009; Wei et al., 2010).

The School and Staffing Survey (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011) and the Standards Assessment Inventory (National Staff Development Council, 2007) were used to study professional learning practices in public schools. An examination of teacher attitudes toward collaboration could possibly inform an assessment tool for independent schools to measure teacher collaboration and the conditions required for it to exist. Since no instrument currently exists, and independent schools perceive themselves as collaborative, the development of an assessment tool could lead to dramatic changes in practice as it relates to collaboration to improve classroom instruction. Finally, results of the study could be presented at conferences or workshops aimed at enhancing teacher practice. Summary findings, trends, and statistics could be shared with independent school administrators with the purpose of establishing best practices to better serve students. Research in collaborative learning among teachers could reveal and define

important behaviors and protocols for true collaboration. Ultimately, the candidate seeks to make a connection between teacher collaboration and student learning.

Definition of Terms

The following list of definitions is offered to provide clarification for concepts discussed in the research study:

Academic Freedom in an independent school setting is an unwritten construct that grants faculty members the authority to study and teach the topics they choose. Academic freedom gives faculty members substantial latitude in deciding how to teach the courses for which they are responsible.

Collaboration is defined as a systematic process in which humans work together interdependently to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results (DuFour, 2004).

Collaborative Learning is often characterized as a process of constructing shared knowledge in which people converge on a shared meaning and representation of what they have learned (Roschelle, 1992).

Collaborative Teams are organizational arrangements that bring individuals together in cohorts within a climate of collegiality. Teachers are arranged with complementary knowledge and skills to amass talent that exceeds the capabilities of any single teacher (Rottier, 2001). Collaborative teams provide advantages for students and teachers in that they support improvements in communication, curriculum, and instruction.

Professional Development refers to a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, or

other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Hidden Curriculum, 2014).

Professional Learning Community is defined as a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice on an ongoing reflective, inclusive, collaborative, learning-oriented manner to promote growth (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; King & Newman, 2001; Sackney & Mitchell, 2002; Toole & Louis, 2002). Seashore, Anderson, & Riedel (2003) used the term *professional learning community* in schools to describe not only discrete acts of teacher sharing but also the establishment of a school-wide culture that promotes collaboration as an expected, inclusive, genuine, and ongoing practice devoted to improving student outcomes.

School Culture refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions (Hidden Curriculum, 2014). Components of school culture include the physical and emotional safety of students, classroom configuration and public spaces, and the degree to which the school embraces various aspects of diversity. A *school culture* may be defined as the guiding beliefs and expectations evident in the way a school operates (Fullan, 2006, 2007).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the problem, purpose, research questions and potential significance of the study seeking to understand teacher attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school setting. A glossary of definitions and terms relevant to subsequent chapters is provided for review and clarification. Chapter 2 provides a review of the current scholarly literature and studies on teacher collaboration, including attention to

theoretical and practical considerations of professional learning communities,

improvements in instructional practice and teacher professional development. Chapter 3

discusses the research design and methodology for this study. Chapter 4 includes the

findings of the study, and Chapter 5, a discussion of the implications for practice and

limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

There is a paucity of research on collaboration in independent schools (J. Chubb, personal communication, October 28, 2014; Hoge, 2013; Kaufman, 2012; H. LaMonte, personal interview, October 22, 2014). At present, no specific instrument exists to assess teacher attitudes toward collaboration in a professional learning community (H. LaMonte, personal interview, October 22, 2014; Murray, 2012). Because U.S. independent schools are not required to administer high-stakes tests in the way that public schools are, the impetus to create an assessment tool for teachers' professional learning is low (Murray, 2012). One assessment tool related to professional development for independent schools that was discovered in the literature is the Independent School Teacher Development Inventory (ISTDI) developed by John M. Murray at Auburn University, published in 2012 (Murray, 2012). This inventory was designed to assess the professional development practices at US independent schools and focuses on content, coherence duration, and active learning/collaboration. This research study will contribute to the scarce body of scholarly work related to independent education by examining teacher attitudes toward collaboration.

The following literature review provides a general overview of collaboration in school settings in order to describe the significance of professional learning communities. A summary of the history of schooling and the independent school sector will complete the literature review.

Review of the Literature

Collaboration in the school setting. Improving professional practice in U.S. public schools has become a focus of policymakers, educators, and researchers. Hiring practices, staff restructuring at failing schools, and ongoing professional development are being examined as a way to improve the quality of teaching (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Rothstein, 2010). Recent demands on schools will require teachers to address improved student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). As students are expected to learn complex material and demonstrate analytical and problem-solving skills, it is incumbent upon teachers to adapt their instruction to encourage higher level thinking (Wagner, 2008). For years, the only form of professional development available to teachers was staff development, also known as in-service training. Training consisted of workshops, speakers, or short-term courses (Webster-Wright, 2009). Researchers have decried the ineffectiveness of the conventional one-shot professional development approach (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Supovitz & Turner, 2000) citing minimal effect on instructional practice or student achievement (Desimone, 2009).

Motivated by the ineffectiveness of conventional professional development, researchers agree that the primary characteristics of effective professional development include a focus on content knowledge, alignment of goals within a school, implementation over time, active teacher learning, and collaborative work groups (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Desimone, 2009; Wei et al., 2010). Further research suggests that collaboration within a professional learning community that is connected to student needs provides the optimal environment for teacher learning and

growth (Borko, Elliot, & Uchiyama, 2001; DuFour, 2004, 2007; Hughes & Kritsonis, 2008; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Collaboration in a professional learning community. There is support in the research community for professional learning communities that are designed as carefully structured learning teams aimed at supporting student achievement. DuFour (2004, 2007) stated that the,

> powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions and reflection that promotes deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. (DuFour, 2007, p. 89)

In a professional learning community, the focus shifts from teaching to learning as a fundamental purpose. Adults in the community are continually learning in support of student learning (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Hargreaves (2004, 2007) provided extensive research on teacher collaboration, contributing to the body of work regarding professional learning communities. Hargreaves reported on the emotional responses of teachers to self-initiated versus mandated change and how the culture of a school community can impact the efficacy of collaboration (2004). Hargreaves (2001, 2004, 2007) noted the importance of sustained collegial relationships among teachers as the cornerstone to success and sustainability in professional learning communities. The ethics of interpersonal caring, support, and respect must permeate the life of teachers, students, and school leaders (Hargreaves & Giles, 2003). Fullan (2007) encouraged schools to create a culture of life-long learning in

order to prepare students for the future with the ability to adapt to change, innovation, and invention. Fullan suggested "re-culturing" schools through a high level of collaboration among professionals, rather than through restructuring schools (2007). Darling-Hammond's (2000) work highlights the structural features that promote success in schools. One of the core structures essential to reaching improved student learning is *teaching teams* where teachers collaborate and learn together (Levine & Marcus, 2010). These teams may take the form of teacher partnerships, small groups, or a whole group focused on a coherent goal (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010; Chang & Pang, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; DuFour, 2004, 2007; Musanti & Pence, 2010).

In practice, schools that function as a PLCs embody a focused learning for both the students and the teachers. The sole focus on teaching to students is removed and is replaced with a focus on sustained collaborative learning among teachers who commit to a shared goal (DuFour, 2004, 2007, 2010; Fink, 2004; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2004; Senge et al., 2012; Sergiovanni, 2012).

The literature review illustrates a shift in approach to collaborative learning in the form of professional learning communities (PLCs) to support teacher training and continuing education. Teachers need ongoing training to meet the demands of the best practices in education (Barth, 1991; Biddle & Berliner, 2002; DuFour, 2004, 2007; Fink, 2004; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2004; Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Hord, 1998; Rothstein, 2010; Senge et al., 2012; Sergiovanni, 2012; Smoker, 2005; Tinto, 2004). The implementation of a PLC supports this need for ongoing training. Collaboration plays a key role. Collaboration in a professional learning community stems from the core value

within schools to support teacher learning in order to promote student learning (DuFour, 2004, 2007).

The fundamental shift toward teacher learning can have profound implications for schools. As such, the emphasis on professional learning via collaboration to transfer skills among colleagues is significant. This transfer of information and expertise offers resources to all teachers committed to collaboration with the objective of improving student learning (DuFour, 2004; Fleming & Thompson, 2004; Thompson et al., 2004). Collaboration is not limited to teachers simply meeting together. Collaboration includes classroom visitation, observation, and reflection (Fleming & Thompson, 2004). Collaboration also involves examination of student output to assess strengths, weaknesses, and overall progress (Bakkemes, Vermunt, & Wubbels, 2010; Hughes & Kritsonis, 2008; Meirink et al., 2007).

Collaboration within a professional learning community is not limited to face-to-face contact (Brown, Wilson, Gossage, Hack, & Biddle, 2013; Olson & Olson, 2013; Payne & Howes, 2013; Priya, 2014). Collaboration over the Internet presents profound opportunities for teachers who work in different institutions across the globe. Studies in long-distance collaboration report potent growth in collaboration among persons located across differing physical locations. Distance communication and collaboration has helped in the sharing of best practices across disciplines in corporations, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations. Online collaboration has been useful in resolving complex multi-disciplinary problems (Brown et al., 2013; Olson & Olson, 2013; Payne & Howes, 2013). Research supports the notion that diverse conceptual perspectives and problem-solving strategies result from collaboration within a professional learning community.

Teacher collaboration in professional learning communities features several fundamental characteristics. These include a shared vision for student learning and interaction; a commitment to collaboration among faculty as an impetus for professional growth; work in a culture of reflection and team research; and administrative leadership (Desimone, 2009; Gregg & Niska, 2004; Wei et al., 2010). Fleming and Thompson (2004) studied the role of trust in facilitating collaborative teams in professional learning communities. Their work further supported the role of creating a safe and trusting culture within a school environment. Other characteristics of a collaborative professional learning environment include shared values and vision, the creation of supportive conditions, and organizational structures that support collaboration (DuFour & Eaker, 2002; Hargreaves, 2005; Senge et al., 2012; Sergiovanni, 2012; Smoker, 2004; Solomon, Boud, & Rooney, 2006).

Impact of the professional learning community. The impact of professional learning communities supports a paradigm shift toward PLCs for the professional development of teachers (DuFour, 2004, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Hughes & Kritsonis, 2008; Thompson et al., 2004; Vescio et al., 2008). In general, the literature and research base has identified teacher benefits, confirmed PLC characteristics, and, to a lesser extent, assessed the impact on student performance.

A PLC can contribute to instructional improvement and school reform (Little, 2003). PLCs can be most effective when their purpose is to enhance teacher effectiveness for the ultimate benefit of students (Stoll & Louis, 2007). By participating in PLCs, teachers may experience a variety of other benefits that contribute to improved student achievement, including a reduction of isolation, increased commitment to the mission of

the school, shared responsibility for student success, higher job satisfaction, and decreased absenteeism. PLCs have also been attributed to sustained school improvement efforts (Schmoker, 2004a, 2004b; Stoll & Louis, 2007; Vescio et al., 2008).

PLC characteristics. PLCs often are defined by the presence of certain characteristics (Stoll & Louis, 2007). Researchers have attempted to identify characteristics in PLCs that are operating smoothly—such as supportive and shared leadership, belief that the school is a learning community, shared vision, focus on student achievement, continuous inquiry and reflective dialogue, and collaboration—and participants' perceptions about those characteristics (Hord, 1998; Huffman, 2000; Thompson et al., 2004). DuFour (2007) further contended that a professional learning community is characterized as a safe, inviting, and supportive environment. Safety, defined as not only physical safety, includes emotional, social, and cultural safety as well (DuFour, 2007). A PLC maintains a healthy respect for the differences that exist among its members, and it promotes intellectual discourse. Even in the face of discourse, teachers in a PLC commit to standard principles to guide their work together as outlined in DuFour (2007):

Standard Principles of a Professional Learning Community

- Clarity regarding knowledge, skills and behaviors that each student must acquire

- Agreement on criteria used for assessment and the consistent application of the criteria

- Development of common formative assessments to monitor student learning in a timely manner

- Process for identification of students who are experiencing difficulty in their learning in order to provide timely, systematic intervention to encourage proficiency

- Support for team interdependence to achieve goals that are strategic, measurable, attainable and results-oriented and time-bound

- Continuous processes built into the routine work practice within a school

- Decision making achieved from shared knowledge regarding best practice, rather than pooling opinions

- Demonstrate through collective efforts the school's intention to help all students learn at high levels

- Concerted effort to focus on critical issues during collaborative work time (DuFour, 2007, p. 233)

Researchers have also recognized that the process for creating a professional learning community is just that—the evolution of a PLC can be dynamic, resulting in varying degrees of proficiency. Proactive administrative leadership, when combined with teacher leadership and purposeful decision making, along with job-embedded professional development distinguish the more advanced PLCs from the less developed PLCs (Huffman, Hipp, Pankake, & Moller, 2001). More developed PLCs also demonstrate more of a shared vision connected to student learning and continuous improvement (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010). Shared vision is evident in more established PLCs (Avalos, 2010; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Huffman, 2003). Further, schools that have more developed PLCs provide greater opportunity for teacher development through both formal and informal leadership structures (Moller, 2006).

PLC impact on student performance. Improvement in student performance is the guiding tenant for developing a professional learning community; however, it can be challenging to show direct relationships between PLCs and student outcomes. Part of the difficulty lies in being able to first determine the presence of a PLC and then show that the work of the PLC resulted in improved student outcomes. Several studies have attempted to study this relationship.

Researchers Hughes & Kritsonis (2008) selected a sample of schools from a database of schools with staff who had attended PLC workshops and that were considering implementing PLCs. The average time that the participating 64 schools reported functioning as a PLC was 2.5 years. During a three-year period, 90.6% of these schools reported an increase in standardized math scores and 81.3% reported an increase in English/language arts scores between five points and 26 points.

Case studies of three elementary schools showed that during a five-year period, students from minority and low-income families improved their scores on state achievement tests from less than 50% proficient to 75% proficient. Strahan (2003) conducted interviews to examine the role of a collaborative professional culture on instructional improvement and found that working collaboratively in PLCs was a characteristic of these schools.

Using multiple sources of data from a four-year evaluation of PLCs in an urban district, Supovitz (2002) found that an explicit focus on instructional improvement is necessary for PLCs to have a positive impact on improving teaching and learning. Without such focus, PLCs may have a positive effect on culture and teachers' feelings of

well-being but not necessarily on student achievement. Researchers found similar results in another large urban district (Supovitz & Christman, 2003).

Research studies focused on collaboration. After reviewing approximately 1,300 research studies, Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) found only nine studies that rigorously investigated the causal link between professional development programs and student achievement outcomes. The studies largely showed positive results, depending on the type of professional development teachers received. Teacher self-report data show, however, that high-quality professional development can have the ability to change teachers' practices and the perceived quality of teaching (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). The National Staff Development Council reviewed the evidence regarding the characteristics of professional development most likely to improve teacher effectiveness. This study determined that high-quality professional development must be sustained, intensive, and focused on the work of teaching and student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). For the purposes of this study, I attempted to find studies that reflect teacher attitudes toward collaboration. I also sought to uncover the factors that support a collaborative process in a professional learning community.

Teacher attitudes toward collaboration. Kuusiaari (2014) studied the collaborative development process to gain an understanding of how collaboration affects product development and how collaboration impacts group development. Three teams of teachers participated in the study that examined their teaching practices. The study focused on peer-to-peer collaboration by presenting data-drive analysis of the content of verbal interactions within teacher group discussions. Kuusiaari focused on modes of

speaking among teachers. The researcher defined developing talk and procedure talk. Developing talk involves all discourse that leads to the development of something new in teaching. Procedure talk occurs when the group participants discuss practical things related to procedures in the classroom (Kuusiaari, 2014). Kuusiaari's work compared the differences of collaborative actions between teams to explain what specific actions would hinder or support collaboration. Developing talk was highlighted as an important factor in supporting collaboration.

Sawyer (2006) also conducted an analysis of interaction processes. He studied verbal and nonverbal interactions of teachers using detailed conversation analytical (CA) methods. All transcription data was coded and was analyzed through quantitative methods, which provided insight into the verbal and nonverbal communication of peers in the workplace. This methodology was adopted in the Kuusiaari (2014) study in which peer-to-peer collaboration was studied using a data-driven analysis of the content of verbal interactions within teacher groups' discussion. In this case, three teacher teams were videotaped during a two-day education course aimed at generating innovation in instruction. Collaborative actions (presenting an idea, accepting and idea, refuting an idea, etc.) were transcribed and coded. The study revealed the need for specific factors such as team personal and professional motivation, the presence of guidance from an impartial facilitator or leader, and the ability to self-manage when the situation required.

Another study by Orland-Barak (2006) focused on the process of professional dialogue by analyzing the dialogue itself, which was similar to the study conducted by Sawyer (2006). Orland-Barak (2006) focused on the process of collaboration by analyzing the process of professional dialogue. This study examined changes in teacher

cognition and the behavior of six teachers who participated in collaborative groups. Researchers wanted to explore the learning activities that teachers undertake in collaborative settings and how these activities relate to changes in behavior and cognition. The teachers were interviewed after group meetings and were asked to report learning experiences by logging their perspectives in a digital logbook. These learning activities were mapped to understand how teachers learn in collaborative settings. Qualitative analyses of both data sources resulted in several configurations of reported changes in cognition or behavior. Over the course of the one-year study, the researchers found that there were two tracks to collaborative inquiry as follows: The *product* track, which focuses on the concrete outcomes of learning after knowledge has been constructed. Conversely, the *process* track focuses on the dynamic acquisition of knowledge, its changes, and evolution (Orland-Barak, 2006). Both tracks were deemed critical in the development of teacher agency and expertise.

