

THE ROLE OF
SCHOOL CULTURE IN SUPPORTING
BEGINNING TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe how school culture supports the educational practices of beginning teachers at two selected middle schools. This study used purposeful sampling to select two middle schools based on the two schools with the highest numbers of beginning teachers. The study participants were beginning teachers in their first three years of teaching. Data were collected through interviews of four beginning teachers, two veteran teachers, and two administrators, observations, documents, and photographs. Identification of symbolic cultural theory, espoused by Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000), and Harris (2005), occurred prior to conducting the study and provided a lens through which to present and analyze the two school settings. Within symbolic cultural theory are six elements of school culture: vision and values, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, the cultural network, heroes and heroines, and architecture and artifacts. Findings confirmed that one single element of school culture was not responsible for supporting the educational practices of beginning teachers, but rather each element contributed to the overall school culture experienced by beginning teachers. Beginning teachers' educational practices were supported through interactions among veteran teachers and beginning teachers. Findings revealed that the educational practices of beginning teachers were supported through having access to a variety of supports. Realities existed outside of the symbolic cultural theory framework that affected the educational practices and support received by beginning teachers. Political aspects created an unstable teaching environment in Oklahoma with changing standards, multiple initiatives, and reduced funding. Also, life events for beginning teachers outside of teaching added to the difficulties normally associated with the first years of teaching. Additional research could focus on the culture or influence of Professional Learning Community partners or teams in supporting the educational practices of beginning teachers in relation to the overall school culture experienced by beginning teachers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

How long does it take to become an expert? Ericsson, Prietula, and Cokely (2007) developed the notion of the 10,000 rule. They asserted that, with deliberate practice, one can become an expert after investing 10,000 hours in the desired craft, sport, or activity. Gladwell (2008) popularized Ericsson, Prietula, and Cokely's (2007) work by providing concrete examples of this rule in his book, *Outliers*. Gladwell explained how the Beatles acquired their 10,000 hours through a gig in Hamburg, Germany where they played every day of the week for five or more hours at a time. Through their commitment to deliberate practice, the Beatles honed their craft and became legends. Billionaire Bill Gates was provided the opportunity to put in his 10,000 hours in middle school and high school, because he had access to a computer lab on a college campus for hours at a time. In order to accumulate this amount of time and achieve "expert" status, one must invest approximately 20 hours per week for ten years, or 40 hours per week for five years.

In education, most teachers go through an apprenticeship, commonly referred to as a student teaching experience, in which the student teacher is placed with an experienced and ideally successful, mentor teacher. In Oklahoma, most teacher preparation programs place student teachers in a classroom with an experienced teacher for one semester. However, Oklahoma requires only twelve weeks of student teaching in the school setting. Thus, the student teacher will be in the classroom for approximately eight hours each day for 60 days for a total of 480 hours, a mere 4.8% of the hours necessary to be considered an "expert" by the 10,000 hour

rule. Despite this gap, Lortie (2002) noted that the beginning teacher is immediately responsible for a classroom of students on the first day of school and further, the beginning teacher is expected to perform at the same level as a veteran teacher by peers, administrators, and the community. Because of these high and immediate expectations, providing support during their first few years is imperative in assisting beginning teachers while they gain more experience and expertise.

Research indicates that the teacher is the single most influential factor who impacts what students learn in school (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Because teachers are directly responsible for student achievement and progress, placing effective teachers in the classroom is at the heart of educational reform. Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) verified that teachers become more effective as they teach the same subject area for an extended amount of time while increasing their knowledge base about the subject. As teachers gain more familiarity with their content standards, greater experience in classroom management, and additional feedback from administrator evaluations, they are likely to improve their teaching skills in subsequent years. For this reason, attention focused on the national retention issue also relates to improving teacher quality and educational practice.

Studies have revealed that as much as 50% of teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Perda, 2012; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) noted that teacher attrition affected beginning teachers more than others due to their inexperience and their need to adjust to the new teaching position. New teachers are not staying long enough to become more effective, resulting in detrimental effects for students and schools.

In addition, teacher attrition is very costly to the education system. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2007) estimated that teacher attrition costs roughly seven billion dollars per year because districts and states must recruit, hire, train, and attempt to retain beginning teachers. Teacher attrition costs administrators' time because they must read resumes, schedule interviews, conduct interviews, call references, complete paperwork, and locate needed

professional development. Administrators mired in an infinite loop of hiring and losing teachers are unable to focus their efforts on supporting and retaining effective teachers.

Problem Statement

Providing support to beginning teachers increases the chance for success in their practice and careers. (Moir, 2009; Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) concluded that teacher attrition affected beginning teachers more than other teachers due to their inexperience and their need to adjust to the new teaching position. Lortie (2002) noted that beginning teachers are immediately responsible for a classroom of students on the first day of school and further, the beginning teacher is expected to perform at the same level as a veteran teacher by peers, administrators, and the community. Because of these high and immediate expectations, providing support during their first few years is imperative in assisting beginning teachers while they gain more experience and expertise.

While support for beginning teachers is designed to improve educational practice, research indicated that it accomplished these goals in some instances (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Moir, 2009) and did not in others (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Gravett, 2003). One possible reason beginning teachers benefit from support in some instances and not in others may be due to the role of school culture in providing quality support to beginning teachers. Several researchers support the notion that teacher success is embedded in and reinforced in appropriate school cultures (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Gossom, 2004; Harris, 2005; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Moir, 2009; Pech, 2009; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Wenzel, 2009).

Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009) posited that cultural symbols influence every aspect of the educational process, including support provided to beginning teachers. For example, vision and values could support beginning teachers through providing a framework of goals and expectations. Other symbols that Deal and Peterson believed to be important are rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, the cultural network, heroes and heroines, as well as architecture and artifacts. This study

drew from the work of Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000), and Harris (2005), to explore how cultural symbols support the educational practices of beginning teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe how school culture supports the educational practices of beginning teachers (years 1-3) at two selected middle schools.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How are beginning teachers (years 1-3) supported in two selected middle schools?
2. How do cultural symbols support the educational practices of beginning teachers in the two middle schools?
3. What other realities exist in the study?

Theoretical Framework

Constructionism is the epistemological perspective guiding this case study. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as, “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). In this study, knowledge was constructed by administrators, teachers, and staff through interactions with one another. Meaning ascribed to and actions resulting from those interactions defined the school culture.

In qualitative research, identification of a theory can occur before or after the study depending on the research design (Creswell, 2009; Harris, 2006). Identification of the theory occurred prior to conducting this study and provided a lens, or framework, through which to view the data collected (Creswell, 2009). Harris (2006) clarified that when using a theoretical framework in qualitative research, the theory is not “deterministically predictive [but rather] one construction of reality that might provide order, clarification, and direction to a study” (p. 142).

This study draws from the symbolic cultural theory espoused by Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000), and Harris (2005), which includes,

- vision and values;
- rituals and ceremonies;
- history and stories;
- the cultural network;
- heroes and heroines;
- architecture and artifacts.

Each of these symbols are defined and expanded in Chapter Two. Important to note is the interrelationship of these symbolic elements as they shape and influence a school's culture. The interaction and interconnectivity of all symbols combined form a more complete representation of a school's culture.

Procedures

Because school culture is multi-layered, complex, and powerful, theorists argue that assessing organizational culture can best occur qualitatively. Schein (1984) believed that using quantitative instruments to measure something as complex as school culture was a violation of ethical procedures, because the questions posed potentially could put words into the mouths of the respondents, instead of capturing their own, unbiased, words. Accordingly, a qualitative case study was the methodology selected for this study.

Purposeful sampling is used in this study to select two of the five middle school sites within the district, as Merriam (1998) stated, "from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). Data collection occurred through structured, open-ended interviews of four beginning teachers, two administrators, and two veteran teachers. Other data were collected through observations, electronic communication, flyers, district program meetings designed for beginning teachers, and beginning teacher evaluations. Following data collection, all data were coded to identify common themes.

Trustworthiness was ensured through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity. I collected data from a variety of sources, through prolonged engagement, and persistent observation to accomplish credibility in my study. As Ryle (1949) and Geertz (1973) stated, I provided a “rich, thick description” of data. All data collected is readily available for an audit.

Significance of the Study

To Practice

When approximately half of beginning teachers leave within the first few years of teaching, students are not able to benefit from high quality teachers. Teachers become more effective after teaching the same subject area for an extended length of time while increasing their knowledge base about the subject (Lortie, 2002). The results of this study will inform university programs, mentor teachers, administrators, and beginning teachers of the role of school culture in supporting teachers who are new to the profession.

To Research

A large body of research exists on school culture, teacher effectiveness, and supporting beginning teachers independently; however, there is limited research that suggests the specific role of school culture in supporting new teachers (Wenzel, 2009). The present study will add to the existing research on the topic by providing an additional perspective regarding how elements of school culture support the educational practices of beginning teachers.

To Theory

Theories regarding school and organizational culture have flooded the world of research the past two or three decades as researchers attempt to explain or define culture in a variety of roles and contexts. Results of this study potentially could add to the existing research on school culture with an emphasis on the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers in the organization. In

addition, the results might inform business organizations with specific attention paid to the role of organizational culture in supporting new employees.

Definition of Terms

School Culture. Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) documented 164 definitions of organizational culture. Because of the large number of definitions for culture, proper identification of how school culture is interpreted and used in this study is of importance. Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009) identified four elements of school culture: vision and values, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, and architecture and artifacts. The schools portrayed in this case study will be analyzed through these four elements of school culture.

Beginning Teacher (New Teacher or Novice Teacher). The literature has various definitions regarding beginning teachers to include (a) teachers with ten or fewer years of experience; however, the first zero to three years were identified as “truly” beginning teachers (Inman & Marlow, 2004, p. 608), (b) a teacher who is currently beginning his or her first teaching assignment (Page, Thomas, & Marshall, 1977), and (c) teachers who had not yet achieved tenure (Lortie, 2002). For this study, beginning teachers will be defined as teachers in their first zero to three years of teaching experience.

Tulsa Teacher Evaluation Rubric (Tulsa Model). The Tulsa model for teacher evaluations has been adopted by over 500 of the 532 public school districts in Oklahoma. The Tulsa model was created in conjunction with teachers, leaders of the district, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (www.tulsaschools.org, 2013).

Teacher Retention. Teacher retention refers to a teacher who begins his or her teacher career and decides to remain in the profession for at least five or more years (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Also teacher retention refers to the ability of a school system to keep, or retain, teachers employed (Ingersoll, 2001).

Teacher Attrition. Ingersoll (2001) defined teacher attrition as, “those who leave the occupation of teaching altogether” (p. 503).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This study is organized in six chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction to the study with the major components including the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and the identification of three research questions. Case study methodology is used in this study to better understand the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers. The theoretical framework informing this study are the components of school culture as identified by Deal, Peterson, Kennedy, and Harris to include vision and values, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, the cultural network, heroes and heroines, and architecture and artifacts.

Chapter II offers an in depth review of the literature that will aid in a better understanding of the research topic. Specifically, the following topics are addressed: teacher quality and effectiveness, teacher retention, school culture, high expectations of beginning teachers, various methods of supporting beginning teachers, and effective and ineffective methods of supporting beginning teachers. Finally, the literature review ends with an explanation of a potential reason why the supports in place are effective some times and ineffective at other times.

Chapter III provides a detailed explanation of the research methods and procedures to be implemented in this study including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis techniques. Ethical considerations are addressed regarding research background and bias as well as gaining access to the school site. The chapter ends with sections on trustworthiness of findings and limitations of the study.

Chapter IV presents the data and provides a full description of the site selected and participants. All data collected through interviews, observations, artifacts, and field notes is presented in detail. Chapter V analyzes the data through the lens of symbolic cultural theory.

Chapter VI concludes the study with conclusions, interpretations, and implications. Implications include the significance of the study to practice, to research, and to theory. Finally, recommendations for future research are provided.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Key topics discussed in this literature review include: (1) the need to support beginning teachers; (2) teacher quality and effectiveness; (3) methods used in the past to support beginning teachers; (4) successful induction programs; (5) challenges to providing support to beginning teachers; and (6) school culture. The goals of the review are: (1) to establish the need to support beginning teachers; (2) to demonstrate that induction methods previously used are not sustainable; (3) to illustrate the enhanced importance of school culture; and (4) to express the need for the present study.

Beginning Teachers' Support Needs

Providing support to teachers in their first three years increases the chance for success in their practice and careers. (Moir, 2009; Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). Teachers who are supported in their early efforts to teach are more likely to remain in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Moir, 2009), and teachers become more effective with more years of experience (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2010).

Teacher Quality and Effectiveness

Research indicates that teachers have the single most influence and impact on student learning (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2000; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Because teachers are directly responsible for student achievement and progress, placing effective teachers in the classroom is an integral component of

ensuring student growth. Teachers become effective more quickly when supported in their early years of teaching (Moir, 2009). In order to understand the need to provide support to beginning teachers, a review of how teacher effectiveness has evolved is beneficial.

In 1954, the National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) was created to assess the quality of teacher preparation programs across the United States. Teacher preparation programs, and the training pre-service teachers receive, are a vital aspect of the quality of teachers in the classroom. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was released and, once again, addressed the need for the United States to improve teacher quality. One of the seven recommendations resulting from the report included the establishment of mentoring programs to support beginning teachers.

In 2001, the term “highly qualified teacher” resulted from the passage of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). Teachers who demonstrated proven competency in a particular subject area, held a bachelor’s degree, and obtained a full state teaching certification were deemed highly qualified. NCLB required that all teachers be highly qualified by the 2005-2006 school year and that all teachers teaching in Title I programs be highly qualified by the beginning of the school year in 2002-2003. Title II funds are given to schools as a result of this law and the funds are used to enhance teacher quality through professional development.

Research regarding teacher effectiveness has been building over the last seven decades, particularly in the wake of legislative reforms. Block, Crochet, Jones, and Papa (2012) presented four historical arguments regarding teacher effectiveness through the years. Langlois and Zales (1991) highlighted the need for student engagement in the learning process and the ability of teachers to maximize instructional time. Cashmere (1999) believed effective teaching to be an art. Effective teachers were knowledgeable about their subjects, had the ability to structure activities to best engage students, and were able to adapt lessons to students’ needs. Sanders (2000) identified twelve characteristics displayed by effective teachers: “Enthusiasm, clarity, interaction, organization, pacing, disclosure, speech, rapport, relevance, learning centered,

flexibility, and leadership” (Block et al., 2012, p. 1166). Lastly, Olivia and Pawlas (2008) indicated an increased focus on student learning in addition to teacher skills through identification of six competencies: “Following a systematic approach, following a model of instruction, writing instructional goals and objectives, applying taxonomies of instructional objectives, describing and analyzing learning tasks, and organizing instructional plans (Block et al., 2012, p. 1166).