Tillema & van der Westhuizen (2006) performed a study on collaboration in groups. The researchers studied the team approach and established a guideline for mentoring in the collaboration process. The three stages of collaboration were identified to include *reflection*, *study and investigation*, and *change*. Reflection involved raising problem awareness through self-examination of knowledge and beliefs. The investigative stage involved inquiry using different perspectives. Finally, the third process of change involved the creation of new concepts and modes of instruction. In this case, six teachers were selected for the in-depth study. Semi-structured interviews, group meetings, and digital logs were used for the qualitative study. Researchers found that teachers can use

the expertise of colleagues "to adjust, extend, expand, substitute or supplement their own beliefs and practices" (p. 159).

Conditions for collaboration. Teacher collaboration is presumed to be a powerful learning tool for teachers' professional development. However, empirical research about how teachers actually learn and develop in their practices within collaborative settings is lacking (Borko, 2004; Chrispeels, Andrews, & Gonzales, 2007; Meirink et al., 2007; Wood, 2007).

Scholars have started to adopt a social network perspective based on Little's (2003) work in order to study collaboration (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Daly & Finnigan, 2010, 2011; Daly, Moolenaar, Bolivia, & Bolivar, 2010; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009). Theses scholars focused on patterns of social relationships among teachers (i.e., their social networks) providing a foundation for the study of the degree to which teacher collaboration takes place.

Further research into teacher collaboration suggests that teachers' relationships among each other influence student learning (Chrispeels et al., 2007; Wood, 2007). In a large-scale study of 199 elementary schools, Pil and Leana (2009) discovered that the strength of the relationships that teachers maintained with colleagues positively impacted student performance. Strong relationships among teachers were defined as those in which collegiality, trust and mutual respect were the norm.

Moolenaar (2012) examined school and teacher characteristics that underscore the conditions by which teachers collaborate with each other. His study demonstrated teachers' tendency to interact with each other. The researcher studied demographic characteristics such as gender, age, experience, and grade level taught. Organizational

structure of schools was also studied. The formal organization of grade-level teams, cross grade-level teams, and interdependent teacher roles were studied. The researcher found that these social structures, both formal and informal, shaped the patterns of social exchanges in the schools.

Boyle, While, and Boyle (2010) developed a longitudinal study designed to investigate prevailing conditions and methods of professional development in England. Participants in the study included eight hundred fifty-four primary and secondary school teachers. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the sample participated in a conference or workshop in the prior year. Ninety-one percent (91%) participated in a long-term professional development activity. These include observation of colleagues and shared instructional practice as well as onsite/online courses. Evidence showed that 77% of the 779 participants credited long-term professional development for the enhancement of skills in at least one aspect of their teaching experience.

Likewise, the study published by Helmer, Bartlett, Wolgemuth, and Lea (2011) supported the contention that peer collaboration through coaching can serve as a means to assist teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and break the isolation that is often experience. The researchers conducted a study in seven primary schools in Northern Australia, employing teachers of varying degrees of experience, to evaluate the efficacy of a web-based literacy program. The study linked peer coaching for professional development to improved student outcomes.

Meirink et al. (2007) examined teachers' individual learning in a collaborative setting. The researchers explored the cognitive behavior of six teachers who were interviewed six times over the course of a year after a group meeting to report learning

experiences. The teachers were working in a school reform setting, and were required to experiment with new teaching methods. Results of the study showed that teachers exploring new teaching methods can feel insecure about the newly acquired practice and therefore seek confirmation from their colleagues (Meirink et al., 2007). In this instance, collaborative efforts proved to be beneficial as a means of support among teachers when attempting new strategies and techniques in the classroom.

Musanti & Pence (2010) explored the complexities of teacher learning in their study during a three-year, federally funded program called the Collaboration Centers Project (CCP). The study involved a school district and a large southwestern university. Fourteen experienced bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers from six different schools participated in the study. The CCP is significant because its intent was to provide teachers with meaningful professional development through an experiential, collaborative, school-centered context (Musanti & Pence, 2010). The project sought to break away from traditional models of short-term transmission of professional development for teachers by examining the ongoing collaboration created by the program. The study promoted collaboration through a common project designed to be completed jointly, encouraging active teacher participation, peer conversations, and trust (Musanti & Pence, 2010).

The Musanti and Pence (2010) study also explored resistance to change from prevailing methods of professional development. Their research has shown that instances of opposition, confrontation, or conflict often result in teachers' attempts to recover a sense of ownership, agency, and capability (Musanti & Pence, 2010). Creating a culture of collaboration proved difficult. The study revealed that in order to build a community

of collaborative practices, a long process of *learning* to collaborate was required (Musanti & Pence, 2010). Teaching with others and modeling teacher instructional behaviors created anxiety and required a great deal of time and trust. Breaking down barriers to privacy in order to conduct peer observations was intimidating and caused the teachers stress. The study also uncovered that teachers more often referred to students when questioned about their practice as opposed to using self-reflection. Teachers' professional identities related directly to their relationship with, and knowledge of, their students and less on their own professional performance (Musanti & Pence, 2010). The study highlighted the distinction between teacher isolation and autonomy and independence (Musanti & Pence, 2010), confirming that social interaction and interdependence are intrinsic to knowledge construction and learning (John-Steiner, 2000).

The work of Berebitsky, Goddard, and Carlisle (2014) examined teacher perceptions of principal leadership and the teachers' capacity to collaborate, work together, and improve instruction. Their study examined survey data collected from 165 schools and 1,738 teachers in Michigan's Reading First schools in the 2006-2007 academic year. The primary method for analyzing the data was multilevel modeling. Factor analysis and full-information, maximum-likelihood estimation were also used. The study found that support by the principal of the school for change was as a significant factor in assessing the degree of regular collaboration and communication. Researchers noted the importance of obtaining buy-in from the principals and taking risks in order to achieve innovation. The role of the principal was critically important when considering positive changes in teacher collaboration.

The role of administrative leadership was also examined in a study by Berebitsky et al. (2014). Data was collected as part of an evaluation of a literacy program in Michigan during the 2006-07 academic year. Survey data was selected from over 1,700 K-3 teachers across all public schools in Michigan (Berebitsky et al., 2014). Researchers concluded that administrative support for change was a significant predictor for teachers' degree of success in regular collaboration and communication.

The term community evokes images of consensus, shared values, social cohesion, and harmony. In practice, when teachers collaborate, enormous conflict can emerge as a result of professional beliefs and practices (Achinstein, 2002). Moreover, the role of diversity, dissent, and disagreement in community life is often undervalued. Achinstein (2002) conducted a study to explore teacher professional learning communities using two school-wide teacher forums engaged in reform initiatives. The study population was located in an urban, public middle school in the San Francisco Bay area. Achinstein studied how each community approached conflict among teachers and what outcomes resulted. The study focused specifically on how conflict was managed, how critical decisions were made, who held power, and the value of shared ideology (Achinstein, 2002). Achinstein found that fostering a culture of collaboration in schools may itself incite conflict. The notion of challenging norms of privacy, independence, and professional autonomy of teachers shakes the boundaries maintained by cultures and stakeholder groups that hold power within a school (Achinstein, 2002).

The intersection of perceptions about collaboration and the outcomes of professional development outcomes was studied by Doppenberg, den Brok, and Bakx (2012). Participants in the study included four hundred eleven teachers in 49 primary

schools in the Netherlands. The researchers compared teacher collaboration that was held

in different collaborative settings (teacher work group meetings, school team meeting,

sub team meetings) using different types and amounts of learning activities

(implementing new lesson materials, e.g., books; and implementing new pedagogical

approach to teaching (as in moving from a more traditional approach to student directed

or self-regulated learning). The researchers learned that differences in learning outcomes

were perceived by participants based on the foci of the collaboration. Further, the context

or culture of the school setting played a pivotal role in teachers' perceptions about

collaboration.

Independent schooling in the United States. There are approximately 2,000

independent schools in the United States serving more than 700,000 students from

kindergarten through high school (NAIS, 2012). The National Association of

Independent Schools (NAIS) is a not-for-profit member organization committed to

serving and strengthening independent schools through advocacy, best practices,

dissemination of information, professional development, promoting the principles of

diversity, choice, and opportunity (NAIS, 2012). NAIS serves over 1,700 private K-12

schools and associations in the United States and abroad (NAIS, 2012).

The National Association of Independent Schools is the result of the merger of

Independent School Education Board (ISEB) and the National Council of Independent

Schools (NCIS) more than 50 years ago (NAIS, 2011). Individual member schools are

governed by an independent board, have a distinct mission, and corresponding academic

programs (Torres, 2011). The NAIS membership directory lists schools representing a

broad range of offerings: elementary to secondary schools, day to boarding, single-sex to

co-educational, secular to non-secular, traditional to progressive, rural to urban, for students with exceptional potential and those with special needs, and various alternatives in between (NAIS, 2013). Although independent schools do not report to a centralized agency as public schools do, they are still accountable both to their boards and to their most important stakeholders—the families that comprise the school community (Calder, 2007). Another professional organization serving the needs of independent schools is Independent School Management (ISM). This organization serves as an advocate for the promotion of independent schools and offers strategic management support for admissions, development, risk management, and strategic long-term planning. While their purpose, membership, and support overlap to some degree, NAIS and ISM are philosophically different, particularly with regard to their stance on affordability. NAIS suggests that affordability should be maintained in schools so that 15-20% of families in the demographic that the school serves should be able to afford tuition, thus ensuring socioeconomic diversity. ISM does not make this distinction regarding the cost of tuition for its member schools (Blackburn & Wise, 2012; J. Chubb, personal communication, October 28, 2014).

The history of early independent schooling in the United States. The responsibility for educating young people in the United States has historically been assigned to small, private schools. In colonial times, education was stratified by gender and race. Girls were steered toward studies of domestic arts. Boys studied math and sciences. Only white children received an education until slavery was abolished. Most teachers during this period were men (Culter, 2000; Hoge, 2013).

The first private schools were established by the religious missionaries of the

Roman Catholic Church (Cutler, 2000; Glenn, 1997). According to Glenn (1997), by all

accounts, private school education in the northeastern colonies was better organized in

the 18th century than its counterpart in the southern states. Schools, such as Boston Latin

School (1635) were founded in order to teach the classical languages of Latin and Greek

(Boston Latin School, 2014). In New York City, Collegiate School was founded in 1628

by the Dutch West India Company and the Classis of Amsterdam, the parent

ecclesiastical body of the Dutch Reformed Church for the colonists of New Amsterdam

(Collegiate School, 2014). In Washington, DC, Georgetown Preparatory School was

founded in 1789 by America's first Catholic bishop (Georgetown Preparatory School,

2014). Georgetown Prep is the nation's oldest Jesuit school and the only Jesuit boarding

school. In the early part of the 18th century, English grammar schools taught more

subjects as the need for a more educated populace grew. The latter part of the 18th

century saw the development of the genre known as the *Academy*. Visionaries, such as

William Penn, guided the educational thinking of the time (Cutler, 2000; Glenn, 1977).

An organized system of public education did not take shape until the 1840s. Leading the

push for better education in the northeastern colonies were leaders such as Horace Mann

and Henry Barnard (Cutler, 2000; Glenn, 1977). They were the architects of the concept

of public funding for schools at the local level, a model which still flourishes in the 21st

century. There were also civic-minded leaders who understood how a rigorous academic

education was essential to ensuring the solid growth of the new nation. The Phillips

family, for example, founded Exeter and Andover Academies with serious, high-minded

purposes (Phillips Academy, 2014). Nineteenth century philanthropists, such as Stephen

Girard (1750-1831), played a pivotal role in establishing private schools to educate children from poor families (Cutler, 2000). This altruistic thread permeated the late 18th and 19th centuries as wealthy businessmen contemplated the social and economic implications of education to serve the public good. Milton Hershey (1857-1945) and Princess Bernice (1831-1884) came from quite different backgrounds but shared a common goal of educating young people at no cost to their families. The schools that they established are some of the grandest examples of educational philanthropy to be found anywhere in the world (Cutler, 2000).

Legislative action to require schooling. Massachusetts became the first state to pass a compulsory education law. The 1852 Compulsory Education Act of the State of Massachusetts required every city and town in the state to offer a primary school for children aimed at teaching grammar and arithmetic (Calder, 2007). Prior to the enactment of this law, education was typically provided by either private schools or churches. Those schools charged tuition and generally excluded the poor and non-white children. Children who had been excluded from private or church-based education received informal schooling at home. The advent of compulsory education laws in the United States mandated attendance for children within certain age for a prescribed number of weeks annually. By 1918, all states had passed a compulsory attendance law for children (Calder, 2007).

A landmark court case ultimately decided the fate of independent schools in the United States. Legal proceedings in the state of Oregon in the early 20th century helped to affirm the role of private schooling. In 1922, the Oregon Compulsory Education Act required all parents to enroll children between the ages of eight and 16 to attend a local

public school. Failure to do so was a misdemeanor punishable by fines and/or

incarceration (Calder, 2007). In objection to this legislation, two private schools, the

Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary and the Hill Military Academy sued the

governor of Oregon Walter Pierce, in 1925. Pierce v. the Society of Sisters argued that

parents had the right to choose the schools and their children's teachers and the state had

no right to jeopardize the schools' businesses and properties by forcing families to go

elsewhere (Calder, 2007). The act was overturned with a court decision in favor of the

schools, which acknowledged parents were the ultimate arbitrators of decisions

pertaining to their children's education. Both of these decisions, one allowing private

institutions to exist and the other empowering parents to make decisions regarding their

children's education, set the foundation for the rights and privileges afforded independent

schools today.

 Characteristics of independent schools. Independent schools are non-profit

institutions that are self-determining with regard to their mission and program. They are

governed by independent boards and funded primarily through tuition, charitable

contributions, and endowment income. They are not regulated by the government but

accountable to the students they serve and the parents that enroll them (Independent

School Management, 2008). The oldest independent school in the nation is the Collegiate

School founded in 1628 (Calder, 2007), which, to this day, serves boys in New York

City. Independent schools maintain that their institutions are selective rather than

inclusive (Calder, 2007) and, today, accept all students who fit their mission. They are

not one-size-fits all educational offerings, however. There is a broad diversity in

independent schools based on location, size, mission, and community demographics (NAIS, 2011).

Benefits of independent school education. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and NAIS in partnership with one another, conducted research to study the attitudes and aspirations of independent school graduates and compared their findings to comparable students in public and other private schools (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004). Their study was combined with results from the 2010 Freshman Survey (TFS), a component of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which is a recognized as a comprehensive source of information on college students. CIRP administers the longitudinal survey to hundreds of thousands of students across the nation to explore myriad characteristics with which students identify. This collaboration resulted in a special report identifying the academic and personal development of independent school students in their first year of college (HERI, 2004).

Key findings reported by independent school graduates revealed that students believed they were well prepared for the academic rigors of college life and success in later adulthood. The students considered themselves self-aware and accepting of differences in others. They considered themselves confident, while remaining respectful of others. Overall, the student demonstrated that they were are eager and prepared to engage in the intellectual, athletic, and social life of college. They seek to gain benefits from their experience beyond preparation for a career; they appear to have the potential for continuous economic success, social responsibility, and personal fulfillment; and, independent schools help graduates look beyond university life and recognize the importance of being fully engaged, contributing members of society (Torres, 2011).

Teachers in independent schools. Research has also focused attention on the

influence and importance of teachers in independent schools. In a study conducted at the

University of Tennessee's Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, the effect of

high-performing teachers on student outcomes was demonstrated in a profound way, thus

underscoring the importance of ongoing professional development.

> When children, beginning in third grade, were placed with three high-
>
> performing teachers in a row, they scored on average, at the 96th percentile
>
> on Tennessee's statewide mathematics assessment at the end of fifth
>
> grade. When children with comparable achievement histories, starting in
>
> third grade, were placed with three low-performing teachers in a row, their
>
> average score on the same mathematics assessment was at the 44th
>
> percentile—an enormous 52-percentile points for children who
>
> presumably had comparable abilities and skills (Tucker & Stronge, 2005).

As reported in the recent *Trendbook* published by NAIS (2014), a study

conducted by Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey (2014) identified seven trends that they

suggested have changed the independent school teaching workforce over the last 25

years. Researchers describe the characteristics of future teachers as "larger, greener,

grayer, more female, more diverse by race and ethnicity, consistent with academic ability

and less stable" (NAIS, 2014).

Further, a study at Harvard University, called *The Project on the Next Generation

of Teachers* provides evidence to support the nuances associated with the future of

teaching. They state that new teachers will be less likely to make teaching a lifetime

career, although today's teachers compare the industry with other opportunities, such as

the medicine, law, and finance, as fields that have been historically closed to those who would have entered teaching in the 1960s and 1970s (Project on Next Generation of Teachers, 2015). Nearly one-third of today's teachers has worked in another field prior to teaching and has been trained for teaching in nontraditional programs. Today's cohort of new teachers is more likely to make teaching a short-term career, experience less job satisfaction, and be more likely to suffer the effects of isolation, standardized pay, undifferentiated salaries, and lack of opportunities for influence and advancement (Project on Next Generation of Teachers, 2015).

Teacher attitudes about professional growth in independent schools level. While teacher collaboration is widely supported by scholars and researchers in education, the research suggests that limited scholarly work exists to distinguish the work of public school teachers from independent school teachers. As a pedagogical approach to schooling, independent schools agree that collaboration is an important factor in professional development (Bassett, 2003). The former president of NAIS, Mr. Pat Bassett, promotes collaboration in schools as a means to demonstrate deep concern and support for the culture of the school (Bassett, 2003).