Despite evolving definitions of characteristics and qualities that determine teacher effectiveness, a clear and agreed-upon definition of teacher effectiveness does not exist. Goe, Bell, and Little (2008) classified the varying definitions into three categories: inputs, processes, and outputs. Inputs indicated characteristics and qualities teachers bring to the profession; processes referred to classroom procedures and interactions between students and teachers; and outputs represented summative measures, such as student achievement results. According to Goe et al. (2008), the research literature commonly refers to teacher effectiveness through outputs, or student achievement. Consequently, one theory gaining increased attention is that teacher effectiveness should not focus on characteristics and abilities of the teachers, but rather on what the students know and can do (Chandler, 2013).

Beginning Teacher Effectiveness

While the issue of teacher effectiveness is important for educational policy and research, it has an even greater impact on beginning teachers due to their inexperience in the profession. Teachers become more effective the longer they have been in the profession (Huang, 2009; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2010) issued a report that stated, “Research clearly shows that with each year of experience, teachers improve their proficiency and effectiveness during the first seven years” (p. 12). Challenges inhibiting teacher effectiveness in beginning teachers may include stress, high expectations, and difficult teaching assignments.

Beginning teacher stress. Effective teaching is a highly complex task, requiring a broad repertoire of skills. Teachers must have a good grasp not only of the standards to be taught, but also, knowledge of the curriculum, knowledge of child development and motivation, and knowledge of how to be a good classroom manager as well as how to build relationships with students, parents, and community (Feirsen, 1996). For new teachers, making the transition from student teaching while supervised and mentored by a highly trained veteran to working in isolation as a novice teacher managing a classroom and lessons can be a very stressful and overwhelming experience (Bartell, 2005). Beginning teachers often enter the classroom with unrealistic expectations for themselves and their students. Bartell (2005) explained that beginning teachers doubt their abilities over the course of the school year as they struggle with the many responsibilities.

Teaching assignment. Darling-Hammond (2012) suggested that beginning teachers have a reduced teaching load and shared planning time; however, these two practices rarely occur. Instead beginning teachers often are given more demanding teaching assignments with less instructional materials and inadequate support (Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Donaldson, 2004). Barnett Berry, director of policy and state partnerships at the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, commented: "It's mind-boggling that we expect teachers who are 22 years old to handle the same load as veteran teachers with many years of experience" (as cited in Ashford, 2000, p.3).

High and increased expectations. With the passage and implementation of NCLB came an increased pressure on all teachers, including beginning teachers, to be held accountable for student progress. High-stakes testing and the accountability movement increased anxiety and stress for beginning teachers (Reese, 2004). Darling-Hammond (2012) observed that the high and increased expectations of beginning teachers have not resulted in modifications of teacher preparation programs. Teachers have a multitude of expectations the moment they start on the job. As Lortie (2002) observed, the beginning teacher is immediately responsible for students the

first day of the job and are held to the same standards as all other experienced teachers. Beginning teachers need time to develop into experienced and more effective teachers, but too many teachers leave the profession before becoming more effective. Feinman and Remillard (1995) suggested that it takes three to five years for most beginning teachers to become proficient. Accordingly, keeping teachers in the profession past three to five years is necessary to ensure maximum effectiveness of the teaching workforce.

Teacher Attrition and Retention

Reasons teachers leave the profession. Many studies have been conducted in the past 20 years in an effort to understand why teachers leave the profession within the first few years. Reasons include school characteristics and organizational conditions, large class sizes and limited instructional resources, lack of opportunity for advancement, lack of administrative support, unsupportive workplaces, student discipline, time, and low salary (Betancourt-Smith, Inman, & Marlow, 1994; Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Darling -Hammond, 1996; Futrell, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001; Langdon, 1996; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997; Yee, 1990). Certo and Fox (2002) found the top reasons teachers leave the profession to be low salary, lack of administrative support, and lack of planning time.

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) demonstrated through their research that the demand for new teachers had been misdiagnosed as a shortage; however, the real problem was retaining the teachers hired. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) collected information from exit interviews of teachers all over the country and found that two reasons, “Pursuit of another job and dissatisfaction...play a major role in about two-thirds of all beginning teacher attrition” (p. 32). Those who selected job dissatisfaction as a reason for leaving were asked about their source of dissatisfaction. Three-fourths mentioned low salary, but even more cited one of four working conditions as the culprit: student discipline problems; lack of support from the school administration; poor student

motivation; and lack of teacher influence over schoolwide and classroom decision making (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Retaining effective teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) published a report, *No Dream Denied*, that drew attention to the high number of teachers leaving the field. However, this report focused only on a single number for teacher attrition without looking specifically at whether effective or ineffective teachers were leaving the profession. With the current demands placed upon administrators and teachers due to common core, teacher evaluations, and state testing, their time is better spent focusing on supporting and retaining effective teachers and counseling out the ineffective teachers.

In 2012, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) conducted a large scale study with 4,818 completed teacher surveys from a total of 249 schools in five districts and two charter schools. Their goal was to examine what kind of school culture increased teacher retention. Findings of this study revealed that strong instructional cultures focused on student learning and high expectations yielded higher retention rates. Schools with strong instructional cultures retained more of their highly effective teachers than did schools with weak instructional cultures.

Attrition impacts effectiveness of workforce. Ingersoll and Merrill (2012) illustrated the current state of the teaching workforce through plotting all teacher ages on a graph. A bimodal peak was discovered: one peak for the high amount of beginning teachers, and another peak for the high amount of older, veteran teachers. Ingersoll and Perda (2012) drew two noteworthy conclusions from these findings. First, a large percentage of older, veteran teachers were reaching retirement age, and second, the attrition rate for the large percentage of beginning teachers remained at 40-50% within the first five years. Focusing on supporting and retaining beginning teachers should be top priority because a significant teacher shortage could exist in the future if approximately half of these teachers leave the profession within five years.

Due to the high number of beginning teachers leaving the profession and the high number of veteran teachers leaving the profession for retirement, schools are faced with an inexperienced

teaching workforce overall. In 2010, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future issued a report that stated, "Between 2004 and 2008 more than 300,000 veteran teachers left the workforce for retirement" (p. 4). Experienced, and most likely more effective, teachers are leaving the profession at high rates which creates a much younger workforce. Again, research shows that teachers become more effective the longer they have been teaching (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007). Beginning teachers will not be afforded the opportunity to learn from experienced, and likely, more effective teachers.

Methods Used to Support Beginning Teachers

Supporting teacher effectiveness through teacher evaluations. The notion of evaluating teachers through an instrument is not a new concept. Teacher evaluations have long been part of the educational system, but just recently have become a critical issue confronting education. Two landmark reports, *Rush to Judgment* (2008) and *The Widget Effect* (2009), highlighted the failure of the current teacher evaluation method for its inability to provide meaningful feedback to teachers. Many teachers in the nation are measured by an arbitrary checklist once a year and are given a check mark for satisfactory or unsatisfactory teaching. Differentiating between effective and ineffective teachers is nearly impossible with this system, and teachers are given very little feedback on how to improve their instruction. Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009) noted, "A teacher's effectiveness – the most important factor for schools in improving student achievement – is not measured, recorded, or used to inform decision-making in any meaningful way" (p. 3).

Marzano (2012) identified two differing purposes of teacher evaluation: to measure a teacher's effectiveness or to assist teachers in the development of their teaching skills. To understand teachers' perspectives, Marzano surveyed approximately 3,000 teachers and found that the majority of teachers believed teacher evaluations should be used to help improve teaching ability, but teachers believed they had been used in the past as only a measure of effectiveness.

Marzano (2012) reported that a combination of these two approaches seemed to be the most ideal solution.

Tulsa Public Schools partnered with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in an effort to create an effective and useful teacher evaluation. This partnership resulted in the Tulsa Model for teacher evaluations currently being used in over 500 of the 532 school districts in Oklahoma. Combining both pieces of Marzano's proposed purposes of teacher evaluations; the Tulsa Model measures teacher effectiveness and develops teachers' abilities.

Tulsa's rubric measures a teacher's ability to explain lessons and objectives clearly, to describe the relationship of the current lesson to previous learning, to use strategies such as advance organizers, to ask questions that engage student interaction and enable the teacher to monitor student understanding, to provide for "wait time" when questioning students, and give timely feedback and reinforcement. (Tulsapublicschools.org, 2013)

Measuring and scoring teachers on these factors is a more defined method with specific criteria. Scores range from one to five, with three being the ideal expectation for an effective teacher. Teachers who demonstrate exceptional qualities of effective teaching within a standard earn a four or even, a rarely assigned five. This evaluation rubric provides a much better representation of the teacher's performance and can serve as a tool to help teachers improve. Instead of a teacher being graded on a pass or fail basis, they are given five degrees of effective or ineffective teaching. Proper implementation of teacher evaluation instruments should result in assignment of teachers to individualized professional development opportunities.

Induction programs designed to support beginning teachers. The primary method of providing support to beginning teachers is through formal induction programs involving the assignment of a mentor, or experienced teacher, to a novice teacher. Ellen Moir, founder of the New Teacher Center in 1998, published an article detailing what has been learned in the past 20 years regarding supporting new teachers. One of the ten lessons learned illuminated how induction programs improve teacher effectiveness. "Induction programs accelerate the

effectiveness of new teachers, fast-tracking their progress to exemplary teachers with the ability to positively impact student achievement (Moir, 2009, p.16).” The resident-year teachers’ experience with their mentor teacher is designed to prepare beginning teachers to be an effective classroom teacher. A higher level of resident-year teacher preparation during the first year of teaching will lead to a higher likelihood of job satisfaction as well as an increased comfort level of handling a classroom effectively on their own (Moir, 2009).

Administrative support. Beginning teachers can also receive support from administrators in their building. Support in this capacity can include making a good selection of a mentor teacher if a mentoring program is in place, building time into the schedule for the new teacher and mentor teacher to meet, and scheduling observations of experienced teachers for resident-year teachers. Certo and Fox (2002) studied teacher turnover in Virginia schools with an emphasis on the organizational aspects of school culture affecting the decision of a resident teacher to remain in the profession. Their findings revealed that administrative support is vital to teacher retention and further, “If school divisions wish to improve teacher retention, targeted efforts to increase building level and district level administrative support should be priority” (Certo & Fox, 2002, p.70).

Superintendent Eamonn O’Donovan (2010) believed that properly implemented intensive state programs assisted beginning teachers in becoming more effective more quickly and should raise teacher retention rates. O’Donovan (2010) stressed this support alone is not enough and administrators must be willing to support new teachers within their buildings. O’Donovan (2010) suggested administrators should support new teachers in the following areas: “(1) Creating a culture of collaboration focused on student achievement...(2) Providing for the basic material and physical needs of neophyte teachers...(3) Scheduling training about ‘how school works’ at strategic points in the year” (p. 90).

More Support, Better Educational Practice

While support for teachers in their first three years is designed to improve educational practice, research indicates that it accomplished these goals in some instances (Evertson & Smithey, 2000) and did not in others (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Gravett, 2003). Emphasizing the importance of this critical time period, Pratt (2010) stated, “During this time [first three years], teachers entering the field will either receive the necessary support to become successful or experience constant stress and isolation leading them to leave the teaching profession” (p. 17). Moir (1999) developed the *Phases of New Teacher Development* depicting stages new teachers go through during their first year to include: anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation. New teachers enter the survival stage approximately in mid-September due to being overwhelmed by all of the many responsibilities. Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, and Yusko (1999) proposed new teachers, when not supported, would develop “safe” practices that enabled them to make it through the survival stage (p. 7). Further, Feiman-Nemser et al. (1999) believed that induction programs should assist and support beginning teachers as they navigate the phases of new teacher development, and gradually incorporate “best” practices (p. 7). Providing support to beginning teachers assists them in developing best practices, thus becoming more effective sooner (Andrews & Quinn, 2005).

Providing support to beginning teachers in the past few decades has primarily occurred through induction programs. As referenced in Yopp and Young (1999), induction programs have the ability to increase teacher effectiveness and, “reduce teacher isolation, frustration, and withdrawal from the profession” (p. 24). In response to the realization that nearly half of all beginning teachers leave the profession within the first five years, many states required formal induction programs to support beginning teachers (Heider, 2005). In 2001, Hirsch, Koppich, and Knapp reported that 38 states offered induction programs to beginning teachers. Induction methods vary widely across all states in relation to intensity, duration, and compensation;

however, most programs involve the assignment of an experienced veteran teacher to mentor a beginning teacher and are intended to assist beginning teachers in their transition from student teaching to their first-year. As induction programs gained popularity, a collection of research-based best practices evolved.

Research-Based Best Practices of Supportive Induction Programs

Flynn and Nolan (2008) collected and summarized research-based practices for induction programs. First, careful selection of mentor and beginning teacher pairs were of importance (Conway, 2003; Serpell & Bozeman, 1999). Common subject areas and proximity should be considered when pairing a mentor teacher with a beginning teacher. Second, many researchers agreed that creating schedules that allow for collaboration time and time to observe each other is essential to the success of induction programs (Andrews & Quinn, 2005; Conway, 2003; Gilbert, 2005; Mills, Moore, & Keane, 2001; Villani, 2002). Third, in consideration of the difficulty associated with the beginning years of teaching, other researchers indicated the importance of a reduced workload for beginning teachers (Feinman-Nemser, 2003; Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997; Renard, 2003; Serpell & Bozeman, 1999). Lastly, Flynn and Nolan (2008) acknowledged literature related to beginning teacher training to include topics such as classroom management, working with parents, school operations and district policies, differentiated instruction, and assessment.

Mentor training is recognized as another research-based best practice for induction programs. Evertson and Smithey (2000) studied the quality of training mentors received in mentoring programs and their effects on resident teacher success. Their study included 46 mentor and teacher pairs. Of the participants, 23 mentors were part of a formal mentoring program, and the other 23 were experienced teachers with no formal mentoring training. Notable differences existed between the two groups. Resident-year teachers paired with trained mentors had established better classroom management routines resulting in better student behavior and could

“more effectively organize and manage instruction at the beginning of the year” (Evertson & Smithey, 2002, abstract). An important finding from the study was that the assignment of a mentor to a beginning teacher was not enough to support beginning teachers, but rather the ability and knowledge of how to mentor made the greatest difference.