The NAIS support of collaboration as a means of leadership development in independent schools is significant. In fact, NAIS uses collaboration as the foundation for its Emerging Leaders Institute. Support for mentoring and coaching among peers of varying years of experience was promoted as one form of collaboration in this year-long program of study and mentorship. Another example supporting the need for collaboration was identified during the school accreditation process, where seasoned teachers would teach emerging leaders how to analyze and improve the organizational culture. Finally,

peer support for collaboration in a cohort experience, where emerging leaders actively identify and solve organizational problems, is another means of collaboration that is promoted for independent school leadership (NAIS, 2014).

Chapter Summary

Collaborative learning is at the core of communities of practice involving the construction of meaning through shared collective practices. These collective practices have been defined as being key to professional development because they establish networks for teachers to share and reflect on their instructional practice (Achinstein, 2002; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Hargreaves, 2007; John-Steiner, 2000; Musanti & Pence, 2010). The study of teacher attitudes about collaboration in independent schools is an area in need of further exploration. Given the paucity of research on this topic combined with the empirical evidence that collaboration in schools is important for student achievement, the study is warranted. Chapter 3 provides a thorough description of the study and methods used in conducting the inquiry.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

This study examined teacher attitudes toward collaboration for the purpose of improving instructional practice. The study examined the complexities of collaboration in an effort to make a connection between collaboration among teachers and teacher learning. The research questions considered in this study included: (a) what are teacher attitudes towards collaboration as a means to improve teaching at an independent school and (b) are there formal structures and policies in place that support opportunities for collaboration to improve instructional practice?

Research has confirmed that teachers who experience frequent, rich learning opportunities are able to teach in more ambitious and effective ways. In schools, collaboration is seen as an opportunity for school renewal (Fishbaugh, 1997; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2000; Council for Exceptional Children, n.d.). Teachers who work collaboratively, have the opportunity to exchange ideas and instructional methods to enhance their performance in the classroom. Teachers can promote student learning by working collaboratively (Achinstein, 2010; Daly & Finnagan, 2011; Danielowich, 2012; Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; Hughes & Kritsonis, 2006; Kuusiaari, 2014; Sergiovanni, 2004). Yet, the autonomy and of independent school teachers may lead to feelings of isolation, low morale and ineffectiveness in teaching (Bassett, 2006; Dronkers, 2008; Jorgenson, 2006; Trickett & Castro, 1982), thereby removing the promise of collaboration.

This study took a constructivist worldview (Creswell, 2014) in order to examine teacher attitudes toward collaboration, and how the development of professional learning communities in schools informs instructional practice. The study explores the importance of school culture and the role of leadership in building collaborative communities (Creswell, 2014). The study allowed the researcher to reflect on the dilemmas and tensions in the development of collaboration among teachers. Although there has been an emphasis on collaboration in schools for the past 50 years (Kuusiaari, 2014), there is a lack of consensus as to its definition and a limited understanding of the process of collaboration among teachers (Kuusiaari, 2014, Riveros, 2012).

Rationale for Study Methodology

The research study examined teacher attitudes toward collaboration designed to improve instructional practice among teachers at a K-8 independent day school in a suburb of the New York metropolitan area as the research setting. Qualitative research of attitudes toward collaboration among teachers can reveal and define important behaviors and protocols for teacher development and improved instructional practice, particularly using the interpretative phenomenological approach **(**Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009**).** Qualitative phenomenological inquiry emphasizes maximum flexibility of structure and experimentation with form, affording the researcher and study participants the opportunity to make meaning of a lived experience, organically generated, and absent of any initial framing by a theoretical construct (Creswell, 2007).

The study sought to identify the conditions that support collaborative behaviors (Desimone, 2009; Gregg and Niska, 2004; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). To do so, the study collected and analyzed data to support the implementation of

collaborative behaviors to improve instruction within independent schools. The intention was to codify collaborative behaviors in order to generalize them for measurement by K-12 schools, thus making a connection between teacher collaboration and student achievement for future research.

Research Context

      Study site. The setting for the study was a K-8 independent day school serving families in a suburban area located in the metropolitan New York City region. For the purposes of confidentiality and positionality of the researcher, the school is referred to using the fictitious name, The Keystone School. The mission of The Keystone School (Keystone) is to support students in the development of their intellectual, creative, moral, and physical potential. The school teaches traditional disciplines, combining a balanced liberal arts focus with the science, mathematics, and technology. The school values the imagination and curiosity of children and respects childhood as an integral part of life. Teachers set high academic standards and challenge students to question, to think, to collaborate, and to act with integrity. The school works in partnership with families to teach personal, social, and environmental responsibility and to create a community that honors diversity and common humanity. The participating school inspires students to be lifelong learners with the courage and confidence to make a positive contribution to the world (Keystone School Handbook, 2013).

      The mission statement of Keystone was created at the founding of the school and was studied and revised in the 1999-2000 academic year. The language of the mission statement is intentional and relevant to its overarching purpose. The use of the word "guide" illustrates the school's philosophy of progressive education (Keystone School

Handbook, 2013). The progressive education philosophy embraces the idea that we should teach children how to think and that a test cannot measure whether or not a child is an educated person. The philosophy stands in opposition to more traditional, conservative methods of teaching that prefer to teach children what to think than teach children to think for themselves through a process of discovery. The progressive instructional approach is important to note. Best practice in progressive education requires creativity and critical thinking by both student and teacher (Blackburn & Wise, 2012; Hughes & Kristonis, 2008.) A collaborative approach to instructional design and delivery is recommended as best practice by researchers in education (Achinstein, 2010; Daly & Finnigan, 2010; Riveros, 2012; Tomlinson, 2000), which supports the premise of the proposed research study on collaboration.

Keystone aims to meet the varying needs of children, and approaches its work in a holistic way. School personnel seek to meet the cognitive, creative, physical and ethical needs of each child. The school prides itself on delivering individualized, differentiated instruction to its students. Differentiation allows for instruction to be tailored to meet individual student needs (Keystone School Handbook, 2014). To that end, the mission statement clearly articulates the purpose of the organization: to guide students to reach their intellectual, creative, moral, and physical potential. Among other factors, the success in fulfilling the mission of the school is directly correlated to the work of the teacher.

The student population at Keystone is approximately 550 children. There is limited socioeconomic diversity among the families who choose to attend the school because the tuition of the school exceeds $30,000 per year. Cultural and religious

diversity is minimal. Six percent of the student population identify as students of color. Two percent report that they practice a religion that is non-Christian (Keystone administrator, personal communication, March 4, 2014; Keystone Handbook, 2013). Of the 134 faculty members, 77% are women and 23% are men (Keystone Handbook, 2013). There is limited cultural diversity at the school. Two members of the staff identify as homosexual, four members of the faculty identify as people of color, and two members of the staff identify as Jewish (Keystone administrator, personal communication, March 4, 2014).

The organizational structure at Keystone is similar to many other independent schools in the United States. A board of trustees is responsible for the long-term fiscal well-being of the school. The head of school manages the day-to-day operations of the school and reports directly to the board of trustees. Division heads are responsible for curricular oversight and management of staff (teachers, support staff, and specialist teachers) based on the grade level of the students. Two part-time school psychologists are on staff to support the social and emotional development of the students. The admissions office is responsible for recruitment, admission, and retention of families. This office includes the admission director, assistant director, and support staff. The advancement office manages the school's annual and capital fundraising. The school also has director of diversity to support the diversity mission of the organization. This group of leaders represents administrative team of the school.

Within the classroom, the organizational structure varies by grade level. Kindergarten, first, and second grade are structured with a lead teacher and associate teacher. Lead teachers are required to have at least three years of career experience

teaching. The lead teacher decides all curricular matters and manages unit and lesson development for the class. He or she is the primary point of contact for the parents. In short, the lead teacher is responsible for the overall management of the classroom. Associate teachers assist the lead teacher in the execution of his or her duties. Associates are teachers who are new to the profession, many of whom are still in graduate school. Most are considered to be in training. Some associate teachers have experience and are hired with the proviso that they will get preference for a full-time position in the next hiring cycle. Associate teachers are hired with the expectation that they will remain at the school for three years, at which time they may be considered for a lead position should one become available. The relationship between the lead and associate teachers is referred to as a teaching partnership at Keystone School. Although the lead teacher is considered a mentor and guide for the associate, both teachers assume responsibility for teaching. The associate teacher's experience, skill, and the overall needs of the students and determine her level of responsibility for instruction and classroom management.

   The researcher. In qualitative inquiry, "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). The individual's experience and place within the research environment is, therefore, important for bracketing in the initial phase of phenomenological research, and contextualizing in the final interpretation of the data (Hycner, 1985). Researcher positionality was an important factor in this study (Smith et al., 2009) given the intimate understanding of the formal and informal structures within the school. Any inherent bias was disclosed in the analysis of research results. With this in mind, I had to remain aware of the potential impact of bias during the design phase of the study in addition to the analysis of findings. I acknowledge my 15-year career in various independent schools

around the country. I have served in various roles as a classroom teacher and school administrator. I developed original curriculum and enjoyed tremendous autonomy during my tenure in the industry. I was involved in several initiatives in schools including the service learning committee and diversity committee and participated in the Atlas Mapping Program with grade level colleagues. I acknowledge that I was formerly employed at the research site.

As the researcher, my positionality had positive benefits, particularly during the data collection process. One benefit was the immediate trust observed with research participants and the ease with which they responded to the interview questions. Teacher participants appeared to be liberated to reveal concerns and issues related to collaboration knowing that they were speaking to "one of their own".

I maintain a personal connection with the participating school as a casual acquaintance of certain teachers and administrators (Keystone) and maintain a professional rapport with many of the staff members. This reflexive position certainly informed the interpretation of data collected in the study. I established a high level of integrity in my career and formed trusting professional relationships in schools across the country. However, I did not establish significant personal relationships beyond the school setting, preferring to maintain an appropriate distance and balance between work and home. The established boundary between professional life and personal life benefitted the process of gathering research from the participants. As the researcher, I was also seen as a trusted professional, but not an insider-friend.

Research Participants

The approach to selecting research participants was strategic and purposeful (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Since the school remains anonymous throughout the research study and upon completion, there is no risk of exposure for the organization. In fact, the school may benefit from understanding the results of the study on teacher attitudes toward collaboration. To obtain the research sample, a pool of prospective participants was randomly selected and submitted to me by the Head of School. Selection in this pool was based on years of experience (minimum three years) and the likelihood for contract renewal in the following academic year. I endeavored to have a diverse group of faculty members participate in the study to reflect a balance in gender, ethnicity, and years of experience as a teacher, and I expressed this desire to the head of school. Following the initial process of drafting a diverse pool of possible candidates, participants were selected randomly using a computer application. This strategy ensured a balance of experience with collaboration and ensured the teachers' commitment to the process of collecting research for the study (J. Willis, personal communication, August 9, 2014). Initially, 12 teachers agreed to participate in the study; however, two teachers opted out of the research study citing disinterest and general ambivalence toward the topic. The final number of research participants was 10. Balance in gender and years of service were important in the data collection process. Faculty from each division of the school indicated their interest

Instruments Used in Data Collection

In a phenomenological study, data collection can be conducted through the using of oral and written self-reporting, poetry, and interviewing (Creswell, 2007). In this

research study, data was collected using semi-structured interviews with teachers. The decision to use this approach was based on Kvale & Brinkman's (2009) support for semi-structured interviews when researchers are seeking to find meaning in the lived experiences shared by the research subjects. As the researcher, I was interested in the subjectivity in the participants' interpretations of their experiences. It was important for me to follow the list of questions and topics presented in my interview guide during the interview, while allowing natural topical trajectories to emerge. It was important for me to permit the conversation to stray from the guide in order to maintain the authenticity of the dialogue, then deftly shifting the topic back to the prepared questions. The intention was to allow the teachers to reveal their own experiences, finding meaning in the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2014). The semi-structured interview protocol and the interview schedule can be found in Appendices D and E. This constructivist approach parallels the process of interpretative phenomenological analysis process (Smith et al., 2009). The similarities of both frameworks for qualitative inquiry were remarkable in that the planned open-ended nature of the interviews allowed the conversation to flow, seemingly without any particular structure.

The intent of each interview was to have the teachers recall various experiences and their reactions to those experiences then connect them to find a common meaning (Smith et al., 2009). When participants became engaged in a discussion of what has happened and how they experience those events, they began to make connections and find meaning in those experiences. Their attitudes about these experiences were ultimately revealed. I then participated in a double hermeneutic in the role of making sense of what the participant was trying to say (Smith et al., 2009) while the participant

himself was finding meaning. The convergence and divergence of ideas within the research sample yielded important results for the study (Smith et al., 2009).

Further supporting this approach was Stake's work in experiential research which found that interview based research is grounded in the collection of subjects' interpretations of their lived experiences. In the case of this research study, data collection required participants to share their individual experiences and attitudes about collaboration in the workplace, thereby reinforcing this approach to qualitative research (Stake, 2010).

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection procedures. In a qualitative study, the process of collecting data is as important as the data itself. Qualitative research involves close attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and the presence of the researcher in the setting (Creswell, 2014). I collected data in a natural setting that was familiar, but outside of the participating school, using a semi-structured interview process. In conducting this research study, several specific procedures were used. Upon receiving written consent from the research site (Appendix A), participants were contacted by electronic mail (Appendix B). Participants were informed at the onset of the purpose of the interview. Documents indicating informed consent for participation in the study (Appendix C) which meet the parameters of the research site were signed prior to commencing with the interview.

Interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participant. Interview length was expected approximately 50 minutes, but not more than one hour. Interviews were conducted during the month of April 2015. The initial phase of the interview aimed to

create an interaction that permitted each participant to tell their own story in their own words. Interviews were structured for individual participants. The setting for each interview was intended to be welcoming, yet discrete in order to protect the identity of the participant. Interviews were conducted in private study rooms at a nearby university and at a private home office near the research site. It was essential to elicit multiple perspectives and diverse views (Fowler, 2014). Teachers were interviewed about their individual perceptions of what collaboration meant. Factors of collaboration were not specifically mentioned in the format of the interview questions in order to allow participants to define collaboration in the manner in which they choose. In keeping with the interpretative phenomenological approach, the semi-structured interviews were structured to establish rapport and empathy, and permit tremendous flexibility of coverage of the topic (Smith et al., 2009). While the interview questions were designed to provide flexibility, the underlying design of the semi-structured questions were formulated with an awareness and understanding of the characteristics of a professional learning community.

An interview protocol was used as a guide (Appendix D). I also used an interview schedule, which included a virtual thinking map (Smith et al., 2009), that served as a reference tool when certain interviews became difficult or stagnant (Appendix E). This level of preparation allowed me to be fully present during the interview, listening actively and approaching the interviewee in a flexible and responsive manner without the need to take written notes (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). Rich, meaningful data was the intended result. Prior to the actual interviews, I test piloted the interview questions among

unrelated individuals to check for content validity. Former colleagues and other professional contact participated in the validity testing.

Articulation within each interview was consistent (Creswell, 2007). Each interview was recorded using the iPhone Voice Memo application and then transcribed by an external transcriptionist in preparation for coding and data analysis. Data was coded by hand exclusively by me. I committed to this process in order to achieve the greatest efficacy of the study.

Data analysis procedures. Results from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed according to the process outlined by Creswell (2009, 2014). This process included (a) organizing and reviewing audio recording of interviews, (b) transcribing the data, (c) reviewing and note taking, (d) coding and identification of emerging themes, (e) determining connections across themes, and (f) establishing reliability among codes (Creswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). The following summary details the multi-faceted procedure of the process of data analysis:

Step 1: Organizing and reviewing the intake data. The first step in the process of data analysis for the study involved organizing and reviewing information obtained from the intake period of the interview process. The intake process was conducted in person in an informal setting. The intent was to gather baseline demographic data for each of the participants to inform participant narrative and descriptive statistics for the study. I reviewed participant information related to total years of service in education, grades taught and years of service at the school. I filed intake forms in individual file folders and stored them in a locked file cabinet.

Once all interviews were completed and recorded, I saved the audio files in a password protected, online storage account to future transcription. Audio files were reviewed privately using a computer and headset for tone, intonation and overall clarity. I recorded any comments from this process in her private notes for future reference during the review of transcripts.

Step 2: Data transcription. Following the recording of demographic data in a spreadsheet, I began the process of transcribing voice memo recordings of the interviews. After transcribing the first two interviews, I enlisted the support of a professional transcriptionist to accelerate the process. Individual transcripts were submitted to me within two days of the interview. Upon completion of each transcription, transcripts were re-read to permit me to become reacquainted with the data and to determine if follow-up questions were required for clarification. Research participants were alerted to this possibility at the end of each interview and all participants understood that clarification might be necessary. Re-reading of each transcript individually and collectively was an important precursor to text familiarization and initial noting (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 3: Text familiarization and initial noting. After transcription was complete, I began an active engagement with the review of the data, becoming fully immersed in the experiences of each participant (Smith et al., 2009). As prescribed by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) procedures, this process included a secondary review of transcripts but also required reexamination of the audio recordings for tone and inflection (Smith et al., 2009). Data analysis of the transcripts included a review of descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments to explore key words, phrases and language used by

the participant. Initial researcher reflections on participant understanding of their experiences were noted on the transcripts (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 4: Coding and development of emerging themes. The coding process involved an exploration and documentation of emerging themes within the text of each transcript (Smith et al., 2007). These themes were then coded using an inductive and deductive process. Themes were color-coded and occurrences were recorded by hand using tally marks on paper then transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet format to track occurrences. The purpose of this step was to allow me the opportunity "to engage in an interpretative relationship with the data" (Smith et al., p. 66).

Initial coding focused on the five superordinate themes. The coding process began with a thorough review of individual passages within the text. Passages were coded using a both inductive and deductive process. This resulted in the development and expansion of codes and subsequent "themes that reflected not only the participant's original words and thoughts but also the analysts' interpretation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 92). Sub-themes emerged from this step in the coding process.