In many induction programs, administrators play a significant role through careful pairing of the mentor and beginning teacher. Barrera, Braley, and Slate (2010) surveyed 46 mentor teachers across Texas who had taken part in a formal mentoring program to gather their perceptions of what practices were most necessary for their success in the mentoring role. They found the presence of particular qualities that contributed to the success of some mentors, while the absence of those same qualities contributed to the failures of others. For example, when administrators created time in the schedule to allow for collaboration and observation, mentors felt supported. When collaboration and observation time was not scheduled by their administrators, they did not feel supported. Administrators are primarily responsible for successful implementation of induction programs.

Ingersoll and Smith (2004) conducted a large-scale national study using information from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2000-2001 Teacher Follow-up Survey to study the effects of mentoring and induction programs on teacher retention. Findings of the study revealed that supports made available to beginning teachers rarely existed in isolation. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) asserted that the more supports available to beginning teachers, the more likely they are to remain in the profession. Conversely, the fewer supports available, the less likely beginning teachers are to stay in the profession.

Successful Induction Programs

Nationally recognized mentoring programs include the California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) and the Columbus Peer Assistance and Review Program. Mentorville Public Schools is a pseudonym for a comprehensive induction program

operating in a New York School District. Because this study will be conducted in an Oklahoma school, two state programs offered to beginning teachers in Oklahoma are presented.

California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program. California embarked on a journey to improve teacher performance in the mid-1980's, with an emphasis on supporting and retaining first and second year teachers. According to Pratt (2010), California studied 37 local pilot programs that served approximately 3,000 beginning teachers between 1988 and 1992. Following this study, the report *Success for Beginning Teachers: The California New Teacher Project* was issued that revealed teachers who were supported were more consistent in using instructional practices that positively impacted students' achievement. In 1992, California's BTSA Program was implemented with a primary objective of retaining teachers, but the program has now expanded to becoming the main way for teachers to obtain licensure in California. BTSA current goals include improving teacher performance, increasing beginning teacher satisfaction through mentoring support, and retaining capable teachers (www.btsa.ca.gov).

Columbus Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) Program. The Columbus PAR Program led the nation in the development of the PAR model and Ohio has operated the program for over twenty-five years. Teachers with more than five years of experience are fully released from their teaching responsibilities and are assigned to approximately 15 to 20 beginning teachers or teachers in need of improvement (Ashford, 2000). PAR consultants supported, mentored, observed, evaluated and encouraged these teachers. At the end of the school year, PAR consultants made recommendations for hiring decisions the following year. Columbus Education Association President, John Grossman, indicated that the program resulted in an 80 percent retention rate of quality teachers within their first five years of teaching (as cited in Ashford, 2000).

Mentorville Schools in New York. Flynn and Nolan (2008) documented the components of a successful comprehensive induction program in a suburban school district in New York

serving approximately 30,000 students. The widely-recognized program was successfully operated for 12 years, from 1988 to 2000, and served more than 1400 teachers. Essential to the success of this program was a two-year collection of research-based best practices by an 11-member district committee led by the assistant superintendent. Recognizing the importance of leadership and buy-in, the superintendent involved teachers, principals, and union leaders in the development of the program. Teachers were given the opportunity to apply to be a mentor, careful selection of mentor and mentees occurred, consideration of teaching schedules determined an appropriate match, mentors and mentees attended individualized training sessions, principals attended training prior to the school year, and yearly evaluations of the program occurred. Results of this program include beginning teachers feeling satisfied and supported, mentor teachers being reenergized, and principals appreciating the growth of beginning teachers.

Oklahoma Residency Program. The Oklahoma State Department of Education operated a resident-year teacher program to support first-year teachers. Foundational to the efforts of the state department was its use of resident-year committees. Each committee generally consisted of a university professor, a mentor teacher, an administrator, and the resident teacher. Members of the committee conducted evaluations of the beginning teacher and met at various points throughout the year to discuss the evaluations of the resident-year teacher's progress in order to support his or her success. The committee discussed the strengths of the first-year teacher and provided suggestions for teacher improvement and effectiveness. At the end of the school year, the committee met and determined if the resident teacher was prepared and qualified to continue teaching. Mutchler, Pan, Glover, and Shapley (2000) reported that the residency program had been in place and funded for 20 years, and at that time, had supported more than 40,000 teachers since its inception.

Oklahoma Mentoring Network (OMN). OMN consisted of a partnership among Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma University, the K20 center, the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation (OCTP), and the Oklahoma Education Association. OMN's goals were to

provide intense training to mentors in an effort to retain beginning teachers and to increase their effectiveness (OCTP handout, p. 1). OMN implemented the 15 state-identified competencies used by the Oklahoma Residency Program and categorized the 15 competencies into four modules: content knowledge and planning, learners and the learning environment, instruction and assessment, and professional environment (OCTP handout, p. 2). Mentors coached beginning teachers through these modules and engaged in multiple conversations throughout each one. OMN provided handouts guiding mentors step-by-step through the pre-data conversation, through the collection of data, and the post-data conversation. Throughout the school year, mentors and beginning teachers attended workshops provided by OMN together to discuss evaluations and to receive training in the next steps of the program.

Challenges of Providing Support to Beginning Teachers

Despite research demonstrating that providing support to beginning teachers increases their effectiveness, the support provided to teachers is inconsistent across schools and does not always result in teacher effectiveness (Cooper & Stewart, 2009). All of the previous nationally-recognized and state programs had promising ideals and strong research-based frameworks; however, eventually they succumbed to external pressures and were not sustainable. Many challenges face educators as they attempt to provide necessary support to beginning teachers such as time constraints, decreased funding, and administrative turnover.

Time constraints. Lack of time is one of the major challenges of providing support to beginning teachers (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010). Administrators, teachers, and other staff play an integral role in supporting new teachers; however, with all that is already required of school personnel, it is difficult to find time to provide adequate support. Cooper and Stewart (2009) pointed out, “Many school administrators and other teacher colleagues recognize this transition difficulty and want to assist new teachers but are burdened with other activities and

responsibilities; therefore new teacher support is uneven and inconsistent in and across schools and systems” (p. 112).

Beginning teachers receive varying quality of support from assigned mentor teachers as well. Andrews and Quinn (2005) analyzed the results of 135 returned surveys of first-year teachers in a district serving almost sixty thousand students. The purpose of their study was to determine if a significant difference existed among beginning teachers’ perceptions of support received when a mentor was assigned through the mentor teacher program, by the building administrator, or if there was no assigned mentor. Some teachers with assigned mentors reported a low total support score possibly due to, “mentor mismatch, unsupportive school climates, and multiple preparations for the secondary teachers” (Andrews & Quinn, 2005, p. 112). The district coordinator of the program reported that very few teachers took advantage of the early release time provided to mentors and beginning teachers possibly due to a busy schedule or failure during training to convey the importance of observation.

In the Mentorville program, mentors were selected to serve as coordinators and full-time teachers because the district committee felt that first-year teachers would be more comfortable confiding in colleagues rather than an outside consultant (Flynn & Nolan, 2008). The job requirements of the selected full-time teacher and coordinator consisted of the following:

Organize all training, meet regularly with building administrators, assist in developing an evaluation model, prepare reports, oversee the budget, inform the district and community of events, assist in the development of an evaluation model, publicize the program, and, most important, facilitate the relationship between the mentors and mentees. (Flynn & Nolan, 2008, p.174)

While the program had good intentions in selecting a teacher in the building, the mentors found it difficult to complete all of the responsibilities associated with two full-time jobs.

Decreased funding. Lack of funding affects a vast majority of induction programs, especially comprehensive induction programs with multiple components. California’s BTSA

program, Columbus' PAR program, and the New York program consisted of multiple methods of providing support resulting in financially unsustainable models (Flynn & Nolan, 2008; Goldrick, 2013). Operating BTSA in California cost the state \$87 million dollars in 2005-2006 (Lovo, Cavazos, & Simmons, 2006). If state funding were cut, this program would not be able to operate due to the high cost. According to Goldrick (2013), California allocated \$4,000 in funds for each beginning teacher in the state in 2008; however due to the economic recession funding was allowed to be used for other funds. Because of this flexibility, many districts chose to no longer implement BTSA.

The Oklahoma Residency Program existed until a legislatively mandated moratorium went into effect July 2010 which eliminated funding and resident-teacher requirements [70 O.S. 3-167]. The resident-year teachers entering the profession did not receive the same support that previous resident-year teachers had received during one of the most critical points in their teaching careers. Consequently, districts throughout Oklahoma were left to determine their own way to support beginning teachers in the field without funds. The Oklahoma Mentoring Network was one solution to providing support, but again, did not receive funding to continue the program.

Administrative turnover. Leadership changes also pose a challenge for providing support to beginning teachers. In the previously described New York school district, Mentorville, a primary cause of the dismantlement of the program was the assistant superintendent leaving the district. The superintendent initiated the program and developed collaborative relationships among the teacher's union, administrators, and teachers. Working together, the school community researched best practices and created a program with a solid and cohesive vision. This program was successful for 12 years until the assistant superintendent left the district. Furthermore, 50% of the administrative staff in the district retired resulting in a lack of overall vision for the program. Flynn and Nolan (2008) observed, "There [was] no organization among the coordinator, directors, or principals with their training agendas and most mentees surveyed reported that the workshops were irrelevant and time-consuming" (p. 175). Principals did not

accommodate teachers' schedules through not providing mentors and beginning teachers time to observe each other or common collaboration time.

External Support v. Internal Support

When multiple elements of a supportive induction program are in place, beginning teachers feel supported and mentors feel a sense of rejuvenation. However, when any of the required components are missing, the strength of the program is compromised. As Ingersoll and Smith (2004) found, the more supports beginning teachers were given, the less likely they were to leave the profession. Many programs implemented by states, districts, and schools have good intentions, but do not have the appropriate funding or time commitments to ensure beginning teacher success. Comprehensive induction programs generally rely on external methods of support; however, these external methods are susceptible to legislative changes and reductions in funding. In light of these realities, effective supports for beginning teachers often rely on internal methods of support, such as school culture and environment, which cannot be taken away. Gu and Day (2007) asserted that the support beginning teachers receive at school is more important than external support.

School Culture

With funding restrictions and time constraints affecting the sustainability of induction programs, the environment and culture of the school absorbs the role of supporting beginning teachers. One possible reason beginning teachers benefit from support in some instances and not in others may be due to the role of school culture in providing quality support to beginning teachers (Gossom, 2004; Moir, 2009). Several researchers support the notion that teacher success is embedded in and reinforced in appropriate school cultures (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Harris, 2005; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Pech, 2009; Wenzel, 2009).

School culture is complex, powerful, and constantly evolving (Hinde, 2004; Kardos et al., 2001). Edgar Schein, a major contributor to the body of research on organizational culture, acknowledged the difficulties faced by newcomers to organizations. Schein (1985, 1992) defined organizational culture:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 22)

In reference to the school environment, Peterson and Deal (1998) defined school culture as:

The underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools. (p. 28)

Because school culture is “constantly being constructed” (Hinde, 2004, p. 2), each school year brings changes among staff due to attrition and new hires. Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, and Liu (2001) also noted the increased pressure for beginning teachers to understand the culture of the school, especially when beginning teachers enter established school cultures. Kardos et al. (2001) reported that beginning teachers often “join schools that already have established professional cultures, with set ways of doing things, memories about the past, shared understandings about what is possible, and practiced strategies about how to make things happen or how to resist change” (p. 256).

Supportive School Cultures

Andrews and Quinn (2005) analyzed the effects of mentoring on beginning teachers' perceptions of support received. A twenty-item questionnaire was given to 182 first-year teachers, in a district serving approximately 60,000 students, to determine if there were perceived

differences in support received by teachers assigned a mentor by the district, by the principal, or if there was no assigned mentor. Overall, teachers felt more supported when a mentor was assigned; however, outliers existed in the data set for teachers who felt very supported even though there was no assigned mentor. On a scale of 120, three teachers without an assigned mentor reported scores greater than or equal to 110 due to the supportive school culture. One of the teachers mentioned that even though she had no assigned mentor, there were many mentors made available to her and further, that the staff felt like family. The collaborative culture of the school was able to provide quality support to these beginning teachers. This study demonstrated that it is possible for teachers to be supported by the school environment rather than through comprehensive induction programs.

Other studies indicated the importance of a family-like environment and the ability of a school's culture to nurture and support beginning teachers. Certo and Fox (2002) were primarily interested in high attrition rates and reasons teachers provided for leaving the profession. However, one finding from the study indicated that some teachers remained in the profession because of their colleagues and the feeling that they were part of a family. Another reason teachers remained in the profession was due to the supportive school culture and time appropriated to collaborate, share student work, and discuss instructional strategies. When time is given to the faculty to collaborate, this allows for relationships to be formed and for beginning teachers to become more connected and in tune with the culture of the school. Peterson and Deal (1998) argued that without, "supportive cultures, reforms will falter, staff morale and commitment will wither, and student learning will slip" (p. 28).

Emphasizing the importance of school culture with regard to beginning teacher job satisfaction and intent to remain in the profession, Kapadia, Coca, and Easton (2007) analyzed the effects of various induction programs implemented in 2005 in Chicago Public Schools. Approximately 1700 teachers were surveyed to determine specific methods of support they perceived to help them decide to remain in the profession. Findings revealed that mentoring

alone is not enough and that beginning teachers should have access to a variety of supports. Kapadia et al. (2007) suggested that these supports could come from either comprehensive induction programs or “from within the school” (p. 29). The present study is seeking to investigate the latter of the two due to external influences affecting the sustainability of comprehensive induction programs. Even though comprehensive induction programs have proven to be beneficial (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kapadia et al., 2007), many times these programs lack funding, time, and a solid vision through leadership changes (Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010; Flynn & Nolan, 2008; Goldrick, 2013).

Findings from The New Teacher Project (2012) indicated that when administrators focused on retaining only effective teachers, rather than all teachers regardless of their level of effectiveness, a stronger school culture resulted. Data collection occurred through 4,818 completed teacher surveys from a total of 249 schools in five districts and two charter schools. Teachers were questioned about the instructional cultures of their schools and responses were separated into quartiles; the bottom quartile represented schools with weak instructional cultures and the upper quartile represented schools with strong instructional cultures. Schools with strong instructional cultures were referred to as Greenhouse Schools. Greenhouse Schools were characterized by a focus on increased student learning, an understanding of the need to develop and prioritize great teaching above all else, and the ability of the administrator to carefully construct cultures that allowed teaching and learning to take place. Another key finding in this study resulted from asking teachers why they chose to leave the profession. Forty-seven percent of teachers in Greenhouse Schools, with strong instructional cultures, cited personal reasons having nothing to do with the school. Conversely, only 18% of teachers in schools with weak instructional cultures indicated personal reasons having nothing to do with the school. This study indicated that supportive school cultures can help beginning teachers remain in the profession, develop teachers’ abilities, and positively influence student learning.

An important consideration in the ability of the school culture to provide quality support to beginning teachers is the need to understand the characteristics of the current generation of teachers. Teachers entering the workforce in 2011 and after are called “Millenials,” and were born after 1978 (Richardson, 2011). According to the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey, 25% of the workforce consisted of teachers with less than five years of experience. These numbers were expected to rise as more of the “Baby Boomers” reached retirement age (Kopkowski, 2008; NCTAF, 2010). Richardson (2011) characterized Millenials as needing more praise, being multitaskers, embracing accountability, appreciating mentoring and advice from veterans, tolerating of change, and loving teams and collaboration. These characteristics will affect the qualities and demographics of school cultures. In a qualitative exploratory study of 80 beginning teachers and 40 mentors, Ulvik and Langorgen (2012) found that the strengths of beginning teachers were not being used and did not contribute towards developing a mutually supportive school culture. Ulvik and Langorgen (2012) concluded, “Within stable frameworks, trust may evolve, potentially enabling a culture of sharing to develop, which, in a changing society, may provide a better induction into the teaching tradition than mentoring” (p. 54).

Collaborative School Cultures

O’Donovan (2010) indicated the need for administrators to provide support to new teachers and suggested three key areas principals could directly impact beginning teachers. One way emphasized, “Creating a culture of collaboration focused on student achievement. A school culture set up this way will naturally provide support for new teachers” (p. 90). Johnson (1990) interviewed 115 teachers who reported that collaboration enhanced their content knowledge as well as their pedagogy. Collaborative school cultures have the ability to support beginning teachers as well as increase teacher effectiveness.

Cooper and Stewart (2009) observed that beginning teachers experience stress as they attempt to learn the culture of the school, learn how to be an effective teacher, and learn to work

productively with the larger school community. To alleviate these sources of stress, Wenzel (2009) alleged that being part of a collaborative and supportive school culture assisted beginning teachers to overcome the stressors associated with their first years of teaching. Hudson (2012) believed that, “A community of willing, capable, and compatible mentors with diverse expertise and vantage points can provide richer and more productive mentoring experiences for beginning teachers” (p. 81). Beginning teachers should have access to many different teaching styles and perspectives as they find their identity in the profession. In relation to teacher retention, Ingersoll and Smith (2004) found that, “the largest reductions in turnover were associated with activities that tied new teachers into a collaborative network of their more experienced peers” (p. 704). This finding supports the idea that Millennials want to learn from veteran teachers in the buildings and appreciate collaborative school cultures (Richardson, 2011).

Dufour and Eaker (1998) defined a professional learning community (PLC) to include shared mission, vision, values, and goals; collaborative teams; collective inquiry; action orientation and experimentation; continuous improvement; and results oriented. With a focus on student learning rather than teaching, the shared mission seeks to answer three questions: What do we want students to learn? How will we know when students have learned the required skills? How will we respond when students do not learn? Key to proper implementation of PLCs are collaborative teams composed of common subject teams and grade level teams at the middle school level. Overall, a collaborative school culture is created with a focus on student learning.

Due to the varying and inconsistent methods of supporting beginning teachers, largely through induction programs, beginning teachers may feel isolated and unsupported in the profession (Benson, 2008; Hudson et al., 2009). Hudson (2012) stressed the importance of establishing a professional learning community. He explained that the entire staff could, “assist the beginning teacher through purposeful guidance to ensure effective assimilation into a teaching career” (Hudson, 2012, p. 72). Once again, a supportive and collaborative school culture is preferred over other methods of providing support to beginning teachers.

Collaborative school cultures have the ability to positively affect beginning teachers' attitudes towards teaching as a profession during a critical time period (Flores & Day, 2006). Darling-Hammond (2012) observed this crucial developmental stage for beginning teachers:

The early years of practice are a linchpin time that can make all the difference in both keeping and developing expert educators. Attitudes and beliefs developed during induction are carried for a career. Induction serves a key role in developing new members of the profession into the work habits, expectations, and commitments that are expected by parents, students, and the public, as well as colleagues and supervisors. (p. 15).

Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, and Liu (2001) supported the notion that induction programs were not sustainable and accordingly, recognized the role of a collaborative school culture in supporting beginning teachers. Specifically, Kardos et al. (2001) noted the importance of fellow teachers:

It is to [fellow teachers] that [beginning teachers] look for advice about how to teach well and for support in how to become a full-fledged member of the teaching staff. Whether the novice can count on those colleagues will depend largely on the prevailing norms and patterns of interaction that exist within the school. (p. 251).

Beginning teachers enter the profession and can encounter varying degrees of a positive and supportive environment or a toxic and unsupportive culture.

Framework of Symbolic Culture

Chapter one introduced the concept of symbolic culture, which includes the following symbols: vision and values; rituals and ceremonies; history and stories; the cultural network; heroes and heroines; and architecture and artifacts (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Harris, 2005). All of these symbols are interrelated to form a more complete representation of the school culture. One single element is not responsible for shaping a school's culture, but

rather the interaction and interconnectivity of all symbols combined. Graphically, this interrelationship can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Interrelationship of Cultural Symbols

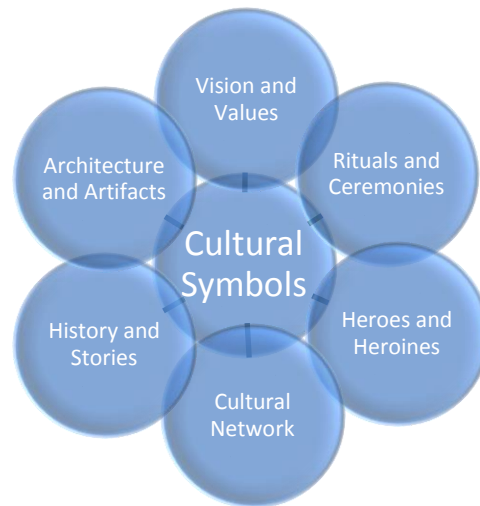


Figure 1. Visual representation of the interconnectivity of cultural symbols. Adapted from “The Cultural Web” by G. Johnson and K. Scholes, 1999, p. 77 as cited in “Organizational Culture and Its Themes” by S. Sun, 2008, *International Journal of Business and Management*, 3(12).

Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000) studied the cultures of successful business organizations in their groundbreaking work, *Corporate Cultures*. They discovered many elements of organizational culture responsible for guiding interactions, decision-making, and relationships among employees. Educators drew upon organizational culture to better understand “this pervasive, yet elusive, element” of school culture that governs, “how staff dress, what they talk about, their willingness to change, the practice of instruction, and the emphasis given student and faculty learning” (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 28). Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009) joined forces to study the symbolic elements of culture responsible for shaping a school’s culture. They organized these elements into four categories: vision and values; ritual and ceremony; history and

stories; and architecture and artifacts. Deal, Peterson, Kennedy, and Harris recognized the importance of the cultural network and heroes and heroines.

Vision and values. Vision and values are the foundation of school culture and both have the ability to bring meaning and purpose to the educational setting. For some schools, the mission and vision provide a unified direction for the staff; for others, the mission and vision is an abstract and unknown document rarely discussed. Deal and Peterson (1999) explained various ways in which schools can define success to include extracurricular activities, excellent teachers, student success as measured by acceptance to top schools in the country, simply surviving through another school day or year, embracing current educational trends, or high expectations of all members in the educational community. The ways in which schools define success can reveal much about the values held by those within the organization.

Rituals and ceremonies. Rituals and ceremonies, an expression of the vision and values held by those within a school, are referred to by Deal and Peterson (1999) as, “culture in action” (p. 31). Rituals are categorized as routine events tied to a deeper symbolic meaning. For example, Deal and Peterson (1999) referred to a school who gave each other, “animated high-fives” with the deeper symbolic meaning reinforcing the school’s commitment to “Reach for Excellence” (p. 33). Through these daily rituals, staff and students are reminded of the underlying vision and dedication to setting high expectations each day. Ceremonies refer to larger school functions and social gatherings that mark important time periods throughout the school year. Deal and Peterson (1999) defined successful ceremonies as, “carefully designed and arranged to communicate values, celebrate core accomplishments, and build a tight sense of community” (p. 41). Together, rituals and ceremonies symbolize the more deeply held assumptions and values.

History and stories. School culture is reinforced through the sharing of school history and stories. Some administrators and teachers share success stories of students, thus showing a school’s commitment to setting high expectations and celebrating student accomplishments.

Others, however, share negative stories and complain about policies and procedures in place. The stories shared by members of the school community reveal the values and assumptions held by those members. Teachers new to the school are highly impressionable as they seek to understand school culture. Deal and Peterson (1999) indicated that hiring interviews are the perfect opportunity to communicate core values of dedication, collaboration, and a commitment to all students.

The cultural network. The cultural network, consisting of storytellers, gossips, heroes and heroines, priests and priestesses, and spies, represents the underground flow of communication and ideas among key players within the organization. Storytellers have the potential to bolster school spirit and reinvigorate staff members. Gossips and spies can be positive or negative forces in an organization, but both have the ability to quickly disseminate information. The cultural network guides, “the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time” (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p.28).

Heroes and heroines. Heroes and heroines are the embodiment of school culture and core values and act as role models for the staff. Deal and Kennedy (2000) observed, “[Heroes] show – often dramatically – that the ideal of success lies within human capacity” (p. 37). Deal and Peterson (1999) described a school custodian as a hero within one organization due to his 25 years of dedicated service to the school and his personal task of painting two classrooms every summer so that the entire school was painted twice in his career. Deal and Peterson (1999) emphasized that heroes and heroines “show us what we can become [and that] they provide the culture with an image of the best that is in us” (p. 58). Heroes and heroines are anointed in rituals and ceremonies. They epitomize the vision and values held by those within the school and the history and stories shared by the staff often involves them. Achievements and awards received by heroes and heroines are displayed through artifacts.

Architecture and artifacts. Architecture and artifacts symbolize values and a common sense of shared purpose. The physical layout and environment of a school symbolize the school

culture. For example, media centers can be found in the center of the schools, grade divisions can be separated into wings to encourage closer knit communities, and teachers teaching the same subject can be located next door to each other to encourage collaboration. Examples of symbolic artifacts in schools include display and prominence of mission statement, displays of student work, banners hung around the school communicating the importance of hard work, displays of past achievements, symbols of diversity, and mascots (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Interrelationship of cultural symbols. Represented by an interconnected web, the categories of symbolic elements support and influence one another. Rituals and ceremonies embody the vision and values held by those within the school, provides a place for history and stories to be shared and formed, and produces artifacts that can be displayed throughout the building. A school's mission and vision is displayed through architecture and artifacts, implemented in rituals and ceremonies, and revealed through history and stories. All elements combined shape the culture of a school.

Chapter Two Summary

Chapter Two presented an in-depth review of the literature to establish the need for the present study. First, the literature review presented reasons beginning teachers must be supported. Reasons included teacher quality and effectiveness, high rates of beginning teacher attrition, and stress associated with the beginning years of teaching. It takes time for teachers to develop into effective practitioners, so providing support during this critical time period is essential. Next, research regarding methods of providing support to beginning teachers was presented. Methods included induction programs, administrative support, teacher evaluations to support beginning teacher development, and state and district programs. In response to the high attrition rate of beginning teachers, the primary method of providing support to beginning teachers was through induction programs. Many of the nationally recognized model programs were successfully operated for a certain period of time and succeeded in increasing retention

rates. Most programs were not sustainable due to decreased funding, time constraints, and administrative turnover. In the book, *Whatever It Takes*, by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek, Mike Schmoker wrote the Foreword describing schools that “made astonishing progress *with existing amounts of time and funding*. They did not wait for someone from the outside to give them the magic formula, the perfect program, or more resources. These schools found a way” (p. xv). The chapter concluded with research on collaborative and supportive school cultures, as well as Peterson and Deal’s (1999) school culture framework. Supportive and collaborative school cultures can have a positive influence on the quality of support beginning teachers receive.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A famous quotation by Henry David Thoreau sets the stage for this case study, “*The question is not what you look at, but what you see*” (Thoreau, 1851, p. 373). My interpretation of this quotation as it relates to my case study is that the statistics associated with school culture and beginning teachers do not truly matter, but rather it is what is seen within those statistics that describes more about the real story. Quantitative measures do not reveal the “underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p.28). Accordingly, I conducted a qualitative case study to expose more than quantitative measures can provide.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to describe how school culture supports the educational practices of beginning teachers at two selected middle schools.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How are beginning teachers (years 1-3) supported in the two middle schools?
2. How do cultural symbols support the educational practices of beginning teachers in the two middle schools?
3. What other realities exist in the study?

Research Design

Constructionism is the epistemological perspective informing this study. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). In relation to the present study, knowledge was constructed by the administrators, teachers, students, and community through interactions with one another. Meanings ascribed to and actions resulting from those interactions defined the school culture.

School culture is multi-layered, complex, and powerful, and qualitative measures are helpful in revealing these complexities. Patton (2002) explained, “Given the qualitative emphasis on striving for depth of understanding, in context, attitude surveys and psychological tests are inadequate for revealing inner perspectives” (p. 48). Understanding culture at the deepest levels requires revealing of the inner perspective of the teachers and administrators. Cultural values and informal networks cannot be simply communicated through surveys.

Case study methodology is an appropriate complement to the constructionist epistemological perspective guiding this study. Yin (2009) provided a technical definition of case studies in two parts:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that
 - investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
 - the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
2. The case study inquiry
 - copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result

- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical proposition to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 18).

The phenomenon, or unit of analysis, studied in this case is providing support to beginning teachers, but studying this case could not occur without consideration of the context, the school culture. In reference to the second part, multiple variables must be considered in this study which results in the need to identify a theoretical framework prior to data collection and analysis and the need to collect multiple sources of evidence.

Methodological Procedures

Participant Selection

School sites and interview participants were selected using purposeful sampling procedures. Merriam (1998) explained that purposeful sampling “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Site selection occurred after the vacant positions had been filled for the 2013-2014 school year. I removed one of the five middle schools from my study due to potential researcher bias; I had taught at that middle school for four years previously. One principal declined to participate, and of the three remaining, I collected the total number of beginning teachers for each of the middle schools. I selected the two middle schools that had the highest number of beginning teachers; one school had nine beginning teachers and the other school had fifteen.