The intent of the development of this initial set of codes was to provide a framework for sub-themes to be sorted and categorized upon a deeper understanding of the data. Superordinate and subordinate themes correspond to the responses to the research questions.

Step 5: Connecting emerging themes. According to Smith et al., (2009), abstraction can be used as a mechanism through which "to identify patterns between emergent themes" (p. 96). Such was the case in this step of the study, during instances

where subordinate themes intersected. Superordinate themes were reinforced and subordinate themes were clearly identified (Smith et al., 2009).

Confidentiality. To assure confidentiality of individual participants, the following procedures and strategies were used. Interviews were conducted in a physical space outside of the research site to minimize any risk of identification of individuals serving as study participants. Audio recordings of the interview were completed using the voice memo application on my personal iPhone device. Audio recordings were transcribed by a paid, external transcriptionist. Individual identification of participants was never revealed. There were no video recordings of any of the interviews.

In phenomenological research, when data is analyzed, participant quotes are used to support themes that emerge from the interviews (Hycner, 1985). When the study population is small, there is risk of context provided in quotes inadvertently revealing the identity of a participant to those reading and reviewing the study. In consideration of this risk, all analysis and supporting data was reviewed privately. Any information noted for its potential to reveal participant identity was removed. As a final assurance that the narratives maintained the anonymity of the participants, each participant received a final summary and list of their quotes recommended for use in the dissertation. Each was given the opportunity to review and make any modifications to insure no identifying information was included in their quotes. None of the participants offered any such modifications. This process provided each participant assurance that confidentiality was maintained throughout the study and in publication of the results and analysis.

Summary

  This chapter described the process used in this qualitative study of teacher collaboration in an independent school setting. The next chapter presents the results obtained from this analysis. Chapter 5 provides recommendations for practice and further study, driven by the findings identified in this inquiry.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide an understanding of independent school teachers' attitudes toward collaboration for the purpose of improving instructional practice. The study further examined if there were any formal structures and policies in place that supported opportunities for collaboration. The first three chapters of this dissertation offered an introduction to the problem surrounding teacher collaboration in the independent school context, a review of the literature surrounding collaboration, specifically as professional learning communities, and the methodological design that was utilized for this study.

The researcher drew upon social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978) as a main theoretical framework, as well as theory of convergent conceptual change (Roschelle, 1992) and social network theory (Warren-Little, 1993). This chapter will now present the findings that emerged from the data collected and analyzed using the conceptual framework of a professional learning community (Desimone, 2009; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2006, 2007; Hughes & Kristonis, 2008).

A qualitative study employing a phenomenological methodology was conducted with data collected from interviews, independent school documents, and reflective notes (Creswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Pseudonyms for the independent school site and faculty participants were created to ensure that all participants' identities were kept private. The findings for each of the research questions will be presented separate from

one another within this chapter. All findings presented served to answer the following research questions for this study: (a) What are teacher attitudes towards collaboration as a means to improve teaching at an independent school? and (b) Are there formal structures and policies in place that support opportunities for collaboration to improve instructional practice?

Findings

From the analysis of the data, the independent school teachers identified five major concepts—shared vision, leadership, school culture, formal organizational structure, informal organizational structure as factors that contributed to effective teacher collaboration to improve instructional practice in independent schools. The independent school teachers also revealed if deficiencies existed in these five concepts within the school, it would hinder teacher collaboration. I also report on a minority perspective in the research study with regard to collaboration, regarding a teacher who revealed that s/he preferred not to collaborate with other teachers (Sproull, 2004). I first provide a descriptive analysis of the participants to anchor the analysis of the data. I separated this chapter in sections based on my research questions: (a) teacher attitudes toward collaboration to improve instructional practice and (b) existence of formal structures and policies.

Research participant demographic data is outlined in Table 4.1 to further inform chapter findings. Due to the relatively small population and the overall population at the research site, providing individual demographic information for the 10 participants would risk divulging actual participant identities. In addition, two summary representations of data analysis are provided in Tables 4.2 through 4.3.

Table 4.1

Keystone School Participant Demographics

Name	Degree	Years of Experience	Years Employed at Research Site	Instructional Specialty
Eric (IST1)	M.A., Teaching B.A., Psychology	3	3	US, Social Studies
Terri (IST2)	M.A., Teaching B.A., Physics, Mathematics	15	9	US, Mathematics
Sheryl (IST3)	M.A., Library Science B.A., English	12	8	LS, US Library Science
Connie (IST4)	M.A., Nursing, Teaching B.A., Nursing	18	6	Technology, 2nd Grade
Misty (IST5)	M.A., Educational Leadership B.A., Sociology	19	8	4th Grade, All Subjects
Kris (IST6)	M.A., Teaching B.A., Music (Voice)	20	18	LS, Music
John (IST7)	M.A., Educational Leadership B.A., History	6	3	US, History
Jeanette (IST8)	M.A., Educational Leadership B.A., Elementary Education	25	12	LS, Third Grade
Kathy (IST9)	M.A., Teaching B.A., Mathematics	8	4	LS, First Grade
Mary (IST10)	M.A. Education B.A. English Literature	7	3	US, English

Note. Information provided by the Human Resource Department, The Keystone School.

Table 4.2 provides a detailed accounting of the frequency of sub-themes that emerged by the research participants during the interview process.

Table 4.2

Frequencies of Sub-Themes in Participant Interviews

Theme	Sub-Themes	Percent of Participants Who Discussed Sub-Theme (x/10)
Shared Vision		100
Leadership	Head of School	90
	Division Leadership	70
	Faculty Leadership	30
School Culture	Autonomy	100
	Isolation	90
	Trust and Morale	70
Formal Organizational Structure	Division Structure	70
	Curricular Approach	100
	Hiring and Retention	60
	Resources	100
	Communication	80
	Professional Development	70
Informal Organizational Structure	Collegiality	100
	Social Networks	100

Table 4.3 provides an illustrative summary of the themes and subthemes that emerged from research participants during the interview process.

Table 4.3

Examples of Sub-Theme Frequency in Participant Interviews

Themes	Sub-Themes	Participant View
Shared Vision		Imposed vision; no faculty discussion
		No established priorities to create shared vision
		Limited philosophical discussions to define plans
		No faculty discussions about curriculum
Leadership	Head of School	Minimal observations recalled
		Inconsistent leadership ability observed
	Division Leadership	Instruction leadership required for collaboration
		Clear definition of roles needed
		Management and leadership styles impact conditions for collaboration
	Faculty Leadership	Shared leadership among faculty to create new initiatives
		Leadership emerged from within faculty
		Peer leadership promotes collaboration
School Culture	Autonomy	Autonomy must be balanced with collaboration
	Isolation	Differences between the school's divisions result in isolation
		Physical space within school building promotes isolation
		Flexible meeting times serve to promote collaboration
	Trust and Morale	Positive, trusting relationships promote collaboration
		Conflict resolution among faculty requires time to process
		Honesty and authenticity in relationships promote collaboration
		Trust impacts morale
		Trust is necessary for collegial relationships among faculty
Formal Organizational Structure	Division Structure	Limited cross-divisional meetings
		Weekly schedule limits time available for collaboration
		Grade level teams and teaching partners are more likely to collaborate
	Curricular Approach	Academic freedom to create curriculum
		School structure supports autonomy
	Hiring and Retention	New hires may add value to collaborative efforts
		Faculty turnover negatively impacts conditions for collaboration
	Resources	Dedicated time for collaboration is essential
		Teacher compensation should reflect extra time required for collaboration

Themes	Sub-Themes	Participant View
	Communication	Ongoing curriculum regarding curriculum is a necessity

		Effective written and oral communication is required for strategic, ongoing collaboration
	Professional Development	Professional development promotes collaboration
		Training important for teachers with varied levels of experience
Informal Organizational Structure	Collegiality	Informal, flexible interactions improve collegiality
		Teachers generally observe positive relationships among faculty members
	Social Networks	Social networks develop in varying degrees
		Social networks promote collaboration

Teacher attitudes towards collaboration to improve instructional practice.
The five major findings of this study, school culture, formal organizational structure, informal organizational structure, shared vision and leadership are discussed in this section.

Finding 1: School culture. Based on the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, a majority of the participants revealed, based on their lived experiences, that collaboration is positively perceived. Although they enjoy their autonomy as an independent school teacher, they want to move away from isolation and yearn for contact with other faculty members and want someone to talk to regarding their work in the classroom. They stated collaboration leads to being a better teacher, having a stronger curriculum, integrating technology effectively, and finding better resources. Interestingly enough, the teachers did not believe that collaboration could be taught through professional development training. The overriding desire to do what is best for their students was an overwhelming impetus for collaboration. Furthermore, teachers reported a desire to gain the social benefits of collaboration. The adult to adult contact was important for many of the teachers, particularly those who worked with the older students. For some, they feared "turning into an adolescent" and therefore actively sought

after the social contact with their colleagues. Yet, the preeminent theme reported by the research participants was the unwavering desire to do what is best for the students.

Although a majority of the teachers felt positively about collaboration, they felt the school culture was a factor in either collaborating or not collaboration effectively. Autonomy is one of the hallmarks of teaching at an independent school. Independent school teachers reported working within a less structured framework, without the restrictions of curriculum guidelines, state standards or strict monitoring. Jeanette (p. 5) explained:

Yeah, I should take a step back and say I'm in an independent school because I can do my own thing. But within that, of teaching a curriculum within, with what you feel is important, it also needs to align with the mission of the school and the mission of your curriculum team, which is English and social studies—the humanities teachers.

Jeanette (p. 8) later said that the isolation impeded her ability to collaborate, commenting that, "We started some philosophical questions that didn't go anywhere." Interviews revealed the considerable power that some independent school teachers wield. The relationships between administrators and teachers may vary from one grouping to the next depending on the affinity between the two, years of experience, individual biases and leadership styles of both the teacher and the administrator. Clearly, the relationships and power structure are rather complex. Kris (p. 14) reported on the varying degrees of leadership and how this may influence school culture:

There is a power among the faculty that can influence decision making. There exists a very different dynamic between the superiors and their subordinates

[division head/ head of school to teacher] in the independent school culture. In other organizations, there is a culture where the boss/supervisor tells you what to do, and then you do it. That is not always the case in independent school (naturally, depending on leadership style). Depending on the leadership, independent schoolteachers wield a lot of power. Because of that, we don't really ever get to the point where we work together.

There was a minority perspective represented in the data where one teacher insisted collaboration is not the best of ideas. Jeanette (p. 22) noted that at times, "It takes so much effort to collaborate. We've been fine until now. Why rock the boat? I know what I am doing in my own classroom."

As stated previously, teaching in an independent school affords teachers with considerable independence and academic freedom. Most teachers were overwhelmingly appreciative of the academic freedoms that they enjoyed, although one of the disadvantages of the autonomy is the isolation that some of the teachers feel.

Kathy (p. 10) made a particular recognition of the independent school culture and the need for collaboration instead of the isolation that she had experienced:

The independent schools are promoting cooperation, collaboration, the interdisciplinary studies, the group work, and yet the teachers seem to still be working in isolation? What do we do about that? It's one of my pet peeves. I mean, I say all the time whether I'm speaking to a national audience or to someone in the next room. My buzzword is we need to—is model, and as educators, we need to model the behavior we expect to see in kids. We cannot keep doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results. And

this is really specific to current education, and so you know exactly, if we want our kids to learn to work together and be team members and to collaborate, we need to be showing them that we're doing the same thing. And there is a great divide there.

Similarly, Misty (p. 19) reported on her experience with isolation. She was not truly working collaboratively to improve her instructional practice. She acknowledged that she worked well with her teaching partner, but not with other teachers in her division. She cited the culture of the school as the issue:

I'd say that we pretty much work in isolation, our grade. We, we [grade level partners] work together, we collaborate together, and try not to, try not to get involved in, you know, the political aspects of the job. We work, we work together and apart meaning that, you know, I mean we [grade level partner] understand what [the grade below us] is doing or what they've done, but we build on that, so not that way. We know what [that grade] is doing.

Finding 2: Formal organizational structure. Study results contrasted both formal and informal structures within the organization. Participants explored the impact that formal organizational structures in the school had on collaboration. Formal structures included leadership, divisional structure in the school, modes of communication, resources and professional development.

Division structure. The research site is a K-8 independent school with a study body of approximately 550 children. The organizational structure is generally flat, with divisions for lower school (kindergarten through fourth grade) and upper school (fifth through eighth grade). There are no departments, such as those found in larger schools

(e.g., Humanities, Science, Mathematics). The lack of formal structure was reported as possible impediment to collaboration among faculty members participating in the research study. Formal structures within divisions could support collaboration according to this teacher. Mary (p. 17):

> I mean, I, I think departmentalizing would be a way to accomplish that [collaboration] so that there's more time built in for these kinds of conversations and they're expected to be happening. I feel like the administrators need to be academic leaders. I like the model of headmaster or headmistress as the master teacher. I know that that job has shifted and it's gotten really busy with other things, but I would love to hear from my superiors what they consider to be master teaching. And I would love more active prompting toward achieving those benchmarks. (pause) It would be good to know what people are doing, like what people are doing well and to have time to go to other people's classes, which I know is a really hard thing to accomplish. And I also feel like we have a lot of supervision expectations that are not academic that could be relieved here and there in order to [pause]

Kathy (p. 16) made the following observation regarding formal structures within the divisions at the research site. A certain administrator or teacher would oversee the collaborative efforts like the interdisciplinary studies that were initiated by the technology and science/engineering teachers. Kathy lamented that what could have been an innovative addition to the curriculum failed because of the absence of formal organizational structure to assist in collaboration:

Having an academic dean or a dean of studies who really looks at curriculum and really like manages something like the STEAM program and doesn't let us have a year of this flop STEAM program, along with managing how we teach using technology and aspects of hiring and, and improving performance. I mean, that position exists too. And that's something that it seems like the division heads do in addition to all the other things that they do [in order for collaboration to thrive].

Misty (p. 12) commented on the organizational structure within the division. She said that departmentalizing would provide the opportunity for teachers to meet regularly and encourage collaborative practice based on their shared responsibility to teach a particular subject. She stated that this would certainly improve teacher practice:

We're not departmentalized that way, yeah. And we only meet in what are called curriculum groups once (pause) a month at the most. It probably shakes out to be fewer times than that, like maybe four or five times a year in reality. And I think we need more of it. I think our small size (pause) where it's harder to departmentalize here because so many people do so many things. Who would be at what meeting is a little bit more challenging. And I do think that we favor a student life emphasis over an academic emphasis.

The overall operation of the divisional structure affects various facets of the organization. The daily schedule, assignment of duties, meeting schedule and annual calendar created solely by the division head combine to have a tremendous impact on how teachers execute their jobs. Data analysis of teacher responses related to division structure revealed the need for improved communications among faculty and with administration. Data analysis confirms that within the division's structure and day-to-day

operation, the meeting schedule provided opportunities for possible collaboration. Unfortunately, although the formal organizational structure was in place, school administrators rarely took advantage of the opportunity to provide the opportunity or teachers to collaborate. It appears that even without a shared vision for collaboration from the school's administrative leadership, teachers were willing to use the scheduled meeting time to do so. In citing the inadequate time made available for collaboration, teachers responding to this concept noted that meeting time could be used for effectively and efficiently if teaches were given the opportunity to decide on how to use the time. Most agreed that these meetings would provide the perfect opportunity to collaborate on long-term projects, interdisciplinary projects, unit planning, development of narratives for joint progress reports and vertical lessons, and unit planning.

Curricular approach. Independent school teachers participating in the study overwhelmingly reported the need for collaboration in order to strengthen curriculum to expand their body of knowledge, improve their practice, and impact student learning.

According to the research participants, independent schools vary in degree of formal curriculum. Some schools adopt a standard curriculum, based on the prescription of a particular textbook. Often, department heads or other curriculum leaders manage school curricula. In contrast, however, some schools, particularly smaller institutions such as this one, leave curricular decisions to the division heads or appoint faculty members to a subject area committee. Yet, teachers at Keystone report the desire to collaborate around topics related to curriculum design and instructional approach. The desire to improve teacher instruction to provide positive impact on student learning was apparent.

Mary (p. 4) reflected on her experience and the lack of collaboration when discussing curriculum and teaching. Misty believed that better discussions would help the teachers become better teachers. Deeper, more meaningful discussions would certainly benefit teachers' instructional practice:

I think it's the lack of a culture of talking about academics [to get better at teaching]. I, personally I feel best when I feel like my colleagues and I are all in concert about what constitutes, you know, good paper grading, good commenting, good assessment. What are great resources to offer kids? And I feel like that's all done very kind of individually…

Resources. Time and money are critical resources for independent school teachers. Teachers are hired based on an annual contract that extends through the academic calendar, July to June of the following year. In addition to teaching responsibilities, other duties are typically included in the contract. These duties include but are not limited to advising, committee work, coaching, chaperoning student functions outside of school hours, after-school programming, lunch/recess duties, dramatic/musical production support, and outdoor education participation. The demands on the time of independent schoolteachers create an impediment to collaborative work. Teachers with multiple responsibilities during the school day (teaching, lunch duty, recess duty, coaching) report that time is a critical factor in creating a supportive structure for meetings in order to foster collaboration. If there is not time set aside for collaboration, it simply will not take place according to the study participants.

Structured time within the school day emerged as an opportunity to support collaboration along with the effective use previously mentioned meeting schedule. Data

analysis shows that teachers welcome the opportunity to collaborate; however, the structures of the school day combined with the myriad responsibilities that they share impede the process.