In addition to purposeful sampling, criterion sampling and opportunistic or emergent sampling was used. According to Patton (2002), criterion sampling referred to selecting participants based on a set of criteria. In this study, beginning teachers within their first one to three years to the profession were selected as potential participants. Patton (2002) described

opportunistic or emergent sampling as, “Following new leads during fieldwork; taking advantage of the unexpected; flexibility” (p. 244). Prior to conducting the study, I did not know which teachers seemed to have a good understanding of the school culture. However, through my prolonged engagement at the site, collection of documents and artifacts, and interviews of beginning teachers, I started to gather an idea of the key players responsible for shaping school culture. Peterson and Deal (1999, 2009) referred to those key players as the heroes, heroines, gossips, storytellers, priests, and priestesses.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in the “natural setting,” identified by Creswell (2009) as a characteristic of qualitative inquiry (p. 175). Within the natural setting, I collected data through observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials (Erlandson et al., 1993). Yin (2009) explained that none of these data collection sources was better than another, but it was important to collect data from a variety of sources. Yin (2009) and Creswell (2009) asserted that identification of strengths and weaknesses of each data collection method served to strengthen the study.

Observations. Observational data were collected during multiple visits to school sites. Observational data included a variety of activities, events, and settings. I attended the district provided meetings for first-year teachers to the district, team meetings, faculty meetings, team leader meetings, award nights, a fifth grade parent orientation, and student of the month recognitions. Observational data was recorded through detailed field notes. Important to note, I also observed elements of school culture that were not present, which Patton (2002) referred to as “observing what does not happen” (p. 295). Strengths of observations include visiting the school site in the natural setting and observing the culture of the school in action. Weaknesses of observations included viewing the culture of the school through my perspective; I may have been

seen as intrusive; and my presence may have biased interactions and responses, especially in team and grade-level meetings.

Interviews. Yin (2009) described interviews as one of the most important sources of case study information. I interviewed two beginning teachers, one veteran teacher, and one administrator at each of the two sites for a total of eight interviews. Of the 24 beginning teachers emailed to solicit participation in the study, only five responded. I chose four of the five to interview. For the two veteran teacher interviews, I initially wanted to select the current site Teacher of the Year (TOY) for each school, because teachers at the school selected the site TOY, which means they are highly respected within the organization. The TOY at Peak agreed to an interview and the TOY at Nation did not respond to either of my two emails soliciting participation. The veteran teacher at Nation I chose to interview was heavily involved in the school and was team leader. For the two administrators, I decided that I wanted to interview the head principal at each school because they were responsible for shaping the culture of the school.

I conducted and audio taped interviews of participants in a one-on-one and face-to-face format. I used open-ended questions in an effort to elicit detailed opinions and responses. I used the “focused interview” technique described by Yin (2009) as, “the interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but [the interviewer is] more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from case study protocol” (p. 107). I transcribed interviews as quickly as possible immediately following the interviews, and I recorded as much observational data as possible in my car prior to leaving the school site. I transcribed all interviews myself, which allowed me to process and reflect on interview content in depth. Listening to the direct account and perceptions of participants in the study was a major strength of interviews, while a limitation of this data collection technique was that my presence may have biased responses. Beginning teachers may not have felt comfortable expressing their true feelings, especially if they could be perceived as negative.

Documents. I collected data through documents such as papers containing the mission statement, electronic communication among staff members, Tulsa model teacher evaluation form, anonymous beginning teacher evaluations, handouts in the front offices, newsletters, and other sources that helped explain school culture or described supports in place for beginning teachers. Creswell (2009) effectively summarized the advantages of collecting documents:

- Enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants.
- Can be accessed at a time convenient to researcher – an unobtrusive source of information.
- Represents data which are thoughtful in that participants have given attention to compiling them.
- As written evidence, it saves a researcher time and expense of transcribing (p. 180).

A potential limitation of data collection was that the information may be missing or not accurate.

Audio-visual materials. Photographs were another source of document collection. I took photographs of banners in the hallway symbolizing the vision and values of the school, the physical environment of the school, trophies and awards on display, student work in hallways, and any other piece of architecture or artifacts that symbolized an important element of the school culture. Photographs were taken of the school website. Strengths of this method of data collection included limiting my obtrusiveness in the school environment and revealing direct elements of school culture deemed important to staff. However, I may have misinterpreted the meaning or assigned meaning incorrectly to a piece of architecture.

Data Analysis

In determining the “best” way to analyze data collected from qualitative inquiry, Patton (2002) concluded, “In short, no absolute rules exist except perhaps this: Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the

purpose of the study” (p. 433). I made every effort to fairly represent the data collected throughout the analysis of my data. Data analysis began the moment I started data collection. Creswell (2009) referred to data collection as “an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (p. 184). As I simultaneously collected and analyzed data, insights gathered informed other sources of data collection.

Creswell (2009) suggested following a mostly linear, but interactive, six-step process for data analysis to include: organize and prepare data, read through data, code data, generate themes or categories, convey findings, and interpret meaning.

Organize, prepare, and read data. Organizing and preparing the data entailed transcriptions of interviews, typing of field notes, and scanning documents collected. Through completing my own transcriptions, I was able to constantly reflect on the information in the interviews. I organized all of my data collection in a large binder first in chronological order of data collected, but then rearranged the binder to group the information by school site. I read through the data multiple times to gather a better idea of the whole case.

Code data. After I had a general sense of the information, I coded the data. Creswell (2009) described a few approaches to coding, “(a) develop codes *only* on the basis of the emerging information collected from participants, (b) use predetermined codes and then fit the data to them, or (c) use some combination of predetermined and emerging codes” (p. 187). I chose (c), some combination of predetermined and emerging codes. I highlighted important chunks of information on the interview transcripts and made notes on the side of the paper regarding emerging themes and common language used among participants. After reading and making notes about the data, I turned each of the highlighted chunks with my notes into mini-notecards on an excel spreadsheet. I created, printed, and cut apart over 500 notecards.

Generate themes or categories. Following the coding process, I organized my data into certain chunks of common significance. I separated over 500 notecards according to common

themes that emerged. Creswell (2009) explained, “[Themes] should display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence” (p. 189). These categories formed Chapter IV of this dissertation to describe the context, setting, participants, and interactions among participants in this study. Then, I took the information I typed in Chapter IV and cut the paper into chunks. I used the predetermined codes of the elements of school culture to include vision and values, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, the cultural network, heroes and heroines, and architecture and artifacts to organize the chunks of paper for data analysis in Chapter V.

Convey findings and interpret meanings. Findings of the study were conveyed in a combination of a narrative format and through charts and tables. The narrative approach included a full description of the participants in the study, a chronology of events following efforts made to support beginning teachers, and a detailed description of the themes (Creswell, 2009). Charts and tables were provided as a visual aid intended to assist in interpreting the meanings of the study.

Researcher Role

Researcher Bias

I graduated with an undergraduate degree in Math Education in December and accepted a middle school teaching position the following January, replacing a teacher who quit mid-year. My teaching assignments included seventh grade math, Algebra 1, Pre-AP Algebra I, a 20-minute reading period, and a character building class period totaling five different classes taught per day. In addition to this difficult beginning schedule, my administrator was highly unsupportive and discipline was a major problem in this highly diverse, inner-city school. However, my seventh grade team of teachers supported me through my first semester of teaching. Leaving the profession was constantly on my mind as I struggled through my first teaching assignment.

I applied to a different district the following year and was able to experience working with a highly supportive administrator and team of teachers. Teachers in this school were highly

committed to student learning and had a shared vision of high expectations and love for teaching. Many teachers volunteered to attend professional development opportunities and upon return eagerly shared what they learned with the rest of the staff. I learned effective teaching strategies from successful teachers, also known as heroes or heroines within the school culture framework. My decision to continue teaching was partly influenced by the culture of the school.

My two drastically different introductory teaching experiences piqued my interest in studying this topic more in-depth. I am aware of my preconceived notions regarding the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers and was careful to analyze the data with utmost trustworthiness and credibility. I followed university and federal policy as well as qualitative research protocols.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, ethical considerations were employed regarding data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation.

Data collection ethics. Multiple ethical considerations must be addressed in qualitative research regarding data collection. Patton (2002) and Creswell (2009) identified several different considerations of importance to this study: (1) informed consent and confidentiality, (2) IRB approval, (3) gaining access to sites, (4) limiting disruptions at the research site, (5) mutual benefits among researcher and participants, (6) sensitive nature of data collected, and (7) interview protocol. Each of these considerations is discussed in further detail.

First, I developed an informed consent form for selected participants to sign, with the acknowledgement that their rights would be protected throughout the research process. Second, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the university. Third, I wrote a letter to the superintendent and principal of the selected middle school site asking for permission to conduct my study within that school district and school site. Fourth, I limited disruptions at the research site by carefully selecting observation times that best fit participants' needs. Fifth,

mutual benefits among researcher and participants were ensured through offering the participants and school sites copies of transcripts, findings of the study, and the final document. Lastly, interview protocol procedures were closely followed regarding neutrality. I was careful not to lead participants to any conclusions.

Data analysis and interpretation ethics. Ethics regarding data analysis and interpretation included assigning pseudonyms, securing data collected, and ensuring accurate interpretations of data collected (Creswell, 2009). In order to protect the anonymity of the school district, school site, and participants, pseudonyms were assigned and used throughout the study. Information gathered during the data collection phase was kept secure, either in my possession or in a locked file cabinet in my home. As previously stated, a potential weakness of collecting data through photographs was that I might misinterpret the meaning or assign meaning incorrectly to a piece of architecture; however, I ensured accurate interpretation of the data through member checks and conversations with staff.

Trustworthiness of Findings

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended four criteria for establishing trustworthiness of findings in qualitative case studies to include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

To ensure credibility in this study, I implemented techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985): prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checks, purposeful sampling, and triangulation. Prolonged engagement at the site allowed me to build trust, develop rapport, and obtain accurate data. Persistent observation allowed me to obtain in-depth data and allowed me to further understand the true culture of the school. Fortunately, I am one of seventeen cohort members at the university completing dissertation requirements, so I was able to take full advantage of peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing

as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit with the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). Member checks were conducted; participants were provided copies of the interview transcripts in order to verify accuracy. I sent follow-up emails, textbook messages, and Facebook messages, as necessary to clarify answers provided during the interviews and other sources of data collection.

I achieved triangulation by gathering information from beginning teachers, veteran teachers, district training sessions, training materials provided by site and district, the Tulsa website for information regarding teacher evaluation, and observational data of beginning teachers. I used all of this information to get a more complete understanding of the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers. Yin (2009) described triangulation further, “A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (pp. 114-115). There are limitations to each type of data collection, and the limitations were minimized by using the triangulation approach to collecting data.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability of the study’s results to be applicable to another setting. A good way to ensure transferability is to provide a “thick description” which is a technique first coined by Ryle (1949) and later elaborated by Geertz (1973). Because transferability is the responsibility of the reader, it was my task to thoroughly describe the setting, context, participants, research design, and results so that the reader can best determine the applicability of this study to their setting. Chapter IV thoroughly describes these areas.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability refers to the ability of the study to be replicated or repeated, and confirmability refers to the degree to which my findings would be consistent with another person’s interpretation of the findings. To meet dependability and confirmability requirements, all

documents, notes, transcripts, recorded interviews, and observations are readily available for an audit. I was fully transparent in my approach to research, specifically noting any changes made as the study progressed.

Table 1

Trustworthiness Criteria and Examples

Credibility		
<i>Criteria/Technique</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Prolonged engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust • Develop rapport • Build relationships • Obtain wide scope of data • Obtain accurate data 	In the field from February 2014 to May 2014; follow-up communication occurred in June and July; avenues of communication: emails, appointments, Facebook, face-to-face, and telephone calls
Persistent observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain in-depth data • Obtain accurate data • Sort relevancies from irrelevancies 	Observation of participants during site and district trainings; Observation of school culture each time I visited site
Triangulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify data 	Multiple sources of data: interviews, observations, documents, websites, and email
Peer debriefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An additional perspective and guidance from a trusted source 	Gathered feedback on interview questions; discussed and helped other doctoral students in the process of writing this dissertation
Member checking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify documentation and conclusions 	The participants received copies of the transcripts and final paper to verify accuracy, especially about the conclusions drawn from the study, and provide any important missing information and/or to schedule a follow-up meeting
Purposive sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site selection will provide a good venue for observing the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers 	Purposeful in the selection of site based on the number of beginning teachers (criterion sampling method)

Transferability

<i>Criteria/Technique</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Referential adequacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a comprehensive picture of the program 	Gathered information from websites, district training materials, school communication pieces, Tulsa website for teacher evaluation information
Thick description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a data base for transferability judgment • Provide a vicarious experience for the reader 	History of supports in place for beginning teachers; education experience of the participants and overall observations regarding the role of school culture, portraits of the school
Dependability/Conformability		
<i>Criteria/Technique</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Access to an audit trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow auditor to determine trustworthiness of study 	Interview guides, notes, documents, note cards, peer debriefing notes, email exchanges between participants and myself, etc. are readily available for an audit

Limitations of Study

Limitations were addressed for each of the data collection techniques in a previous section. The presence of the researcher was one limitation regarding interviews of participants (Creswell, 2009). Another significant limitation identified by Stake (1995), is that, “Many a researcher would like to tell the whole story but of course cannot; the whole story exceeds anyone’s knowing, and anyone’s telling” (p. 240). Telling the whole story is not possible, but through spending an extensive amount of time in the site, I believe I gathered the best possible understanding of the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers.

Conclusion

Chapter three provides an in depth review of the methodology used. In addition to stating my role in the research process, potential areas of researcher bias are addressed due to my background and personal experience related to supportive and unsupportive school environments. The trustworthiness of findings are clearly defined with specific examples of how the findings are valid and credible.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Chapter Four presents data collected throughout this study. The purpose of this study is to describe how school culture supports the educational practices of beginning teachers (years 1-3) at two selected middle schools. In order to set the stage for understanding many realities presently faced by beginning teachers, it is beneficial to zoom out and view education at the state level through explaining the current state of education in Oklahoma. The chapter begins by explaining the current state of education at the state level, followed by a description of the school district, and then narrows further to tell the stories of the two school sites selected. Scenes are used throughout this chapter with intentions of creating a more vivid picture or snapshot of actual happenings within the state, district, and school sites. Scenes from the state level, district level, and two school sites are presented to reveal more about each of the settings. Scenes presented from the two school sites portray the contrasting school cultures.