Erick (IST1) reported: "someone should be in charge of getting everybody who should be at a meeting there to talk about curriculum . . . . I think there's no established time [to work together or collaborate]."

Sheryl (IST3) noted:

It would be helpful to have more constructive time to really work together. And I think it would pay off in the end. I also think people feel a collaboration is an expenditure of time that could be spent grading (laughs) or prepping on one's own.

Financial support is another critical resource identified during the research study. Independent schools are generally well moneyed. Their operating budgets result from the collection of annual tuition and fees.

Mary (p. 21) discussed the distribution of resources at Keystone School and related her experience to the independence and also the isolation she felt as a teacher. She felt that the school's financial commitment to collaboration would be a natural extension of the money they spend on other things in the life of the school such as laptops for students, new teaching materials, textbooks and the like. Mary questioned how to create opportunities for collaboration among teachers and noted that in her previous experience at another school, there was a financial incentive to collaborative during the summer. The intersection of the time permitted to collaborate combined with the financial

compensation to collaborate around curriculum design (or a host of other needed projects) created the ideal conditions for collaboration.

> The (pause) incredible resources at the school, that I can get my hands on a laptop for any kid at any time basically. I can get a new textbook if a kid loses one or I'm missing a classroom copy. I can update my materials year to year as new and exciting things come out. (pause) The small size means I can be very successful individually with kids, and I think the flexibility. You know, I don't feel like I'm being told to do what to do all the time. I really enjoy my independence because I feel confident in what I'm doing. I think it makes it okay, you know? . . . . I've seen this happen at the last two schools I was in . . . they're giving teachers summer grants to work together on curriculum. We need that to happen here . . . if there will ever be any real collaboration.

Communication. At Keystone*,* formal communication occurs most frequently in the setting of faculty meetings or committee meetings similar to most other independent schools. At the research site, participants reported monthly full faculty meetings and monthly divisional meetings (lower school and upper school faculty met separately with their division heads. In the upper school division, weekly meetings were held with first year teachers with their division head. In the lower school, the division head met once a cycle with each grade level team to discuss student concerns; however, periodic meeting with teachers to review performance were not scheduled regularly.

Data analysis reveals the need for meetings that cross divisional lines between lower and upper school teachers, thus allowing for authentic communication and transfer of information among the entire faculty. Study participants at Keystone School stressed

the importance of well-facilitated, regular meetings to promote authentic communication among faculty and between faculty and administration. In addition, participants voiced their belief that meaningful communication was required to promote the conditions conducive to collaboration. Mary (p. 18) discussed the communication among peers using the meeting format. Her assessment point to the need for improved communication focused specifically on collaboration focused on academics and instruction:

> We have a guidance meeting every six days and a team meeting every six days, so twice out of a six-day cycle we have face time with each other, a good amount of face time with each other, but not specifically designated for academics [or how we teach our subject matter].

Mary (p. 18) observed, "We rarely talk about curriculum or how we teach," but offered possible solutions in her discussion of the topic of communication. She referenced her experience at a previous independent school:

> So every other Thursday, the kids would have self-defense, taught by an outside group, so they were completely supervised and managed by an outside group, with the exception of the staff like in the lobby and stuff like that. And then the faculty all met in a separate location, like a different building on campus, and they met for, I think we met for 75 minutes every other Thursday morning.

Of all of the respondents, only Terri (p. 15) reported an example when the division structure and meeting schedule resulted in a positive outcome and promoted collaboration (based on her definition). The participant reflected on the shared vision, leadership and communication required to support a collaborative effort:

I think that the math program under [division head's] leadership has, was, is much

more collaborative. We met for two years for the Wednesday committee

meetings. We met cross-divisionally and we started by looking at each grade

level, I think based somewhat on the Common Core, somewhat on NCTM

standards. We looked at, you know, numeracy, like geometry, all across the

strands, starting with Kindergarten and then we went up to first, so it took us two

years to do it. But we looked at everything from K to eight. The [division head]

was great about documenting everything and then we would, we kept returning to

our written document to make sure that there weren't gaps.

Professional development. Teachers participating in the study acknowledge the

importance of professional development, but also admit that the requirement for

professional development is based on teacher needs or interest. Most did not realize that

expertise in collaboration could actually be taught and that there is scholarly research and

technique to support collaboration in schools. While many had heard of the notion of

professional learning communities, and some even stated that professional learning

communities existed at Keystone, only a few understood that the conditions for

collaboration could be defined and that certain protocols and procedures could be used to

support collaborative work among teachers. Yet even with that new understanding,

teachers willingly acknowledged the need for professional development in collaboration.

They also recognized the limitations within certain independent schools.

Connie (p. 8) discussed the importance of professional development as a means to

promote ongoing collaboration:

It's astounding to me that many educators that I've gotten to know in independent

schools have never been to professional development outside of their school.

They—you know, have people come in and run workshops and that kind of thing,

but in the public school where you have to maintain your continuing education

credits, it's the responsibility of the teacher to find opportunities and also the in-

school opportunities count, but there's an accountability that is often lacking in

independent schools . . . there's very few schools that are even keeping track of

what kind of professional development their teachers are partaking in. And I think

it's a real serious issue in independent schools . . . . How else will we all reach the

level of master teacher?

Finding 3: Informal organizational structure. The development of positive

relationships among teachers is very important in the life of the school. Teachers'

willingness to support one another in their roles and develop mutual understanding of the

demands of the job is critical to the overall positive functioning of the independent

school. While all participants acknowledged the importance of the social aspects of their

jobs, study participants reported varying degrees of social networks within the school.

Informal opportunities for communication and work together can yield positive

results. Informal networks help to build working relationships, develop trust and support

camaraderie among faculty members. According to the research participants, without the

informal opportunities for teachers to connect with each other, poor communication can

result: Mary (p. 7) talked about the relationship that she formed with a colleague as a

result of common time for lesson preparation, also known as "prep time." This informal

relationship led to the development of a professional alliance in which the two teachers were able to collaborate:

> I know very well what [colleague] is doing because he and I talk a lot, and we happen to have free preps together. I know a good amount about what [colleague] is doing because she's at the seventh grade homeroom level with me. . . . We work together quite a bit now. I guess that would be considered collaboration! (laughs) . . . I can't say I know much about the fifth grade. I really need to get into [colleague's] classroom.

Terri (p. 4) offered another example of informal networks contributing to the work of teachers and to the overall experience of being part of a successful team that collaborates effectively:

> [Colleague 1] just stopped me in the hall last week at some point and said, "If you were teaching, you know, adding mixed numbers, would you line them up horizontally or vertically?" And I said, "Oh, absolutely, I would be lining them up vertically because that matches what we do in terms of borrowing, and that will help them later on when they have to borrow in fractions." And then [Colleague 2] happened upon the scene and he's like, "Absolutely I would line them up." Like we were all in synch and it felt great!

Social networks. The development of strong social networks is not always easy. The complexity of relationships among teachers, between administrators and teachers and the dynamics within the administrative level contribute to the successful development of social networks according to the research participants. The experiences of the participants varied, seemingly due to personality. Some teachers were remarkably outgoing and

actively approached fellow colleagues for professional advice or to socialize after work. The more introverted and reserved members of the faculty tended to shy away from such interactions. Cultural affinity was another, although thankfully less important factor in the development of social networks among the teachers at the research site. Some research participants noted that the women of color on the faculty seemed to have a powerful social bond and that the openly gay population of teachers had formed a strong social network. Even the younger teachers (those new to the profession and the assistant teachers had formed a bond based on their joint social experiences. Surprisingly, the greatest division among social networks appeared to be based on the division in which the teachers worked.

Mary (p. 6) discussed the social separation between lower school teachers and upper school teacher as an impediment to collaboration:

We're not too social. We don't have anything that I know about unless there are things that I'm not invited to that are very social. We're really social at lunch; it's super division divided, right? Like the upper school teachers are at one table and the lower school teachers at another. We talk a lot about student progress and things that irk us in the course of a school year and how to make them better and what we're doing wrong, what we're lamenting, we're not doing very well. And there's occasional administrative presence there too, but I don't feel in the upper school that people are socializing either . . . what I do know is that it's not likely that we collaborate if we don't get to know each other!

Relational trust. According to the research participants, trust is an important factor for all stakeholders at Keystone School given the intimate nature of their work:

teaching children and guiding them achieve their personal best. And its importance at the Keystone School was revealed by all of the study participants. Connie (p. 20) stated it bluntly when she reflected on the likelihood of colleagues collaborating: "People are not as inclined to get involved with an individual that they don't have any kind of relationship." Interview data shows that given the human nature of schools, creating a sense of warmth and trust within the community is important. The absence of trust can impede faculty relationships, interactions among faculty and administration and can ultimately affect performance. This does not bode well for collaboration to improve instructional practice.

When contemplating trust in a prior school experience, Eric (p. 28) offered the following:

> It was really hard to leave that community. Not necessarily the curriculum I was teaching and everything the school believed in in terms of the mission. I wanted to make some changes there, but it really was about I didn't want to leave that community. That community was safe, that community was warm and welcoming, and anything you ever needed, they were there for you . . . yeah, it was a very collaborative environment . . . . It's different here.

Morale. Faculty morale is deeply connected to the relationships that faculty share among each other, but also the relationship between faculty and administration. Morale is also connected to the relational trust found within the school. The overall morale of the school can directly influence the school's culture thereby influencing conditions necessary for collaboration. Teachers participating in the study noted that a positive

morale was directly correlated to inspire teaching. Terri (p. 3) described the current

climate in the school:

> I would say in general (pause) the relationships have been good and trusting, but
>
> (pause) this year, [morale] has been particularly difficult . . . there seems to be a
>
> difference culturally between the two divisions. . . . We hired consultants [made
>
> us engage in difficult conversations]. In this case, the guided collaboration help to
>
> improve everyone's experience at the school! Go figure!

> There was a confluence of emerging themes among study participants. The unique

school culture and the development of a shared vision emerged as important indicators

for conditions in which collaboration might exist. Subordinate themes provided a

framework to support the superordinate themes. Considered together, these themes have a

considerable impact on the overall functioning of Keystone School.

> ***Finding 4: Shared vision.*** Research study participants overwhelmingly supported

the notion that shared vision is critical to enhanced performance in the classroom.

Independent school teachers reported that in order to develop their instructional expertise,

developing shared vision and collective goals for improvement inspired them to put forth

their best effort and support the work of their colleagues.

> Misty (p. 16) discussed the need for a shared vision in the context of curricular

goals and objectives for the entire lower school division:

> I would really like to (pause) feel like we had a common vision for our work --
>
> the curriculum, differentiated teaching and even student expectations. I know
>
> that's a tall order, but I feel like (pause) there needs to be more conversation and
>
> work around (pause) what we want, ultimately the kind of student that we want to

leave lower school. And, and how, making sure that they're definitely more than prepared for the next stage of their education. I just feel like there are just a lot of different moving parts and there (pause) really is no rhyme or reason. The faculty, they're the ones who hold the ship steady, you know? In spite of what happens with administration, that the faculty, they're the ones who, you know, they're the ones who set their own high standards, they're the ones who make sure that, that we're communicating with, with parents that, you know, what's happening in the classroom, making sure that we touch base with parents about progress. But we all know that we're all vulnerable to the whim of any, any parent at any time because, you know, that's just the nature of the beast.

Another example of a collective experience where shared vision impacted an outcome was a math planning meeting referenced by Terri (p. 9):

And we figured out that there were some gaps in between [grade levels]. We also sort of talked—to me the conversations were more important about what did we wanted the product to look like, that we—most of us were much more concerned with could students justify their thinking, either in writing or with drawing or (pause) however it worked for them. We were all really concerned about justifying thinking, which eventually becomes proofs in geometry, but those conversations to me were the most important.

Additional data observed in the study supports the contention that the entire school community needs to weigh in on the overall vision of the school, and the parents need to be included in that discussion along with faculty and administration. Based on the research findings and the support of the literature, shared vision among all stakeholders is

a significant characteristic of the independent school. Yet, the independence of teachers may interfere with shared vision, particularly at the research site. Teachers essentially work on his/her own without direct supervision or guidance. Individual vision versus shared vision may conflict as a result. The need for a shared vision among all constituencies, but particularly the teachers is paramount according to Eric (p. 8):

> I have a positive and collegial relationship with enough people here, with most people where I can go and say, "I really need your help with this. Do you have any ideas?" But separating the social piece from it, well, I don't, we don't have to be—it sounds awful, too, but we don't have to be friends here . . . . I don't need any more friends (laughs), but we both are here for a common goal. Let's achieve that common goal together.

As the school looks to the future, creating a shared vision becomes even more important when contemplating change and competition in the independent school marketplace. One teacher, Mary (p. 10), offered a suggestion to achieve shared vision:

> That brain trust could be tapped and well utilized. I think another obstacle here is that there are people who have been here forever, and so their perspective on the school is expert level, but their perspective on the school relative to the world around is not so [well-informed] . . .

Finding 5: Leadership. Varying degrees of leadership exist with the organizational structure at the research site. One study participant felt that private school leadership was lacking and that this was a "typical" phenomena in the independent school. John (p. 12) noted the following during his interview: "I wish that our current leader had more background in management and leadership, educational leadership, and

also to kind of set boundaries for parents and teachers, but I don't know if that, that's probably typical for private school."

While other participants may not have expressed such fervent opinion, a recurring theme was the importance of the school administration being present in the classroom. Study participants discussed their desire for more contact with school administration for the purposes of professional feedback, mentoring or to develop an authentic understanding of what actually occurred from day to day in the classroom. In general, teachers generally felt supported by their division heads; however, there was a clear desire for more purposeful interaction that supported improved instructional practice and professional growth.

Kris (p. 14) referenced a desire among colleagues for greater contact with school administrators for instructional feedback and support, essentially asking for more supervision, in an effect to receive affirmation that his work was consistent with the overall vision for the division and the school:

> You know, it's, it's very easy to, for administrators to get bogged down with day to day tasks and not spend time to the classroom. And I do know that a lot of my colleagues in lower school often express that they wish that, you know, the division leader or the head of school or whatever, you know, would be a little more present in the classroom, just from the perspective of knowing what's going on in the classroom, knowing teachers' teaching style, getting a look at how the group dynamic of the specific class operates in the classroom.

The relationship between division head and faculty in the very human organization of an independent school is critical to overall success. Independent school

teachers want this level of contact. In fact, they appear to thrive on the interaction. This interaction between administration and faculty has the potential to impact organizational success, faculty effectiveness and ultimately, student learning. Mary (p. 15) reflected on her experience:

> My supervisor was certainly very supportive of me and, you know, was very supportive of my teaching methods and, you know, loved how I sequenced everything. He was very appreciative of my rapport with the students. And I mean, I have always felt like *uber* supported by, by him.

Another form of leadership that was articulated by study participants involved the relationship among teachers within the same classroom. Leadership within the classroom at Keystone School is structured based on the head teacher/associate teacher relationship. On the job teacher training to develop expertise and mastery of instructional technique and curricular knowledge is an important construct in the independent school, particularly at Keystone. Head teachers are expected to guide the professional growth of their associate teachers. Associate teachers are generally enrolled in a graduate program to earn a master's degree in education while working full-time at the school. This design requires leadership and mentoring from the head teacher that can prove to be quite valuable in developing teachers who are young in their profession. Sheryl (p. 3) reflected on the team teaching approach:

> For the most part, I think it's been working really well. It seems like most head teachers and associates seem to enjoy working with each other. The partnerships have seemed to work well. I definitely think amongst teachers that the relationships are collegial between teachers. I think teachers, you know, seek each

other out and talk to each other and, you know, get advice for each other, from

each other.

Existence of formal structures and policies. Key components of formal

structures and policies within the organization are discussed in this section.

Finding 1: Formal organizational structure. Teachers participating in the study

identified different facets of the formal organizational structure of the school that

impacted opportunities for collaboration. Often, these issues prevented the development

of collaborative practice at Keystone School.

Meeting schedule. As it relates to the formal organizational structure in schools,

one of the greatest challenges faced by the independent school teachers participating in

the study is the schedule and quality of meetings. Research participants reported having

weekly meetings scheduled at the beginning of each academic year that are required for

all faculty members to attend. The meetings occur on the same afternoon each week,

from 3:30 p.m. until 4:15 p.m. in the afternoon. Research participants cited these meeting

times as the most opportune times for teachers to utilize the time on collaborative

endeavors. Training in the use of technology in the classroom, the development of

interdisciplinary studies, or work on school policies related to discipline, academic

standards and the like could occur during these scheduled times. Unfortunately, most

participants reported that the majority of the time in these meetings was spent either

making announcements or discussing student needs in a large group setting. Respondents

found this to be an inefficient and ineffective use of time—time that could be better

dedicated to collaboration. The teachers were clear in their desire for school

administration to assign specific time for collaboration and to provide guidance on which initiatives would benefit from authentic collaborative work.

Misty (p. 19) reported on the difficulty in scheduling meeting for teachers to discuss matters related to curriculum. She noted that the absence of such structures limited the possibility of collaboration among teachers to focus on and improve their instructional practice:

Unfortunately, because of the nature of our meetings, it's difficult to do [to collaborate], so this year the department heads take turns having meetings on Thursdays, and because lower school teachers teach Math and English and Social Studies, we're at those meetings during, during the course of the month, and so we don't meet as often for lower school at all.

In response to a question about the most effective use of meeting time to encourage collaboration with the intention of improving teacher practice, Sheryl (IST3) noted:

It would be helpful to have more constructive time [during meetings] to really work together, to really collaborate on curriculum and how we do our jobs [teach]. And I think it would pay off in the end. I also think people feel a collaboration is an expenditure of time that could be spent grading (laughs) or prepping on one's own.

Finding 2: Resources. The resources dedicated to creating formal structures for collaboration were reported as a significant factor in the support of teacher growth, improved instructional practice and overall commitment to collaboration. Research study participants were very focused on making sure that time and money were reported as part of the data.

Time. Allocation of resources was a topic that research participants became rather excited to discuss. Time and money were the primary commodities that emerged as concepts in the dialogue about the structures and policies in place to support collaboration. Independent school teachers reported that the lack of time during the school day negatively affected opportunities to collaborate with peers. Most teachers were required or volunteered to assume additional roles or duties at the school such as coaching, tutoring or performing morning or afternoon carpool duties. According to the teachers, there were simply not enough hours in the day to collaborate. Eric (IST1) weighed in on the same topic during his interview:

> Sometimes I don't know how I could possibly collaborate on a project with [peer colleague] unless it happened in the summer. I am in a master's program, I coach, I grade papers every night until 7. So when do I get to collaborate. Look . . . it's not that I don't want to. I do . . . (pause) but how much is really realistic? Why not use some of these dumb meeting better? That would be helpful. At that point, I'd be willing to stay late to collaborate. Otherwise, it's not gonna happen.

Money. Money was the second resource concept that impacted the policies and structures in place to support collaboration. Mary (IST10) offered an alternative financial model for professional development that would encourage collaboration among teachers.

She offered a creative approach to professional development that merged independence with accountability for work.

> Because I know in our contract we have a thousand dollars that's supposed to be for professional development, and I wanted last summer to use that money to just basically pay myself and my teaching partner to make writing, like instructional videos on writing to use in our classroom. And that was turned down, and it was work I ended up doing anyway for free, which I think teachers do, but not to the extent that I wanted to do and not over the summer. So I've just done it as I found the time over the course of the school year. But I would love for the school to be, to be open-minded and creative about how that money is used and to make sure it's used for everyone every year, because it's written into our contract . . . . I feel like if you're going to write it into our contracts, that we have a thousand dollars of PD money every year, you have to ask people how they're using it. The idea is to become better teachers, to continue improving in our practice. So why not have some flexibility on how to do that?

Finding 4: Professional development. Direct teaching of collaboration skills appeared to be a foreign concept for the independent school teachers participating in the study. While professional development for math instruction, writing workshop technique or emergent reading instruction was commonplace, instruction in collaborative practice was not considered. The research participants were unaware that professional service firms provided training and ongoing consultation for collaboration. Further, the participants were unaware of the inherent complexities in teaching collaboration based on the definition of professional learning community. Fortunately, all of the respondents

were eager to learn more about how to participate in such training. Connie (p. 22) discussed the importance of professional development as a means to promote ongoing collaboration:

> It's astounding to me that many educators that I've gotten to know in independent schools have never been to professional development outside of their school. They—you know, have people come in and run workshops and that kind of thing, but in the public school where you have to maintain your continuing education credits, it's the responsibility of the teacher to find opportunities and also the in-school opportunities count, but there's an accountability that is often lacking in independent schools . . . there's very few schools that are even keeping track of what kind of professional development their teachers are partaking in. And I think it's a real serious issue in independent schools . . . . And to think that there is professional development dedicated to collaboration . . . . Sign me up! We need it!

Finding 5: Informal organizational structure. Informal organizational structure appeared to be a delicate matter when discussion trust and morale with the teacher participants in the study. While the teachers certainly wanted their voices to be heard, they were distinctly aware that they would not share these attitudes in a public forum. They enjoyed the safety of the research process**.**

Trust. Trust and morale are two significant factors related to informal organizational structure that can impact conditions for collaboration. Research participants reflected on their personal experiences regarding the necessity of peer observations and curricular review if authentic collaboration were to exist at Keystone School. Kris (p. 8) offered the following perspective:

I personally trust the faculty that I work with as far as homeroom teachers go. I would say there are some members of the lower school faculty that I (pause) I know for a fact have, are known for throwing people under the bus. But I haven't ever been thrown under the bus nor have I done it to anybody else, and you know, so I don't, I don't think that there's anybody who I deal with specifically that I would say I don't trust (pause). I trust certain people enough to collaborate with them, but I'm not sure everyone could say that . . .

Morale. Faculty morale is deeply connected to the relationships that faculty share among each other, but also the relationship between faculty and administration. Morale is also connected to the relational trust found within the school. In the absence of relational trust, research participants agreed that any collaborative effort would fail. Terri (p. 16) described the current climate in the school:

In general I trust my colleagues to take care of the students and fulfill their responsibilities. I really don't go too much further than that. Morale goes up and then in goes down. It all depends, I guess. Our head [the head of school] has a lot to do with it. If we feel supported and valued by the head, then we can deal with almost anything. You've got to have trust between the teacher and the administrators to get anything done. And if you want to collaborate or even just work together side by side, you're going to have to have trust.

Finding 6: Shared vision. The development of a shared vision for collaboration was cited unanimously by the respondents as a necessity for collaboration to exist. In particular, the respondents discussed the small size of the school and the seeming inability to create a collaborative environment. When asked to delve deeper into what this meant, Jeanette remarked that she did not think that she and her colleagues truly understood what collaboration is. She attempted to remember instances of cooperation versus collaboration, but with over 25 years of experience, she found it difficult to focus in on "the best one." Jeanette (p. 20) expressed her frustration with her "small school" as follows:

> Yeah, when you're such a small school, and that's what also what I've had to sort of like, when I'm frustrated, to have to remember that I'm at a really small school, so the responsibilities are greater here, and you have to, you have to participate a lot more in the school environment, which is, I think, innately, you know, something that I'm, I like to do, but it's not everyone who's going to do that. And if not everyone's going to get on board, then it's a waste of time. If you really want to collaborate, everybody's got to get on that train!

Finding 7: Leadership. Participants in the research study enthusiastically endorsed school administration's role in creating conditions for collaboration for the faculty. Some mentioned the need for teacher input when considering which structures to put in place. Others focused on ensuring that all school leaders (administrative leaders and teacher leaders) fully understood the professional learning community. In essence, the teachers needed their supervisors to demonstrate their commitment to collaboration. Jeanette (p. 18) commented on this topic in earnest:

> Listen. I've seen them [heads of school, division heads] come and go. Some are better than others. Some, well, I don't know how they got that job! But, whatever. The leaders have to be the ones to get this in motion [collaboration]. The teachers need someone to set the tone, to set up the foundation, to create the framework for collaboration to happen. Now, a leader that can do that, will get results [referring to teachers improved practice].

Theme delineation that emerged during data analysis is illustrated in the following figures. Figure 4.1 illustrates the intersecting themes for shared vision. Figure 4.2 illustrates the subordinate themes related to leadership. Figure 4.3 illustrates subordinate themes related to school culture. Figure 4.4 visually outlines the subordinate themes related to formal organizational structure. Finally, Figure 4.5 illustrates the subordinate themes related to informal organizational structure.
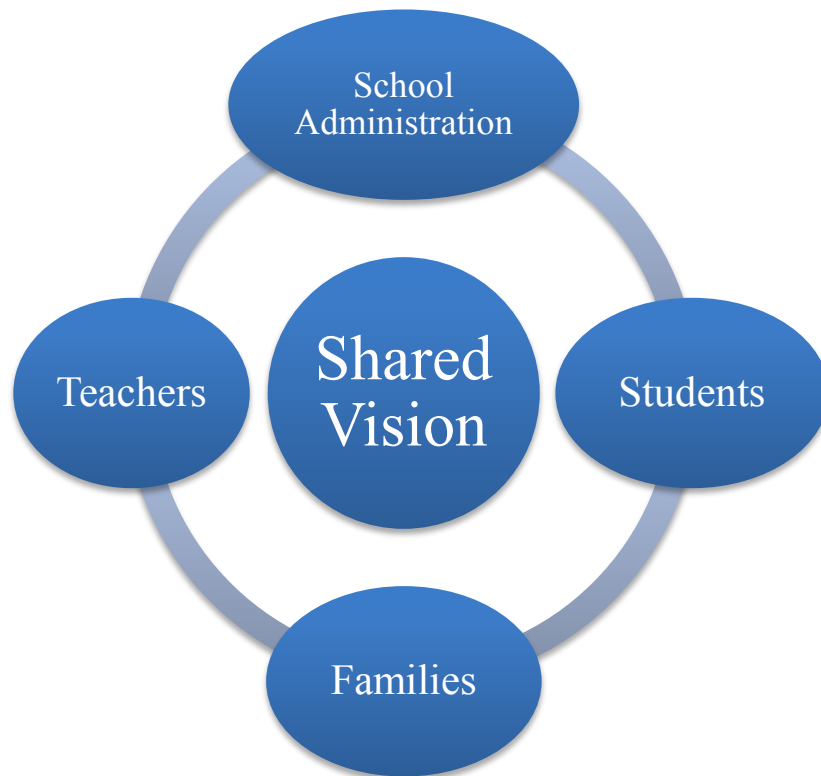
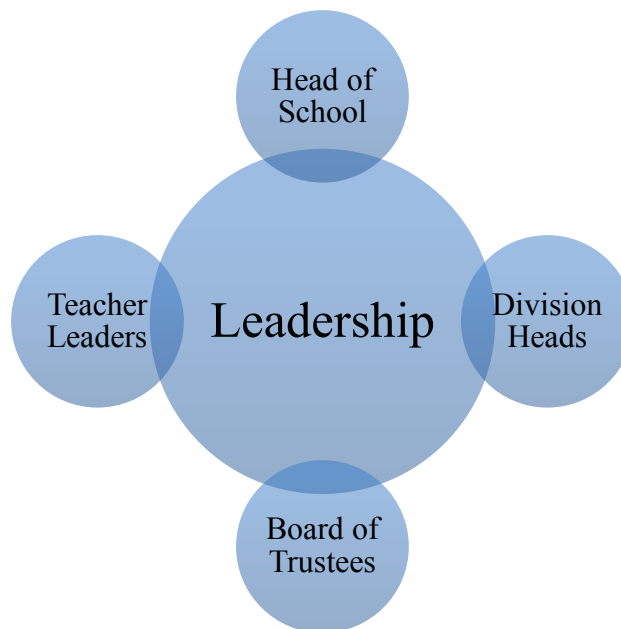*Figure 4.1.* Intersecting themes for shared vision.

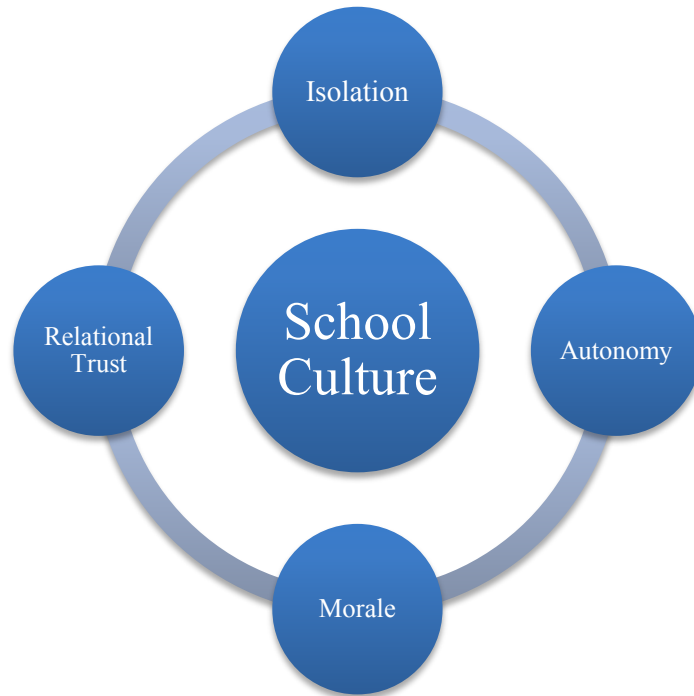*Figure 4.2.* Subordinate themes related to leadership.

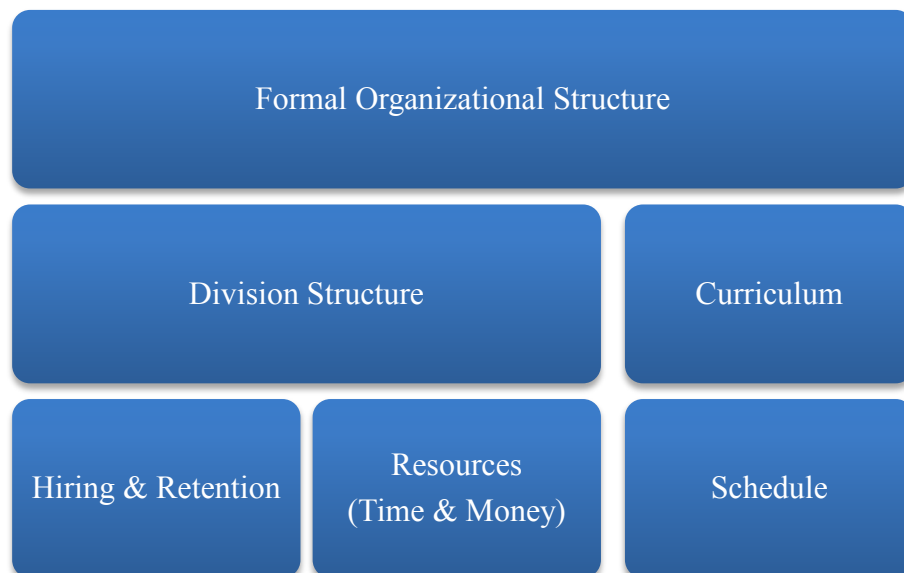*Figure 4.3.* Subordinate themes related to school culture.

Figure 4.4. Subordinate themes related to formal organizational structure.
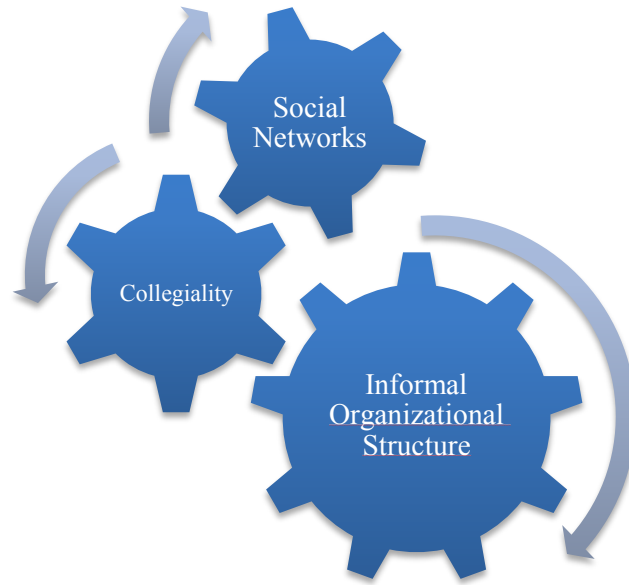
Figure 4.5. Subordinate themes related to informal organizational structure.

Summary of Results

This chapter presented the results of a phenomenological analysis of the interview data. The research questions guided the coding of the data into five major themes and 14 sub-themes, resulting in a series of major findings detailed in the following chapter. The two research questions of the study were as follows: (a) What are teacher attitudes towards collaboration as a means to improve teaching? and (b) Are there formal structures and policies in place that support opportunities for collaboration to improve instructional practice?

The results of the study were discussed according to the findings, as well as the major themes and sub-themes uncovered by the data. The major themes included shared vision, culture, leadership and formal and informal organizational structures within the school. These results offer the opportunity for independent school leaders to reflect on their school's professional practice and consider areas in which their schools can improve

in order to directly impact teacher professional development, and thereby student outcomes.

Consistent with the literature, this study revealed that several factors influenced teacher attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school setting. As indicated in Chapter 2, school culture (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2007), shared vision (Levine & Marcus, 2010), leadership (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2007) and organizational structure (Darling-Hammond, 2000) provide the foundation for authentic collaboration. These conditions were represented in the primary themes that emerged from the research. This study suggests that teachers are confronted with intersecting conditions that impact their overall experience with collaboration. Among the obstacles identified by independent school teachers, participants focused on the critical role of leadership as a factor for establishing the platform for collaboration among teachers. Findings also revealed several organizational barriers that impacted collaboration. These included division structure, communication and resources, specifically time and money. Underutilization of professional development to support teacher learning was also cited as a contributing factor to unsuccessful collaboration. Findings further suggest that the independence afforded to independent school teachers could often result in feelings of isolation and suboptimal accountability. The lack of structured curriculum, divisional support and ongoing mentoring were key factors related specifically to independence and academic freedoms that characterize independent schools. Finally, issues related to social networks and relational trust emerged from the data. Findings support the importance of trust in building relationships among teachers and with school administration as a significant impetus to creating an environment in which collaboration can thrive.

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this study while Chapter 5 summarizes the

research findings and reviews the implications and limitations of the study. Finally, the

chapter will conclude with a discussion of direct structural and policy recommendations

to address the identified problem.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to provide an understanding of independent school teachers' attitudes toward collaboration for the purpose of improving instructional practice. The study considered the complexities of collaboration in an effort to make a connection between collaboration among teachers, teacher learning and student learning. I drew upon Vygotsky's social development theory (1962) as a main theoretical base, as well as Roschelle's theory of convergent conceptual change (1992) and Warren-Little's social network theory (1993). This study examined teacher attitudes toward collaboration using the framework of a professional learning community (Desimone, 2009; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2006, 2007; Hughes & Kristonis, 2008) in order to inform best practice in independent schools in support of the professional development of teachers and ultimately, to support improvements in student outcomes.

Introduction

Collaboration is a deceptively simple concept with wide-ranging and exciting implications for all schools. School leaders, teachers and students can benefit from effective collaboration within the school community. Effective teacher collaboration to improve instructional practice exists when teachers engage in routines and protocols of communication about classroom experiences, instructional practice and interactions with students in an effort to strengthen pedagogical expertise, support professional growth and enhance student outcomes (Achinstein, 2010; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Kuusiaari, 2014).