Education at the State Level

The following scene depicts the current state of education in Oklahoma.

Scene One: Context of Current State of Education in Oklahoma

On March 31, 2014, approximately 30,000 Oklahoma educators, students, parents, and community bonded together at the state capitol to let their voices be heard, claiming 678,000

reasons, the number of students in Oklahoma schools. Hundreds of busses lined the circular drive in front of the capitol releasing large groups of educators dressed in red carrying signs that read, “Our kids deserve better!”, “Our kids are worth it,” and “678,000 Reasons to Fund Education.” Some school districts around Oklahoma even closed school sites so that the administrators, teachers, students, and community could attend the rally to demonstrate the importance of this very critical time in education. School funding is at an all-time low and for once there is \$300 million in potential state revenue, from tax incentives for Horizontal and Deep Well Drilling, which could be directed toward education.

State Teacher of the Year: “Our legislators are failing us, and yet they have an abundance of resources available to them. This year I’ve met many teachers from around the nation and quite frankly, it is embarrassing to tell them that we have \$300 million of possible oil tax revenue right under our feet and yet we are still forty-ninth in education funding per pupil...Why should we have to take our time already filled to the gills to fill out an application to jump through a hoop just to obtain the meager funds that should be available simply for asking.”

Student Speaker [male]: “I’ve been taught from a very early age that a good education is fundamental to a successful life. The keys to such an education are adequate numbers of quality teachers [cheering and clapping from the crowd], and ample funding [more cheering and clapping]. I’ve recently noticed that class sizes in my own school have increased significantly and many school programs lack basic funding. Education must be placed higher on our list of priorities.”

Student Speaker [female]: “My mom pours everything she has into her classroom; she focuses on the needs of each student and teaches them in a way that will benefit them the most. But this becomes increasingly difficult as she stresses over common core, teacher evaluations, and rigorous testing [cheering and clapping] ...Higher standards are wonderful. We all want stronger [students] to send out into the world, but this cannot happen if funding is continually cut and testing remains the focus.”

School Superintendent: “We will no longer stand quietly by while Oklahoma education crumbles around us. If we don’t speak up about education, and the lives of children, then who will? Today is about respect [cheers and clapping]. It is about respecting those who work with our most precious resource, our children. Respecting them enough to pay those who work in Oklahoma schools a decent wage, respecting them enough to provide personnel to adequately staff schools, and it is about providing resources to have all the materials that a teacher needs...It is simply about priorities, and Oklahoma schools have not been a priority.”

Following the speeches, rally attendees were encouraged to enter the capitol to speak with legislators about important upcoming bills affecting educational funding.

Educational Funding

In response to the economic recession in 2008, President Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009. Of the \$840 billion total funds allocated to boosting the nation’s economy, \$94 billion was directed towards education in categories such as State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Aid for the Disadvantaged, Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, and Student Aid (www.recovery.gov). These funds were intended to provide stability while state economies recovered. When the one-time federal funds were used, the expectation was that states would be able to restore educational funding to pre-recession levels. As of 2014, education funding levels in Oklahoma have still not been restored to pre-recession levels and the federal money is expended. Following the recession, funding has decreased by \$200 million dollars since 2008-09 even though Oklahoma serves approximately 40,000 more students with 1,500 fewer teachers (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2014). The result of this is increased class sizes and while Oklahoma did have a law mandating class limits; the financial penalty for schools not abiding by this law has been waived. Oklahoma is ranked forty-ninth in the nation on per-pupil expenditure and forty-ninth in teacher pay (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2013).

Current State of Oklahoma Education

Of the \$94 billion of ARRA funds allocated for education, \$4.35 billion was committed to the establishment of the federal Race to the Top (RTTT) Initiative in 2009 (United States Department of Education, 2009). RTTT is a competitive grant program designed to award federal money to states and programs that have demonstrated results in raising student achievement as well as the best plans to accelerate their reforms in the future. RTTT focuses on reforms in these four areas:

- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (United States Department of Education, 2009)

Many states made necessary legislative changes in an effort to secure these funds. Goe and Holdheide explained, “To position themselves for a successful RTTT bid, many states passed new legislation mandating that student achievement growth be included as part of teacher evaluation” (2011, p. 4). Oklahoma has applied for, and been denied, these funds two times.

As described in Chapter Two, *Rush to Judgment (2008)* and *The Widget Effect (2009)* highlighted the flaws of previous methods of teacher evaluation because the evaluations provided limited feedback for improving teacher instruction. To accommodate the first area of reform, states began to focus on creating an effective and useful teacher evaluation method that included student growth performance. In 2011, Oklahoma school districts were asked to choose from three approved teacher frameworks for conducting teacher evaluations. School districts were to make

their selection and implement the new evaluation method no later than the 2013-2014 school year.

Most school districts in Oklahoma have chosen the Tulsa Teacher Leadership Effectiveness (TLE) Observation and Evaluation System. Teachers are evaluated and given scores in five domains including classroom management, instructional effectiveness, professional growth and continuous development, interpersonal skills, and leadership. Student test scores will account for 35% of the teacher's overall evaluation score starting in the 2014-2015 school year. Administrators and teachers completed the first pilot year of roster verification, a complicated process of linking the percentage of time each student spent with each teacher in the building, during 2013-2014 school year. Those percentages will be used to determine the student academic growth measure for every teacher and leader in the building. Again, this is a very complicated process and each teacher or leader could fall into four separate categories depending on the subject taught or role in the building; however, the purpose is still to inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.

Not only are teacher and administrator evaluations changing, but also teachers are learning a new and constantly fluctuating curriculum. To meet the second goal of RTTT, states are in the process of adopting new curriculum to ensure that students are prepared to be college, career, and citizen-ready upon graduation. Currently, Oklahoma schools are using Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) standards that have been used for the previous two decades. With the current PASS standards in place, approximately 40% of students entering college require remedial courses (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2014). This percentage demonstrates that many students are not graduating from Oklahoma schools college-ready. Oklahoma adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, along with 45 other states in the United States (Academic Benchmarks, 2014), and standards were expected to be fully implemented in the 2014-2015 school year. However, Oklahoma, and two other states, rejected CCSS in 2014 just upon implementation. Oklahoma has chosen to revert to previous PASS skills

until new Oklahoma Academic Standards and assessments can be created for the 2016-2017 school year.

In addition to a new system of evaluating teachers and fluctuating curriculum standards, school accountability information is being collected and presented in a new way. Oklahoma recently implemented A-F report cards partly due to making school performance transparent and easily understood by parents and community. In response to the first goal of RTTT, student performance and student growth are an additional focus of the A-F report cards and each account for half of the overall score. Schools can earn up to ten additional bonus points in areas of high student attendance rate, low dropout rate, and percentage of students taking advanced coursework. The A-F report card was signed into law in 2011 with initial scores released during the 2012 school year. Changes were made to reflect an emphasis on student growth and achievement for the 2013 release. Simply put, schools are experiencing numerous changes across many areas in a short span of time with decreased funding.

Coinciding with the multiple reform initiatives and instability of Oklahoma education was the election of Janet Barresi as State Superintendent in 2011, the first new superintendent in 20 years. As stated on Barresi's biography on the State Department of Education website, "Her goal is to take bold action to help students succeed in college, career, and citizenship. Since she was sworn in she led the implementation of several top-to-bottom reforms, passed through the legislature and signed by the governor..." (www.ok.gov/sde). While she has led numerous reforms, she has been highly criticized along the way for her dismissive attitude toward educators. For example, Barresi threatened to withhold state money and revoke certifications of school personnel who refused to comply with a statewide "readiness" test to determine if computer servers would be able to handle online state testing (Eger, 2014). She also told a group of teachers in a training for creating the new Oklahoma Academic Standards that if people questioned them along this difficult journey, then they should tell them to "Go to Hell" (Eger, 2014).

In another example, the new A-F Report Card system of school accountability has good intentions; however, the reliability and validity of data has been highly questioned by superintendents, education associations, and university researchers. The Oklahoma State School Boards Association and the Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration (CCOSA) commissioned researchers from the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University to review and evaluate the A-F School Grading System (CCOSA, 2013). Findings revealed that the A-F system of collecting statistical information was “seriously flawed” and did not provide reliable and valid data about student growth. Comments made by Barresi included, “Both universities have disavowed [the study]. They didn’t use a representative sample. They didn’t use a random sample...the director of research from the University of Oklahoma called me and apologized to me for the poor research model used” (Eger, 2014). Researchers from the universities responded to these accusations by explaining that they did use the entire student population from 60 urban schools. Barresi influenced the climate of education at the state level in a negative way and was not reelected the following term, losing in a primary election.

Education at the District Level

Earlywine Public Schools (Earlywine)

Earlywine Setting

Earlywine is a 6A suburban school district in Oklahoma serving approximately 23,000 students and employing just over 2,700 staff. What started as a one-room school house in 1889, has now expanded to the fourth largest district in the state with one early childhood center, 16 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, and two alternative schools. Enrollment numbers indicate an increase of approximately 600 students per year for the past several years. A large portion of the city is under construction to accommodate the continued population growth. In the past several years, Earlywine has seen an increase in diversity. Eighty-two languages are spoken by students and 26.3% of students are classified as economically

disadvantaged. District demographics for 2013-2014 show that the student population is 66% White, 10% Black, 9% Hispanic, 7% Mixed, 5% Asian, 2% Native American, and 1% Native Hawaiian.

Earlywine is considered by many to be a successful district. One hundred percent of the teachers are considered highly qualified and 155 teachers are National Board Certified Teachers. Ten schools have achieved National Blue Ribbon Status. As a district, Earlywine received an A on the on A-F report card for the 2013 school year. Students consistently achieve at high levels. Three points above the state average, the district's ACT composite is 23.7. The graduation rate for Earlywine students is 94% and the number of students needing remediation upon entering college is 16% compared to the state average of 42.5% (Earlywine website). Sixteen students were named National Merit Finalists and Commended Scholars in 2014. In the last ten years, Earlywine has produced 76 High School State Championship teams. Student groups also were state champions in chess, yearbook, newspaper, literacy magazine, and academic team.

Mission and Vision

Earlywine's mission statement is, "Empowering all students to succeed in a changing society." Earlywine acknowledges that one of the major ways society is changing is through technological advances. Their goal in this area is:

Recognizing the pervasive use of technology in the 21st century, the District must continue to expand the uses of technology in ways that promote better student learning and that contribute to more efficient administrative services. Besides investing in equipment and services, professional development of staff must take high priority so that the potential benefits of technology can be maximized.

Every classroom in Earlywine is equipped with a smartboard, which is not the case in surrounding districts. In order to reduce funding costs, the district frequently hosts smartboard training sessions free of charge to teachers.

Earlywine's vision is, "To consistently achieve excellence in all areas of district operations." The district achieves excellence through five pathways to include student focus, learning for all, teamwork, commitment to quality, and uncompromising integrity. These pathways are constantly being communicated across the district through the website, in speeches given by administrative staff, and found on district documents.

District Initiatives

In order to accomplish the mission and vision set forth by the district, several initiatives have been implemented in Earlywine. For example, professional learning communities (PLCs) are an expectation among all the schools in the district. Key to the implementation of PLCs are content area teams such as science, math, English, and history who all work together to plan curriculum and give common assessments. Administering common assessments allows teachers to compare their results from each assessment in order to determine their own strengths and weaknesses and share best practices. With a focus on student learning rather than teaching, the mission of each school seeks to answer three questions: What do we want students to learn? How will we know when students have learned the required skills? How will we respond when students do not learn?

One way Earlywine answers the last question, is through the Response to Intervention (RTI) initiative. RTI is a systematic intervention in place at schools to assist students who are not making desired learning gains. RTI initially was implemented in Earlywine elementary schools, but now has moved to secondary schools as well. In middle school, State Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) exam scores guide placement decisions for students in need of remediation. For example, students who did not pass their reading or math OCCT in middle school will be placed in an additional hour of math or reading during the school day in place of an elective. Students receive intense targeted interventions and are given weekly formative assessments. Each student's progress is discussed by administrators and teachers in bi-monthly or monthly RTI meetings to ensure the plan for each student is meeting his or her needs.

Earlywine stays ahead of changing educational philosophies. Upon hearing that common core state standards were adopted in Oklahoma three years ago, Earlywine developed a detailed and gradual implementation plan. Changes were made to the curriculum to reflect teaching the current PASS standards in addition to the new common core standards so that when full implementation was scheduled to take place in August 2014, students and teachers would be ready. Curriculum consultants started the process of training teachers and finding resources for teachers to use and administrators planned professional development sessions for teachers. As described previously, Oklahoma rejected common core standards in May 2014 and asked schools to revert to using the PASS standards until new standards were created over the following two years. The Earlywine superintendent released a letter to the community addressing concerns:

Quite frankly, though, PASS content alone is insufficient in content, depth, and rigor to prepare students to be college or career ready upon graduation from high school...It's easy to understand how some schools have been placed in somewhat of a quandary as we seek to function in ways that best meet the needs of our young people...Our rigorous Advanced Placement courses, from curriculum content to instructional practices, even prior to CCSS, per se, were and remain quite consistent with the direction established by CCSS. We will not abandon that path.

While Earlywine agreed to follow all laws set forth by Oklahoma and to make changes accordingly, the plan going into the 2014-2015 school year is to continue teaching the combined PASS and common core curriculum.

Earlywine created the "Start Here, Stay Here" initiative to attract beginning teachers to the district. Central office staff hosted a Graduating Seniors Teachers Reception for education majors from nearby universities in an effort to recruit them. Approximately 90 graduating seniors registered, with about 80 teachers attending. Door prizes included a home theater system, gift cards to local restaurants, and other prizes donated by local businesses. In the opening remarks, the superintendent shared the district's mission and vision and also indicated that there were

multiple retirements and multiple vacancies in the district for the upcoming school year. The Executive Director of Secondary Education commented that the teacher candidate pool is as shallow as it has been and that she felt like this reception was similar to “sorority rush”. An administrator from each school was present and sitting at the tables with the graduating seniors. For the remainder of the evening, topics were posed for tables to discuss such as preparing resumes and tips for getting an interview.

District Programs

Two programs, Rachel’s Challenge and Bright Beginnings, are district initiatives being implemented in each of the two school sites in this study.