Yet, while on the surface, collaboration may appear to be easy to achieve, these types of interactions among staff have been difficult to establish and maintain in schools. Independent schools, which have historically been defined by a culture of individualism and academic freedom (Cutler, 2000; Glenn, 1997; Hussar & Bailey, 2011), are no exception. As reported in the research study, teachers tend to work independently and are often unaware of the work of their colleagues in nearby classrooms; however, results of the study suggest that fostering collaboration in independent schools can be promoted by establishing a shared vision within the school community, creating a culture of collaboration within the school community and developing organizational structures to encourage and sustain collaborative work.

Through an interpretative phenomenological study of independent school teachers lived experiences, findings revealed important perceptions and attitudes regarding the collaborative work in schools. Based on the input from independent school teachers, the findings of the study suggest that independent schools must focus on five key themes when considering how to create a school environment in which collaboration can thrive: shared vision, leadership, school culture, formal organizational structure, and informal organizational structure. Research supports the assessment that teachers work in isolation (Hadar & Brody, 2010; Musanti & Pense, 2010; Orland-Borak, 2006); that the shared vision is a key condition for collaboration (Kuusiaari, 2014; Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Pisano & Vergenti, 2008) and that organizational structure can have a meaningful impact on collaboration (Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Kuusiaari, 2014)).

Implications of Findings

The results and findings from this study are consistent with the theoretical frameworks upon which this study is based. Implications of the major findings are presented below in terms of the literature surrounding collaboration in schools, based on the data collection of teacher attitudes toward collaboration, as well as professional development for independent school teachers. These findings have specific implications for theory and practice in the delivery of instruction in independent schools. Relevant findings will be discussed for universal application at independent schools in general, not solely the research site.

Implications for theory. The findings from this study provide a necessary addition to the limited body of qualitative research on teacher instructional practice and collaboration among teachers in independent schools. This study provides a valuable addition to the scholarly research on teacher attitudes toward collaboration to improve instructional practice particular to the independent school setting. As noted in this study, very few studies focus on teacher isolation in independent schools. Such autonomy can lead to isolation and selfishness in the name of competition. This is problematic and indicative of lack of shared vision (Moolenaar, 2012). This presents another opportunity for scholarly research investigating the intersection of shared vision and autonomy and its impact on school culture in an independent school setting.

Implications for research on independent schools. There is a paucity of reliable research data on independent schools. Studies specifically designed to examine collaboration in independent schools are even scarcer (Blackburn & Wise, 2012; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009; Murray, 2012). Findings of this study provide valuable

insights into further study on teacher isolation in independent schools, teacher attitudes toward formal organizational structures in independent schools, and the unique cultural phenomena that exist in independent schools. This study provides a platform for future research into independent schools.

This body of work represents an important contribution to the field of independent education while supporting the scholarly work of other researchers whose focus pertained specifically to public schools. A future study may begin the process of examining the instructional practice of teachers in independent schools in an effort to establish a model for best practice of collaboration in independent schools. Research in this area should continue to better identify and support the professional needs of independent school teachers. Further research could involve an exploration of formal and informal communication, social networking among independent school teachers and collegiality among independent school teachers. An exploration of the development of school culture in independent schools would also offer important data that could impact the development of shared vision in schools. This would be valuable information for school leaders, particularly heads of school and trustees.

Another study to consider would be research on the impact of individual teacher identity on collaboration in independent schools. Although independent schools may support diversity in schools, they are generally homogeneous organizations. Diversity in the student body and within the teaching staff remains at minority levels at most independent schools (NAIS, 2014). As a result, there may be particular teacher isolation for those teachers who are considered different from the norm. Teachers who identify as people of color, homosexual, aged or disabled may experience collaboration in a different

way as a result of the need to establish solid communication and social networks among their peers. An exploration of the impact of difference on collaboration could yield very interesting results.

Implications for professional practice. The findings from this study challenge independent school leaders to examine the professional development of teachers, their instructional practice and their overall curricular approach to schooling. The majority of the participants in this study indicated that their experience with collaboration was inconsistent or non-existent based on the model of the professional learning community employed by the researcher in conducting this study (Desimone, 2009; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2006, 2007; Hughes & Kristonis, 2008). The conflict between the need for change toward more collaborative schools and the tendency of schools to remain in the "we've always done it this way" model is apparent.

Findings from this study identify that independent school teachers certainly value their independence; however, they are generally willing to venture into the realm of professional interdependence and confront issues of isolation versus privacy. Limited research supports the assessment that teachers work in isolation (Hadar & Brody, 2010; Musanti & Pense, 2010; Orland-Borak, 2006), that the shared vision is a key condition for collaboration (Kuusiaari, 2014; Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Pisano & Vergenti, 2008) and that organizational structure can have a meaningful impact on collaboration (Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Kuusiaari, 2014). As reported in the research study, teachers tend to work independently and are often unaware of the work of their colleagues in nearby classrooms; however, results of the study suggest that fostering collaboration in independent schools can be achieved by establishing a shared vision within the school

community, creating a culture of collaboration within the school community and developing organizational structures to encourage and sustain collaborative work.

Findings reveal that independent school teachers are genuinely committed to exploring the idea of collaboration to improve instructional practice based on the research related to professional learning communities. They seek professional training in collaboration and in how the school as a collective unit can best support the conditions for collaboration. The literature supports professional development strategies for improvement in teacher instructional practice. This includes course work aimed at improving technique in a particular subject area or discipline. It may also include development of skills in a particular expertise such as classroom management, anti-bias techniques or social skills (Hargreaves, 1990). Training in the development of a professional learning community is a form of professional development that most schools need in order to intentionally and authentically support a PLC (Desimone, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Hughes & Kristonis, 2008).

Findings reveal that independent school teachers are prepared to take the lead in developing the conditions for collaboration. They seek to understand the impact shared leadership, shared accountability and shared responsibility and how to achieve it. Russell (2002) supports the use of collaboration based on shared vision, goals, and trust. His work acknowledges the need for mutual respect, planning, and shared risk. Roschelle's theory of collaboration asserts that performance is enhanced when learners are placed in situations involving "coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem" (Roschelle &

Teasley, 1995, p. 34). Research presented in the literature review supports the findings that affirm the importance of shared vision in creating the foundation for collaboration.

Findings support the role of school administration in reconsidering the balance of control maintained by the head of school and division heads versus shared leadership and cooperative involvement with teachers. The delicate balance of management should contemplate how much decision making will be offered to teachers versus how much direct oversight will be provided to them and what will that look like. This finding is consistent with the literature that states that administrative leadership is an important condition for organizational effectiveness and collaboration (DuFour, 2007). Proactive administrative leadership, when combined with teacher leadership and purposeful decision making, along with job-embedded professional development distinguish the more advanced organizations from the less developed (Huffman, Hipp, Pankake, & Moller, 2001).

Implications for the control of resources emerged from the findings. School administrators will be confronted with the question of resources versus the cost of collaboration. The allocation of time and financial support allocated to collaborative efforts can enhance the instructional practice of teachers, and thereby enhance the experience of the students. Research supports a comprehensive, school-wide approach to instituting a professional learning community in which collaboration thrives in order to support innovation and change (Achinstein, 2010; Bettinger & Long, 2009; Daly & Finnigan, 2010).

Implications for independent school teachers. Findings from this study challenge independent school teachers to examine the professional development of

teachers, their instructional practice and their overall curricular approach to schooling. One of the most significant characteristics reported by research study participants was isolation. This finding was consistent with the literature that supports the contention that teachers are given considerable autonomy in an independent school. The level of autonomy may differ from school to school; however, one of the hallmarks of teaching at an independent school is the autonomy bestowed upon the faculty. Unlike public education where teachers must follow a strict edit of what to teach and when (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009), independent school teachers enjoy the privilege of teaching within a less structured framework (Wei et al., 2010). The amount of structure varies from school to school depending on overall mission, division of leadership and often, school size.

Leadership remains of particular importance in this instance. Often, strict curriculum guidelines result from the efforts of a person in a position typically called the Director of Curriculum or Dean of Studies (NAIS, 2014). A school leader in this position would be responsible for guidance and oversight of the curricular efforts of the teachers. This includes monitoring standards, sequencing units of study and overseeing the development of lessons. In the absence of these titled positions, division heads or principals lead in the area of standards and curriculum development, or charge faculty committees with these duties. In other instances, however, there is very little curricular oversight and the teachers direct the course of the curriculum for their classrooms. Independent school teachers will need to adapt their practice and be more willing to support the call for collaboration when it comes from school administrators, fellow colleagues or even parents well-informed of best practice in education. Those teachers

experiencing disdain for peer observation or peer critique, or those suffering from the insecurity that results from feeling vulnerable or even threatened will be impacted. Although independent school teachers are accustomed to academic freedom in their work, there is a greater need for academic interdependence in the form of collaboration.

Limitations

Several limitations were identified in the study. This study uses a qualitative methodology, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis. Qualitative designs are generally compatible with studies that seek to understand complex processes in order to discover an explanation to a series of events or to find a solution to a problem. (Creswell, 2007). Unfortunately, limitations are often inherent in certain qualitative designs. The choice of a purposeful sample limits the generalizability of the findings (Creswell, 2003). This study was conducted at one research site with a limited number of participants. Generalizability may be better obtained by conducting a study utilizing a larger sample of independent schools of the entire population of schools located in the various geographic regions across the United States.

The participant selection process only involved independent school teachers from one school. The school itself is a K-8 institution with a combined staff and faculty of about 150 and a student population of 550. While the size and composition of this school is not unique, it does represent a smaller population of schools. Other school models are pre-K through 12th grade, and are larger, more formally structured organizations, with greater depth in management. In particular, independent schools with grades nine through twelve tend to have greater departmentalization in the curricular areas and deeper layers of administration (dean of students, grade level deans, assistant head of school, dean of

faculty, dean of curriculum, among other titles). Schools with this type of organizational

structure, have a greater likelihood of having the formal structures in place to support a

collaborative environment, although this represents only one component of authentic

collaboration (J. Chubb, personal communication, October 28, 2014). Fortunately,

several of the study participants had been previously employed at independent schools of

varying composition and sizes. The diversity of professional experience that these

teachers brought to their participation in the research study was beneficial as it helped to

shape and inform their perceptions about their current employer.

This study collected data from a relatively diverse group of faculty. There was a

balance of gender, race, sexual orientation and socio-economic status represented. This

was an accidental outcome that resulted from the random selection of teachers for the

study. The school itself has a remarkable record for diversity among independent schools.

While peer schools typically reach a faculty diversity of approximately 17%, Keystone

School's faculty diversity was maintained at 31% for the last two years. To date, that

percentage has decreased to 23% due to recent adjustments to retention of faculty and

staff at the end of the academic year. Diversity among teacher participants could impact

study results for informal structures within the independent school setting. Research

suggests that teachers of color experience professional and social isolation at greater rates

than their white counterparts (Harlow, 2003; Stanley, 2006; Turner, Gonzales, and Wood,

2008). This may have an impact on the lived experiences of teachers of color as it relates

to collaborating with peers.

The data collection and analysis processes used in qualitative designs also present

limitations to the study. The subjective nature of the interview process itself and the

possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpretation by either the participants or researcher may have an impact on the overall outcomes of the study. While I intended to offer clarity to the interview process, individual interpretations of specific questions or the overall direction of the fluid conversation may have occurred.

Further, the use of interviews demands honesty and trust. Although it is assumed that what is shared in interviews is an accurate depiction of actual lived experiences and general feelings held by each participant (Nunkoosing, 2005), the researcher cannot confirm specific events, interactions or outcomes. Even though researcher positionality as an independent school teacher supports the relational trust between interviewer and participant; the inherent risk in complete authenticity of each participant remains. Timing of interviews could also have a negative impact. Interviews were scheduled toward the end of the school year, a time period often characterized by burnout and disillusion with the school environment overall (Hargreaves, 2007).

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that what most impedes collaboration among independent school teachers can be remedied by addressing the following: the development of shared vision within the school community; the development of a school culture to support collaboration; management of formal and informal organizational structures; and, supporting the critical role of leadership. This section will offer considerations for school trustees, administrators and teachers. The overarching goal of the following recommendations will be to establish a collaborative culture within the school. Klinger, Vaughn, Hughes, and Arugelles (2001) contended that school professionals who belong to a community of practitioners that hold shared values are

more likely to sustain innovation. A deliberate, methodical focus on the development of collaboration skills based on new policies, protocols and a shared understanding is one way to foster such communities. Specific recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1: Further scholarly research on collaboration should continue to inform instructional practice. Research can be applied to many areas related to the conditions that support a professional learning community. Researchers interested in the unique features of independent schools as it relates to collaboration should also observe the communication behaviors among teachers in independent schools to add to the body of scholarly work investigating teacher isolation in schools. It is recommended that studies focus on communication as a means to better understand collaboration among independent school teachers. An exploration of the communication networks among teachers can shed light on how the levels of participation in collaborative work and help to determine how isolation results from behaviors of individual teachers, as well as the relationship between communication networks established by the school (formally or informally) and how they are related to task completion (curricular planning and design). A study of this nature can yield insights that can be helpful in developing and supporting collegial relationships in schools, thereby increasing the likelihood for collaboration. Research committed to a more holistic, anthropological approach would include reviewing attitudes, actions and beliefs of independent school administrators, observation of meetings, review of policies and procedures, and interviews among all constituents within the school community. Comparative research is another recommendation to compare independent schools to

suburban and urban public schools, or comparing a collective sample of independent

schools from across the United States.

Finally, researchers should continue to study teacher collaboration and its impact

on student collaboration in the classroom. This type of research would require a

comprehensive approach that involves the analysis of the transformation effects of school

culture, the development of shared vision and adjustments to the organizational structure

of the school to provide short and long term benefits to the school. The study would

optimally involve mixed methods, both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The study

would include, but not be limited to, a school culture assessment, review of formal and

informal organizational structures, a comprehensive review of the school's pedagogy and

curriculum, review of student performance of a defined period of time and review of

teacher performance.

Recommendation 2: Independent schools should develop a system of

evaluation to assist in the supporting improvements to overall management and

instructional practice. At present, an accreditation body does exist by region to assess

independent schools. These accrediting bodies offer a five- and 10-year accreditation that

examines all aspects of the school life. Board operations, school fiscal management,

safety, pedagogical practice, faculty morale, parent satisfaction and student satisfaction

are carefully explored and reported on to the school. The accrediting body works to

support the work of the school; however, it has no true authority over the ongoing

operation of the school. While no school wants to fail its accreditation report, it is

generally unlikely that the accrediting body will do so for any independent school.

Instead, the school will be given recommendations for improvement and a period of time,

generally one to three years, in which to improve. While the accreditation process is indeed lengthy, it does not usually delve into concepts like shared vision or leadership of the head of school unless something egregious emerges from their investigation.

In order to offer a deeper assessment of instructional practice, I recommend a meaningful system of evaluation to determine the level of collaboration in independent schools and how those schools actually function as a professional learning community (PLC). Professional learning communities are guided by a series of constructs. One of the most important of these constructs is the development of a shared vision for collaboration (Kuusiaari, 2014). If this construct does not exist, a school cannot function properly as a PLC, and the likelihood for collaboration among teachers is limited. Examination of the conditions to support collaboration (Achinstein, 2010; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Kuusiaari, 2014; Pisano & Veranti, 2008) will be an important part of this process. Schools will need to engage in a self-study in order to determine areas in need of support to determine if the conditions that support collaboration actually exist. An internal system of accountability to monitor collaborative behaviors as a precursor to school improvement would follow. This may include evaluating student data, information about teachers and information regarding student school experiences.

Recommendation 3: School leadership should examine existing conditions for collaboration make adjustments as indicated by the tenets of a professional learning community (PLC). School leadership must work together to establish common goals and a shared vision for the future of the school. Strategic communications, branding and messaging will be important in promoting the shared vision of the school. Over time, with deliberate approach, the vision will permeate the school culture. To support

collaboration, school leaders must work to develop norms and protocols for school improvement. School improvement may take the form of improvements to curriculum, instruction or even school spirit among the students or teacher morale. Whatever the goal, leadership must work to create a shared vision among all school constituents. Klinger et al. (2001) observed that professionals who belong to a community of practitioners with shared values are more likely to sustain innovation. This applies to teachers as well as to professionals in other industries. Explicit development of collaboration skills based on new protocols and shared understanding is one way to foster such communities. Independent schools would certainly benefit from this type of departure from the autonomy that seemingly exists, although to varying degrees from school to school. Once a vision is established, administration must create the organizational structures necessary for collaboration. Formal structures include team meetings and cross divisional or matrixed (Poulos et al., 2014) meetings held to increase the frequency of teacher engagement. The format of these meeting should encourage reflective discussion about challenges in the classroom, instructional practice or student achievement. Academic teams should be established across disciplines to encourage diversity of thought among the team membership.

Recommendation 4: Independent school leaders should perform a school-wide cultural assessment to obtain reliable data targeting school climate, teacher moral and relational trust. Since these conditions impact overall school culture, and an appropriate school culture is a condition for collaboration, a holistic understanding of the school culture will yield important information from which to build a culture of collaboration. A school cultural assessment may take the form of a quantitative study for

data collection using various research methodologies. Data may also be collected using qualitative methods in order to gain a different perspective of school culture. Creating a professional growth climate in which teachers can review their relational difficulties and be open with colleagues about them requires that they be supervised relationally. School leaders (division heads, department chairs, curriculum specialists and others) must support teachers by establishing trust, inspire professional growth and encouraging innovation. These behaviors among school leaders support conditions for collaboration. The development of teacher evaluation protocols that include peer observations in which performance can be assessed in mutually supportive ways is another means to support collaboration and is highly recommended. Research shows that when teachers feel well supported, heard, and cared about, there was a positive impact on the teachers, which ultimately translated, tot a positive effect on the students in the classroom (Drago-Severson, 2015). Formal and informal mentoring would be a natural consequence of this approach, thus creating even more opportunities for collaboration. A more formal system of mentoring for beginning teachers should be implemented in order to enhance performance and support long term retention.

Recommendation 5: School leaders should carefully examine formal organizational structures in schools to ensure that conditions for collaboration actually exist. Formal structures may include policy and procedures, master schedule, classroom locations and teacher assignments (Hargreaves, 2007). Formal structures can assist in creating appropriate conditions for collaboration among teachers.

A strategic approach to scheduling and assigning professional development classes for teams or groups of teachers would allow for expertise to be shared among

teachers and implemented in a collaborative fashion. For example, teachers who are assigned to participate in professional development to learn techniques for teaching non-fiction writing would be able to collaborate on how to best implement what they learned in not only their classrooms, but throughout the division. This approach could impact instruction for not only a few classrooms, but could have far reaching implications for grade levels across the entire school. This would be beneficial in that teachers could take what they learn and collaborate to effectively institute what they learn in the classroom. The annual schedule for full faculty meetings, division meetings, team meetings, and grade level team meetings should support collaborative work. These meetings can be scheduled in a way to allow for small groups of teachers to meet based on their discipline, grade level, years of experience, interdisciplinary projects or curricular interests.

The physical space within a school can impact the opportunities for informal interactions among teachers. As such, school administrators should carefully consider the impact that classroom location can have on collaboration among teachers. Teaching assignments can impact collaboration in an independent school. Veteran teachers working with teachers new to the profession in partnership or in a mentoring relationship can yield positive results for morale, building relational trust and may also support collaboration. Teacher selection for team teaching offers tremendous opportunities for collaboration and instructional improvements based on teacher personality, teaching style and learning style. There may not be an exact formula, but school leaders should consider the configuration of team of teachers in a grade level in order to best support collaboration.

Recommendation 6: School leaders must support the development of informal structures including social networks among teachers to support collaboration. Learning is social and the use of informal structure such as lunch periods, morning coffees and hospitality before meetings provide a casual format in which teachers can connect both professionally and personally. School leaders should strategically offer opportunities for informal supports for collaboration. Informal social interactions among teachers lead to improved collegiality and relational trust among them. This will increase participation in more formalized collaborative efforts in the school such as internal and external professional development.

Recommendation 7: Ineffective communication can be a barrier to trust. Therefore, school leaders must carefully consider communication methods within the independent school. Communication among teachers and between teachers and administration remains critically important to support effective functioning. Communication can combine in-person and electronic forms, and should follow a protocol established in partnership by both teachers and administrators in collaboration. School leaders should endeavor to transfer team management and leadership responsibility to teachers to eliminate the top-down structure that typically characterize schools. This will serve as an invaluable way to build institutional trust, one of the building blocks of collaboration.

Recommendation 8: Formal training of school administrators, staff and faculty in professional learning community strategy will be important in establishing the foundation for collaboration. General training in the tenets of a professional learning community will assist the school in developing the conditions

necessary for collaboration. Training administrators to work in more collaborative

settings and to establish environments where collaboration can thrive will lead to

continual improvement in instruction. Team teaching and integrated lesson planning

should be encouraged among the faculty through professional development training to

support improved instructional practice. School leadership must provide resources to

support teacher-directed collaboration, allowing for the independence with financial

support for professional development in skills required to support at PLC will drive the

process of collaboration in lieu of a top down approach by administration.

Recommendation 9: School leaders should work to create a synergy between collaboration and technology to provide online support for teachers engaged in collaborative work. Teachers can use many applications to collaborate within the school

setting and through external collaboration between schools, both locally and globally.

The use of online webinars is a formal tool for professional development. Blogs,

discussion threads, Twitter and LinkedIn provide opportunities for teachers to share

information more informally. Skype calls, FaceTime, Google chats, and Google groups

offer opportunities for online face-to-face collaboration. Online applications continue to

be developed to allow for collaboration among individuals. School leaders must

investigate these opportunities and leverage the products to allow for innovation in the

work environment.

Conclusion

Research confirms that teachers who work collaboratively have the opportunity to

exchange ideas and instructional methods to enhance their performance in the classroom.

Using this as a guiding premise, the purpose of this study was to understand teacher

attitudes toward collaboration to improve instruction in an independent school setting. The study examines the complexities of collaboration in an effort to make a connection between collaboration among teachers and teacher learning. The study identifies the conditions that support opportunities for collaboration employing the definition and framework for a professional learning community (PLC). The dynamic collaboration that characterizes a professional learning community is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practices (DuFour, 2004, 2007; Fullan, 2001, 2006; Riveros, 2012). Teachers work in teams, engaged in an ongoing cycle of questions and reflection to promote meaningful team learning.

Collaboration to improve instruction is considered a trusting, working relationship between two or more equal participants involved in shared thinking, shared planning, and shared creation of integrated instruction (Achinstein, 2010, Riveros, 2012). Riveros (2012) explained that collaboration is based on shared goals, shared vision, a climate of trust, respect, comprehensive planning and shared risks. Attributes of collaboration include reciprocity (Crow, 1998); congeniality (Inger, 1993); partnerships (Austin, 2000; Gundergan & Gundergan, 2002); interaction between coequal parties (Friend & Cook, 2000); cooperation (Fitzgibbons, 2000); shared vision (Black et al., 2002; Bruffee, 1999; Drucker, 1999; John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis, 1998; Senge, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978); joint negotiation of common ground (Olson & Olson, 2000); shared power (Johnson & Thomas, 1997); dialogue (Clark, 1996); joint construction of knowledge (Moll & Whitmore, 1993; Million & Vare, 1997); joint planning (Riordan, 1995); complementarity of skills, efforts, and roles (John-Steiner, 2000; John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis, 1998); teaming, strategic alliances, joint ventures (Katzenbach & Smith, 2001);

creating new value together (Kabter, 1996); and multi-organizational processes (Himmelman, 1997). Kukulska-Hulme (2004) explained that collaboration is a philosophy of interaction with the underlying premise of consensus building. Teachers who experience frequent, rich learning opportunities are able to teach in more ambitious and effective ways (Desimone & Hochberg, 2010; DuFour, 2004, 2007; Fink, 2004; Fullan, & Hargreaves, 2004; Garet, 2001; Hord, 1998; Rothstein, 2010; Senge et al., 2012; Sergiovanni, 2012; Smoker, 2005; Tinto, 2004). Teachers who work collaboratively have the opportunity to exchange ideas and instructional methods to enhance their performance in the classroom. Schools that foster collegial learning and foster a culture of collegiality and continuous improvement are better able to support and retain new teachers, pursue innovation, respond effectively to external changes, and secure teacher commitment (Johnson, 2004; Little, 1993, 2003; Little & Bartlett, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2012).

Various attributes of collaboration are explored in this research study. By contrasting the definition of collaboration of a professional learning community within the context of the research site, this study considers whether the conditions for collaboration with the intention of improving teacher instruction actually exist.

To gain insight into the attitudes of independent school teachers toward collaboration to improve instructional practice, this study examines the lived experiences of those teachers based on the premise that learning is promoted through collaboration. The research drew on the tenets of Vygotsky (1962), Roschelle (1992) and Warren-Little (1993) to guide the examination of current practice in order to underscore the research in best practice in instruction, particularly the necessity for collaboration to enhance teacher

performance. Vygotsky's social development theory (1962) asserts that social interaction plays a pivotal role in the process of cognitive development, proposing that social learning precedes development. The work of Jeremy Roschelle (1992) analyzed collaboration as a process that can gradually lead to shared meaning. Roschelle's theory of convergent conceptual change outlines the process by which two or more people share mutual understanding through social interaction. Finally, Judith Warren-Little's social network theory (1993) examined the connection between teacher's collegial involvement and productivity in schools. Her work acknowledged the importance of teacher collaboration for strengthening schools and building individual teacher's knowledge.

Reviews of the relevant literature provide evidence that there is an urgent need for research on independent schools. Research conducted on teacher learning in professional learning communities has been conducted in public school settings (Billet, 2004; Jenkins, 2010; Poulos et al., 2014; Scribner et al., 2007), yet independent schools offer a unique opportunity to explore collaboration. It is clear that there is a paucity of research related to independent schools and collaboration. Independent schools have long been characterized by a culture where teachers work in isolation (Hadar & Brody, 2010; Musanti & Pense, 2010). Further, the mantra of academic freedom for independent school teachers and the absence of required licensing prescribed curricula, and lesson planning support professional isolation (Cutler, 2000; Dronkers, 2008). This study serves to obtain information about teacher learning in independent schools by understanding teacher attitudes toward collaboration to improve instruction.

The context of this study is a K-8 independent day school serving families in a suburban area located in the New York tristate region. Using semi-structured interviews,

10 independent school teachers describe their own lived experiences of collaboration at the school. The research participants are diverse in their gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and years of experience. The data collection instruments consist of an introduction letter asking the head of school to help identify potential participants, a letter of introduction from the researcher to the potential participants, an informed consent document, and a list of semi-structured interview questions. Interviews with participants are recorded and transcribed. Data analysis involves multiple rounds of coding to result in the emergence of five major themes and 14 sub-themes.

The study's research questions guide the coding of the data into the five major themes. The two research questions are as follows: (a) what are teacher attitudes towards collaboration as a means to improve teaching at an independent school? (b) are there formal structures and policies in place that support opportunities for collaboration to improve instructional practice?

Findings from this study reveal factors that are integral to establishing the conditions for collaboration in independent schools and provide data to support the implementation of certain structures and behaviors to improve organizational goals within independent schools. The results are further evaluated according to five major themes uncovered by the data: shared vision, leadership, school culture, formal organizational structure, and informal organizational structure. These results offer independent school professionals a level of awareness and understanding of teacher attitudes toward collaboration that had not been revealed prior to the study.

The findings emerging from the data support the notion that effective collaboration based on the tenets of a professional learning community can improve

teacher instruction. School leaders must empower the teachers to engage in collaborative practice given that the classroom teacher has the ultimate responsibility for improving student achievement. School leadership must work to leverage the independence and autonomy afforded to teachers. Administration must encourage the interdependence to work with peers who have similar learning goals, utilizing formal structure to collaboratively plan and measure outcomes. This approach will help to relieve the isolation that is often associated with teaching (Hadar & Brody, 2010; Musanti & Pense, 2010). Strong leadership and considerable, but varying, forms of distributed leadership among faculty will help to establish conditions for collaboration The interaction of shared vision, organizational structures, and social networking in the development of collaborative environment is essential (Achinstein, 2010; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Kuusiaari, 2014). This research confirms that independent school teachers are committed to the process of collaboration. Independent school teachers appear to be committed to their craft and extending their knowledge and expertise in teaching; yet, the conditions for collaboration must first exist.

Recommendations resulting from this study include replicating the study in larger independent school organizations with a broader student population in order to explore the impact of school size and composition. This type of study could also be conducted nationally in independent schools using quantitative methods to identify best practice for collaboration. Other recommendations include the development of formal and informal structures to support collaborative work among teachers; the implementation of teacher training in collaborative practice; attention to the communication of shared vision within

the school community; reinforcement of attributes of school culture; and leadership training and support of collaborative practice.

This study will contribute to scholarly work that has been primarily focused on public schools. This work will contribute to the literature for independent school education. Summary findings, trends, and statistics can be shared with independent school administrators with the purpose of establishing best practice to better serve students. Research in collaborative learning among teachers can reveal and define important behaviors and protocols for true collaboration.

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Appendix A

Letter from Research Site

January 31, 2015

To Whom it May Concern:

█████████ School is aware of Ms. Stephanie Royal's proposed study examining teacher attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school setting. Ms. Royal's study will involve interviewing members of the faculty; however, the names of the faculty members will remain anonymous. Students are not involved in the study. Furthermore, the name of the research site will remain confidential.

Sincerely,

████████████

Head of School

Appendix B

Sample Letter of Participation to Research Participants

Dear Teacher:

My name is Stephanie Royal and I am a doctoral student in the Executive

Leadership Program in the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher

College. As part of the research requirements for the doctoral degree, I am conducting a

qualitative research study under the direction of my dissertation chair, Dr. Steven Block,

██████████████

I am conducting a research study to examine teacher attitudes toward

collaboration in an independent school setting. I am interesting in learning how the use of

collaborative work methods in a professional learning community translates to teachers'

work in an independent school. I seek to gather data that will help to inform best practice

in teaching in the independent school setting. Further, I hope to discover possible

correlations between teacher collaboration and student outcomes.

Your contact information was received through your association with ██

████████████████████████. The school is supporting this research effort.

Please consider participating in this research study. Your experience as a classroom

teacher in an independent school will inform the outcomes of this study. Specifically,

you are being invited to take part in an interview. The criteria of selection will consist of

5-7 teachers with at least three years of experience and have been directly involved in

curricular design and instruction. The interview will take place at an agreed upon location

and it will last between 50-60 minutes. You will be asked to complete an Informed

Consent Form. The form will be emailed to you prior to our scheduled meeting. This form acknowledges your agreement to participate in the research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to end your participation at any time. If you are interested in participating in the study, please respond within 10 business days upon receipt of this request. Participants who are selected for the study will receive a follow up email providing further details and the consent form.

Your participation and the information shared with the researcher during the process will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. All efforts will be taken to ensure your anonymity. All data gathered will be held in strict confidence. Finally, should you decide to participate then subsequently change your mind, you may withdraw from the study without penalty or consequence.

Please contact the researcher directly to indicate your acceptance of this opportunity to participate in the research study, or if you have any questions or concerns. The researcher may be contacted by email at ████████████ or by phone at ████████.

Sincerely,

Stephanie A. Royal
Doctoral Candidate
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

Appendix C

Sample Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Teacher Attitudes Toward Collaboration in an Independent School Setting

Name of Researcher: ███████████████████████████████████
██████████████████████████████████. Contact information: ██████
█████████████████████████

Faculty Supervisor: ████████████████████████████████████
████████████████ Contact information: ██████████████████████
████████████████████████

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to examine teacher attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school setting.

Study Procedures: You will be interviews in person for a maximum of sixty minutes regarding your attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school. The interview will be recorded via a voice memo application using a hand held device and transcribed. Observation notes will also be taken during the interview.

Participation: You have been selected as a participant for the research study examining teacher attitudes toward collaboration in an independent school setting based on the criteria of your current employment and your minimum three years professional experience at the research site, an independent school located in metropolitan New York City. Participation in this research study is voluntary and you may choose to end your participation at any time. At any time during the research process, if you feel your rights have been violated or abused, you may

contact the chairperson of the project of the Institutional Review Board committee at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York.

Confidentiality: All efforts will be made to keep the participants' identity confidential. All interviews will be conducted in a private setting. All interview data will be coded to protect the identities of the research participants. All observation notes and interview documentation (consent forms, research documentation) will also be coded. Consent forms containing personal information will be kept separate and personal information will be removed from coded materials. Only the researcher will be able to link the research materials to an informed consent form. The researcher will transcribe interviews and will protect all recordings and transcriptions. Recordings and transcription files will be stored and password protected on a password protected, locked laptop computer that only the research can access. All hard copy transcripts, observation notes and interview materials will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. There will be no personally identifiable information disseminated.

Risks: None

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for the purposes of participating in this study.

Questions About the Research: For questions pertaining to the research, please contact the researcher, █████████████████████████████████

████████

Your Rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty

4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any that may be advantageous to you.

5. Be informed of the results of the study

Questions About Your Rights as Research Participants: If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research related inquiry, please contact the following:

███████████
████████
███████

████████████
██████████████████
██████████████████████
███████████

Statement of Age and Consent: Your signature indicates that:

- You are at least 18 years of age
- The research study has been explained to you
- Your questions have been fully answered
- You freely and voluntarily chose to participate in this research project

Name of Participant (please print):

_____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

An Examination of Teacher Attitudes Toward Collaboration

in an Independent School Setting

Interview Date: _____

Time Started: _____

Completion Time: _____

Name of Interviewer:

_____

Name of Interviewee:

_____

Interviewee Position:

_____

Audio Recorded: YES _____ NO _____

Written Notes taken: YES _____ NO _____

Notes to Interviewee:

- Introduction: Thank you for joining me today. Your reflections will be integral to the completion of the research study on teacher attitudes toward collaboration.
- Purpose of Research: The purpose of the research is to examine teacher attitudes toward collaboration using the framework of a professional learning community (PLC).
- Right to Privacy: Confidentiality of participant identity and participant responses is guaranteed.
- Approximate length of interview: 50-60 minutes

Interview Schedule

Research Question #1: What are teacher attitudes towards collaboration in a professional learning community at an independent school?

1. Could you please tell me what you do in your job?
2. How would you describe the culture of the school? What is it like to work there?
3. What does an average day look like at your school?
4. Can you identify things that make you successful at your job?
5. Can you identify any obstacles to your success?

Research Question #2: Are there formal structures and policies in place that support opportunities for teacher collaboration?

1. Tell me about your work with your boss?
2. Tell me about your work with colleagues?
3. How does planning for curriculum happen at your school?
4. Tell me about professional development at your school.
5. Might there be anything that troubles you about your work experiences?
6. How can your experience at work be improved?

Interview Schedule for Deeper Meaning/Virtual Maps

- Can you tell me more about that?
- What else happened?
- What was that like for you?
- Can you tell me what you were thinking?
- How did you feel about that?
- It sounds as though you had a pretty strong reaction.