Rachel’s Challenge. Rachel Scott was the first student killed in the Colorado Columbine High School shooting in 1999. Rachel was a kind-hearted, compassionate, and reflective young girl who was determined to help change the world. She kept a journal and in the journal she had written five challenges, or goals, for how everyone should strive to live their lives: “Look for the best in others, treat others the way you want to be treated, choose positive influences, speak words of kindness, and forgive yourself and others.” Shortly before her death, Rachel wrote, “I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People will never know how far a little kindness can go” (Rachelschallenge.org). This program, which has been shared with over 21 million people all over the United States in schools and businesses, is designed to tell her story and pass on her challenges of kindness and treating others with love and respect. Earlywine received a grant and implemented Rachel’s Challenge in each of the five middle schools. Students attend a school-wide presentation of Rachel’s life and describe the challenges to the students and then have the opportunity to sign a large banner accepting the challenges. Students can be part of the Friends of Rachel clubs whose goals are to design ways for students to demonstrate kindness and compassion.

Bright Beginnings. Bright Beginnings is a district-wide program to support first-year teachers. Prior to school starting, Earlywine hosts two introductory professional development days at the administrative center to introduce first-year teachers to the district’s mission, vision, and purpose. In addition, central office staff and curriculum consultants present important topics such as professionalism, teacher evaluations, PLCs, and classroom management tips. After these two introductory days, curriculum consultants and assistant principals plan monthly meetings throughout the remainder of the school year. Topics of these meetings include parent-teacher communication and grading, classroom management and PLCs, resources and strategies for special needs students, differentiated instruction, instructional strategies that work, preparing for state assessments, and end of year celebrations and reflections.

Table 2 shows the attendance from the 2013-2014 school year broken down by middle school and high school attendance. Of the 37 total secondary teachers, 12 were first-year middle school teachers, and 25 were first-year high school teachers.

Table 2

Bright Beginnings Attendance 2013-2014

		Sep	Oct	Nov	Jan	Feb	March	April
Middle School Attendance	# of Attendees (12 total)	4	5	2	2	1	0	0
	Percentage	33%	42%	17%	17%	8%	0%	0%
High School Attendance	# of Attendees (25 total)	13	15	18	10	15	7	8
	Percentage	52%	60%	72%	40%	60%	28%	32%
Overall Secondary Attendance	# of Attendees (37 total)	17	20	20	12	16	7	8
	Percentage	46%	54%	54%	32%	43%	19%	22%

As shown in Table 2, attendance at bright beginnings declined throughout the school year, even reaching 0% attendance at the middle school level the last two sessions.

Administrators do not keep track of attendance, but are sent an email encouraging them to remind their staff to attend. While both administrators interviewed in this study described this as a great

program, the beginning teachers interviewed had mixed feelings. Beginning teachers felt that some topics were beneficial, although others did not necessarily apply to them or were topics that they had just learned about in school. Instead of covering so many formalized topics in the program, beginning teachers preferred more time to connect and have conversations with one another, like the two English teachers described in this scene:

Scene Two: Conversation between Two First-Year English Teachers

The final bright beginnings session took place on April 30, 2014. Due to a mix-up on times, four first-year teachers arrived an hour early. These four particular teachers had attended every bright beginnings sessions, and two ninth-grade English teachers, from two different schools, used this extra time to exchange instructional strategies on teaching their Shakespeare Unit.

Teacher 1: "How are you completing the reading? I'm getting so bored, and I know the kids must be too."

Teacher 2: "We do a mixture of listening to the audio tape and then students' taking turns reading sections."

Teacher 1: "That's a good idea, because I think the students are tired of the audio, we will try that. And how are you showing the video? Are you waiting until the end and showing the whole thing, or reading and act, and watching an act?"

Teacher 2: "We are reading an act, and watching an act."

Teacher 1: "That's what we are doing too. We just did our 'Shakespeare Day' today and it was a blast, even though I'm cold and tired now!"

Teacher 2: "What all did you do for that?"

Teacher 1: "We had all kinds of activities set up on the football field for all of our English classes. We had a jousting section, archery, dancing, and fencing replica. The [local newspaper] came out and took pictures which the kids thought was really fun."

Teacher 2: “We should do something like that, our kids would love that and it would be such a fun way to end the unit.”

Teacher 1: “Here is a copy of the punch card we gave the kids, and for each completed activity, we gave them a hole punch, similar to Super Kids’ Day in elementary school. Even the kids who are usually ‘too cool for school’ got into it.” [See Appendix H for a photograph of the punch card.]

The English curriculum consultant arrived and come over to discuss benchmark issues with the English teachers. Mary did not receive a copy of the benchmarks resulting in her not giving the test. After the curriculum consultant left, their conversation continued.

Teacher 1: “We were told not to do Shakespeare Day this year [motioning towards consultant], even though they’ve done it the past four years, because there wasn’t any time in the curriculum.”

Teacher 2: “Time must be made for that in the curriculum - that is the best form of learning. When they kids look back on their year, they won’t say, I remember taking turns reading, they will talk about the events of Shakespeare Day.”

At the conclusion of the last bright beginnings session, which included elementary and secondary first-year teachers, was a quick cell phone survey with results immediately posted on a screen. Teachers were only allowed to select one response per question. The first question asked what was the most valuable part of Bright Beginnings with the two top responses being sharing ideas and hearing from experienced teachers. Another question posed asked teachers what they thought would be the most effective professional development for future first-year teachers. Overwhelmingly, the top response was to have more classroom observations of experienced teachers, instead of meeting before, during or after school for bright beginnings.

District Funding

Earlywine has strong parental and community support as demonstrated through the passage of 54 consecutive bond issues over the past 54 years. Many of the bond issues pay for

structural renovations of school sites and for adding additional classrooms to schools. Earlywine has a non-profit foundation whose sole purpose is to raise money from local businesses and provide grants to teachers and programs directly benefiting students. One year, the Foundation awarded 81 teachers full or partial funding for their requests totaling \$90,000. The grants support a wide range of initiatives for improving student achievement including: classroom response systems, calculators, a kiln for a high school classroom, digital and document cameras, professional development programs such as “Literacy First” training for pre-kindergarten teachers, and trauma and grief seminars for school counselors.

Even though Earlywine benefits financially from the community and the Foundation, it is still not enough to cover the expenses associated with operating such a large district. Overseeing the operations of the entire district are seven people with job titles as follows: superintendent, associate superintendent of educational services, executive director of general administration, executive director of elementary education, executive director of secondary education, executive director human resources, and a chief financial officer. Earlywine demonstrates fiscal responsibility through having such a small administrative staff for a district of over 25,000 students and staff, not including parents and community. Further, 95% of the district operations budget is allocated for payroll related costs. With the current funding crisis at the state level, Earlywine is facing a budget shortfall of \$4 million for the upcoming school year, resulting in the potential need to reduce personnel and programs.

Schools, teachers, and students will be impacted by reduced personnel through increased class sizes with already limited space. Earlywine middle schools are currently overcrowded creating large class sizes, and the upcoming years will only be worse with less funding. A sixth middle school was scheduled to be opened in 2015-2016 to help alleviate the number of students in the middle schools; however, due to funding, the elementary schools currently under construction could not be finished on time causing construction of the new middle school to be

pushed back a couple of years. Again, Earlywine is growing by approximately 600 students each year, so even more students will be in these overloaded middle schools in upcoming years.

Education at the Local Level

Nation Middle School

History and Mission

Nation was the very first middle school in Earlywine Public Schools opening in 1976. Ten years later, the campus turned into another high school site for the district, and Nation opened a new site in the northeast section of Earlywine. To accommodate the continued growth in the district, the school expanded in 2009 to include eight new classrooms and a completely remodeled and larger media center. Included in the eight new classrooms were two additional science lab classrooms and two new computer labs.

The mission statement for Nation is, “Together we will nurture our infinite talents and encourage our potential for growth by supporting sincere, quality endeavors and celebrating success” (Fifth Grade Parent Night Handout). While the mission statement cannot be found on the school website, the more prominent school motto found throughout the school is, “Learn like a Champion Today.” This motto can be seen posted on walls, hanging from the ceilings with banners, on the front page of the school website, and shared from the administrators to students on morning announcements. Posted on the front page of the school website is Nation’s goal:

Our goal is to assist students to make a positive transition from elementary school, through middle school, and into high school. During the middle school years, the teaching staff will provide educational experiences that will emphasize basic skills in an environment structured to maximize learning. In addition to academic endeavors, students will have opportunities to make new friends and participate in a variety of age-appropriate activities. It is our hope that all students will become involved positively in

our school and in its activities. It is also our desire that students will take pride in the school and promote positive feelings.

One of the prominent principals of Nation, who was principal for 20 of the 38 years the school has been open, had an immense love for reading. He wanted to share his passion for reading with the staff and students so it became a Nation tradition to have famous authors visit the school at the end of each school year. The English classes read books by the famous author and have classroom discussions and projects. The art classes create and paint a very large banner, approximately five foot by ten foot, representing the cover of a book written by the author. When the author visits, it is a tradition that he or she signs the banner. Approximately 25 authors have visited the school over the years and this visit is always highly anticipated by staff and students.

School Setting

Nation is located in the more affluent, northeastern section of the district. While this area of the city is known for being wealthy, it also encompasses apartments, a trailer park area, and several old and run down houses. Because this area was part of the initial establishment of the district, it is located very close to the original downtown area for the city before the rapid expansion took place. The houses located closer to downtown are much smaller and older, whereas the houses to the north, where the city expanded, are much larger and newer. The majority of the student population served by Nation is located in the northern section.

Nation employs one head principal, three assistant principals, 72 teachers, and 18 support staff to serve just over 1300 students. The student population consists of 78% White, seven percent Hispanic or Latino, four percent Asian, three percent Black, two percent American Indian or Alaska Native, and six percent other. Ten percent of the students in the school are classified as needing special education services. Just over one percent of the students are classified as English language learners, and 15% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

High attendance rates, at 96%, contributed to Nation scoring an A on the A-F report cards released for the 2012-2013 school year. Schools are awarded up to ten bonus points on factors

such as attendance rate, dropout rate, and advanced coursework, and Nation received all ten bonus points. While Nation's overall student growth grade received a 91, their overall bottom quartile growth grade received a 72. Nation is a high-performing middle school, in academics, athletics, and extracurricular activities, and has achieved National Blue Ribbon status. During the 2013-2014 school year, Nation won the academic team state championship, had an undefeated football season, and claimed the titles for conference champions in tennis, golf, baseball, and cross country. Also, students won writing competitions at the state level and traveled in the summer to the national competition.

School and Team Structure. Nation Middle school serves students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and subscribes to the middle school teaming concept. Students within each grade level are divided among teams of teachers who teach five core subjects to include: English, math, history, science, and either literature or Spanish. Literature and Spanish are each one semester in length and all students take these courses each year. The literature class emphasizes reading and writing skills. Due to Nation's large student population, each grade level consists of three full core academic teams of teachers.

In addition to the five core subjects, students are able to choose two electives. Electives offered at Nation include physical education, vocal music, band, orchestra, enrichment, family and consumer sciences, technology literacy, I Teach, drama, multimedia exploration, FOCUS, Around The World, publications, and a variety of visual arts courses. FOCUS is an elective that is assigned to students if they do not pass the state English or math Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test. Students in FOCUS receive an additional hour of instruction from one of their five core academic team teachers in the areas of reading and math.

Physical Structure. Nation is a physically appealing building and kept in very good condition given the age of the building. Outside doors leading into the building remain locked and secure throughout the school day, and visitors entering the building must page the front office secretary to be granted access. Once inside the building, visitors must use their driver's license to

sign in on a secure automated system that conducts a quick background check. A nametag with a photo image is printed for the visitor to wear throughout the building. Located inside this office is the head principal's office.

After exiting the front office, the doors open to the rest of the school building. On the immediate left is the school media center with clear windows wrapping around the inside of the building. Hanging on the walls of the media center are several author banners painted by students and signed by famous authors. A photograph of the media center and banners is shown in Appendix H. Directly across from the library is an overpass that leads to the other main office in the building. Assistant principals, counselors, attendance secretaries, the school psychologist, and a school nurse fill these offices. This is the main area for teacher gatherings for team or parent meetings in the conference room, eating together in the faculty lunchroom, or working together in the workroom. Below the overpass leading to these offices is a tunnel that connects the sixth and seventh grade hallways to the gym or other elective classrooms.

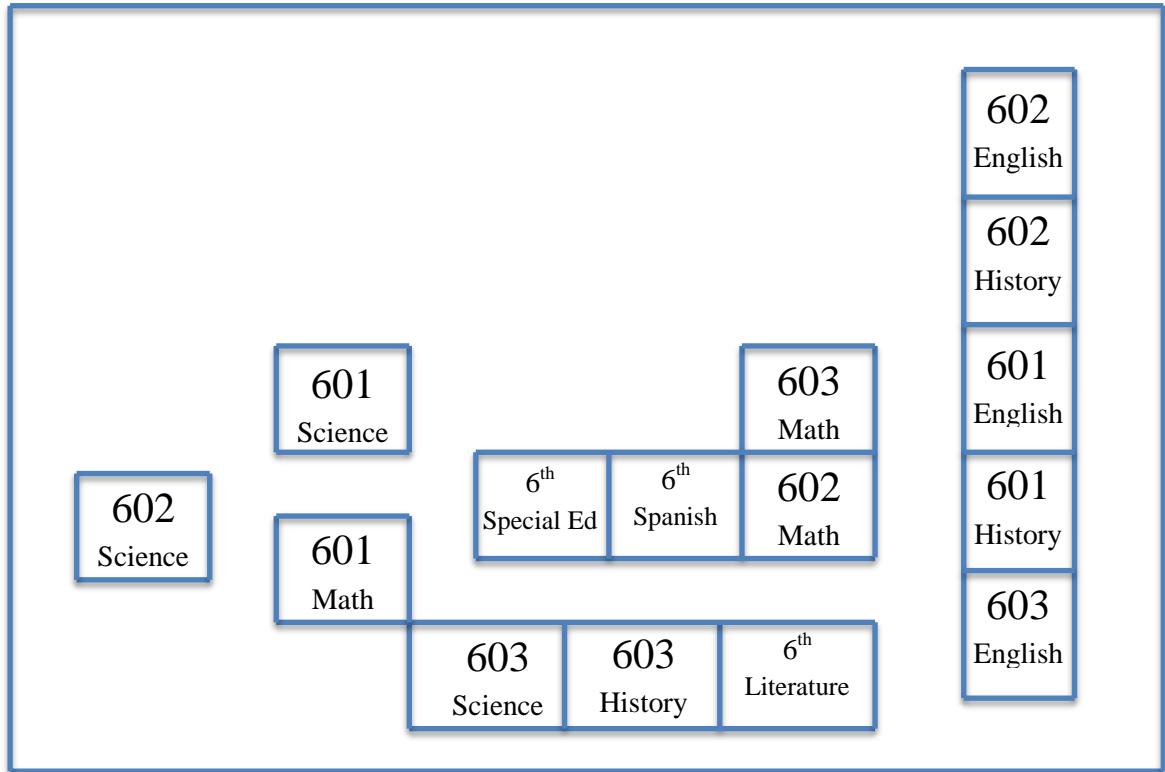
In previous years, when students would pass through the tunnel connecting the sixth and seventh grade halls to the gym and eighth grade hall, it was a game to try and jump and touch the entrance to the tunnel. Upon seeing this, the principal had the school motto, "Learn Like a Champion Today", printed on a metal sign and hung at the entrance. It is now a Nation tradition for the students to jump and hit the sign as they go through the tunnel. Several students, probably eighth graders, are able to jump and successfully hit the sign; others, give it their best effort and fall short just a couple of inches. See Appendix H for a photograph of the tunnel with the sign hanging above the entrance.

Grade levels are separated throughout the rest of the building into their own sections. The sixth grade classrooms are located in the southwest corner, the seventh grade classrooms are just north of the sixth grade rooms, and eighth grade classrooms are located on the opposite end of the building above the tunnel. Elective classrooms are dispersed all throughout the building in all hallways and mainly along the far north side of the building. Two portables are located

outside and are closest to the gym and eighth grade classrooms. An example of the layout of the sixth grade hallway is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Sixth Grade Hallway at Nation



Classrooms with 601 represent one of the sixth grade core teams of academic teachers. Teams and subjects are not located next to each other. Team 602 is the most spread out from one corner to the other. Classrooms shown on the far right side of this figure, and the three classrooms along the bottom row all have outside windows. One teacher mentioned that there was no set pattern to the way the teams and subject areas were arranged, but rather when a room opened, due to a teacher leaving, with windows, other teachers seized the opportunity to move to a room with a better view.

Hallways in this building are narrow and winding, especially considering the number of students filling the hallways each day. Student artwork, class projects and assignments line all of the hallways in the building. The school motto, "Learn Like a Champion Today" is clearly

visible throughout the building. Due to state testing in April, many posters hang in the hallways with encouraging and motivational phrases. One poster had a picture of bacon and eggs with a reminder to eat a good breakfast on test day. See Appendix H for photographs of these banners.

Meeting Structure. Several different meetings occur at Nation. Team meetings are held weekly, during teachers' planning periods, for the core subject teachers with the intentions of discussing struggling students and any student issue on that team. Teachers exchange strategies for how they deal with problematic students because sometimes a student causes problems for one teacher and not another. Administrators, and occasionally counselors, are present during these meetings.

Weekly PLC meetings are expected among common subject areas within each grade level. For example, sixth grade has three math teachers, so these teachers meet each week to discuss curriculum and teaching strategies. It is an expectation that they teach the same topics each day and give common assessments. The purpose of common assessments is for teachers to be able to discuss their teaching strengths and weaknesses. Once a month, the district curriculum consultant and an administrator are present at these meetings. The curriculum consultant provides new teaching resources or discusses the district benchmark results.

Monthly faculty meetings take place in the media center. Student and teacher recognition are the focus of these short meetings that occur before school. Response to Intervention meetings occur monthly with the purposes of using data to discuss student progress as well as individual strategies that may need to be implemented. Other meetings that are not on a weekly or monthly schedule include parent meetings, teacher evaluation pre-conference or post-conference meetings, and staffing meetings to discuss a potential student being classified as in need of special education services.

Participant Profiles

Interview participants for this study included three teachers and one administrator from Nation. Of the three teachers interviewed, two were beginning teachers, Lauren and Jacob, in

their second years of teaching, and one was a veteran teacher, Melanie, with eight years of experience. Only two beginning teachers responded to the initial email seeking participants for the study. Fortunately, only two were necessary. The administrator interviewed, Mr. White, is the head principal at Nation.

Lauren. Lauren is a beginning teacher in her second year of teaching. She worked in a different field for many years before deciding that she ultimately wanted to become a teacher. Being from a Hispanic background, she chose to enter the teaching profession, in part, to share her culture with students. Intending to experience the entire benefit of the teacher education program at a nearby university, she obtained full teacher certification to teach Spanish education. When asked if the teacher education program helped prepare her for teaching, her response was that she didn't feel like the program could ever prepare beginning teachers for what would be experienced in the classroom that first year. All three of her children went through Nation, so she was already familiar with the school from a parental standpoint. Currently, she is teaching sixth, seventh, and eighth grade Spanish in one of the two portables on campus. She does not have any additional responsibilities outside of her teaching position.

Jacob. Jacob is a beginning teacher who obtained full teacher certification in history education from a nearby university, the same university as Lauren. He completed his student teaching requirements in the fall of 2011 at one of the three high schools in Earlywine Public Schools. The following semester, spring 2012, Jacob covered a long-term substitute position, in the same high school where he student taught, for a teacher whose dad passed away during first semester. He described this as a very difficult introductory teaching experience, "I was thrown into a fire, I was in a classroom that wasn't even really mine...I kinda just got tossed in that situation and the room was cluttered, and I couldn't make it my own" (Jacob, interview, April 28, 2014). The next school year, the other teacher returned and Jacob got a job at Nation teaching seventh grade history. This is his second full year of teaching at Nation. In addition to his

teaching responsibilities, he coaches volleyball, junior varsity boys' basketball, and baseball. He also has lunch duty every day.

Melanie. Melanie is a veteran teacher in her eighth year of teaching, all of which have been at Nation. She felt very fortunate to be hired straight out of college to teach at this school and she indicated that she had no intentions of leaving Nation. Melanie's mother, father, and brother are all accountants; however, her mother has served on a neighboring district's school board for 17 years. Melanie saw the value in what her mother was doing and decided to join the teaching profession. She changed her major three times within the education department, but ultimately gained her teaching certification in English. Her husband is a band teacher at Nation as well and both enjoy being very involved in the activities within the school. Melanie is one of the sixth grade team leaders, she serves on the principal's advisory committee, she coaches the academic team, and runs the after school drama program. When asked to describe the school, part of her response was, "It's a great school to be at...it's one of those schools where there's no reason for us to ever leave" (Melanie, interview, May 21, 2014).

Mr. White. Mr. White is the head principal of Nation and is currently completing his third year in that position. Prior to this job, he was an assistant principal for three years, and head principal for three more years at a nearby district. Important to understanding his perspective of Nation's culture is the knowledge that his administrative experience at the nearby district included more diversity, lower socioeconomic status, and more behavior problems than his current position. He wanted to become an administrator so that he could influence more people than he could as a teacher. Mr. White had been in the classroom for several years and had the opportunity to develop great relationships with his students and then realized he was ready to take the next step and become an administrator.

Table 3

Participant Profile Summary – Nation

Name	Age	Position	Years teaching/admin experience	Years at Nation	College Major	Additional School Responsibilities
Lauren	46	6 th , 7 th , 8 th grade Spanish teacher	2	2	Spanish Education	None.
Jacob	25	7 th grade history teacher	2.5	2	History Education	Assistant volleyball coach, Head JV basketball coach, Assistant baseball coach, lunch duty
Melanie	30	6 th grade English, social studies	8	8	Elementary Education	Academic team coach, principal's advisory committee, team leader
Mr. White	37	Head Principal	9	3	N/A	N/A

People and Interactions

Leadership. Nation's leadership team consists of one head principal and three assistant principals. Each of the three assistant principals is assigned to a grade level to handle discipline needs and team meetings. Assistant principals rotate through the grade levels each year, meaning the principal assigned to sixth grade last year, will move up to seventh grade next year. Nation has three counselors, and again, each is assigned to a grade level and they move through the grades with the students.

Administrative Influence. Prior to the state education rally at the capital, he hosted a voluntary educational meeting for teachers to help explain issues currently confronting education at the state level. He chose to meet with the teachers because of the misinformation that gets passed along in media, to describe the situation, and to inform them of how it affected their educational practices. Seven veteran teachers and one beginning teacher attended. During a faculty meeting, he gave a legislative update with information that the horizontal drilling tax,

which would increase educational funding, was up for discussion. He wanted the staff to know that it was “not all doom and gloom [and that] positive steps are being made” (Mr. White, speech, April 25, 2014).

Mr. White described that he communicates his vision and values to the staff through doing his best to lead by example. He admitted that leading by example during stressful times is not always easy and that he may not be as open or outgoing as he should be. He described himself as an introvert and that he must ignore that part of his personality and “put on a show when [he’s] at work” (Mr. White, interview, May 20, 2014). Another way he communicates his vision and values to the staff is through a newsletter. Information he shares in the newsletter could be related to teaching philosophies, recognitions, professional development opportunities, and other general information. In a newsletter sent to faculty on May 8, 2014, he explained the philosophy and reasoning behind the grading system. With semester exams approaching, he emphasized that grades are weighted and the test and quiz category accounts for 60% of the student’s overall grade. If a teacher does not have very many grades in that category, a low test score can have detrimental effects to a student’s average in a class. He also reminded teachers of the importance of creating meaningful lessons the last two weeks of school.

Mr. White described his teaching staff as competent, nurturing, caring, and nice (Mr. White, interview, May 20, 2014). Kevin Durant was the recipient of the National Basketball Association’s Most Valuable Player, and in his acceptance speech, he recognized each team member individually for their contributions to the team. While watching the speech, Mr. White thought about the staff and how he could relate to the team analogy, “You [staff] each bring something special to this team, and I am thankful for having the opportunity to work here in this organization” (Mr. White, newsletter, May 8, 2014).

While Mr. White thinks very highly of his staff, he also believes that some have the tendency to be a little spoiled. Due to his previous administrative experience being in a different district, his perception is that, “A lot of our teachers really don’t know how good they have it”

(Mr. White, interview, May 20, 2014). Describing the teaching experiences of beginning teachers and teachers who have only taught at Nation, Mr. White stated:

Our teachers have never been cussed out by a student, our teachers have never had a student physically intimidate them, our teachers have never had to deal with gang violence, or those different types of aspects. And our teachers can come and they can teach...by and large kids are going to do what teachers are telling them to do, and the teachers, in a lot of ways, don't have to have any masterful skill to get them to do that.

(Interview, May 20, 2014)

Administrative Interactions with Beginning Teachers. Mr. White had good intentions for supporting beginning teachers, but did not always follow through with initiatives or programs. Mentor teachers are assigned to first-year teachers at the beginning of the year, but Mr. White admitted that they have not grown the program the way he intended. When asked about support provided to beginning teachers, Mr. White's responses included, "Next year, we are going to try to get some shadowing opportunities...next year we are partnering with a university to train mentors...next year, that's something we're looking to grow" (Interview, May 20, 2014). Melanie serves on the principal's advisory committee, and she indicated that providing better support to beginning teachers had been a topic during one of the meetings.

Mr. White and Melanie both mentioned the lack of support resulting from elimination of the state residency program. However, Mr. White believes that Nation does a really good job providing support to beginning teachers prior to school starting. All beginning teachers come a day earlier than the rest of the staff to get acquainted with the school mission, vision, gradebook, and general procedures. Jacob described these days as very beneficial, "It was nice, I was able to kind of breathe, get shown around the place, get shown the ropes and get set up as well as I could so I didn't crash and burn on my first day" (Jacob, interview, April 28, 2014). Mr. White acknowledged that there were no specific supports or follow-up days for beginning teachers after the first day.

Mr. White recognizes that beginning teachers struggle with classroom management, and both beginning teachers interviewed at Nation mentioned having difficulties in this area during their first-year. Mr. White described how classroom management affected instructional ability, because if beginning teachers cannot get students to do what they want them to do, classroom instruction is irrelevant. He has seen several teachers enter the profession and struggle with classroom management and unrealistic expectations. When asked what is done in this situation to assist the beginning teacher, Mr. White's response was:

I'm pretty connected with the teacher leaders in the building, so when somebody is struggling, it will weave its way back to me and it will be like they really are having a hard time, and that's when the administrator will get into the classroom, they'll kind of watch things, they'll make tweaks or they will give a lot of advice to the new folks.

(Interview, May 20, 2014)

This approach suggests a reactive rather than proactive approach; the administrators wait until a beginning teacher is struggling before they enter the classroom to provide feedback and advice.

Lauren and Jacob described differing perceptions of administrative support. Lauren mentioned the difficulties of classroom management and felt that she received excellent support from administrators whenever she had any issues or problems. She felt like there was always someone she could go to for help. Jacob, on the other hand, did not feel supported, specifically in the area of classroom management. He found a professional development opportunity for classroom management and asked Mr. White if he could attend. Mr. White declined his request due to funding costs.

Administrators interact with beginning teachers through teacher evaluations as well; and again, Lauren and Jacob have opposing viewpoints in this area. Jacob described the evaluation as just another process for administrators because they have so many evaluations to make and such little time to complete them. Jacob preferred that the administrators come by his classroom more often and make their presence known, instead of only coming in for assigned evaluations.

Lauren, in contrast, felt that the teacher evaluation process allowed time for conversations to happen and time to discuss her specific teaching strengths and weaknesses. She felt supported through the evaluations and appreciated the feedback, especially feedback on how she could improve.

Mr. White provided three anonymous beginning teacher evaluations, and all include detailed information regarding the educational practices of beginning teachers. When a four or five is given on the evaluation, the administrator must provide a short narrative explaining why that score was earned. Mr. White is generous in giving fours and fives, so his evaluations include descriptive information with regards to instructional practices of beginning teachers. Most comments on the evaluations described teacher strengths, but Mr. White commends and acknowledges progress as well, “[Beginning teacher] has shown great improvement in the area of explaining directions and providing instructions for transitions, for example, setting a time expectation for getting into pairs” (Beginning teacher evaluation). In addition to specific feedback, he provides suggestions for improvement:

I would also like to see the PLC process between the teachers become more structured.

Be consistent with set meetings that address common assessments, future lessons, what students are doing well on, what they need to improve on, and developing ideas/plans as teachers to address those needs. (Beginning teacher evaluation)

This allows beginning teachers to know what is expected of them as well as ways to improve their educational practices.

Faculty. When asked to describe the culture of the school, the three teacher participants interviewed provided very different perspectives. Melanie described how the culture had changed drastically in the eight years she has taught at Nation, due to the change in administration and staff. When she was first hired, the principal had been in his position for 20 years and he indicated that 70% of the staff was eligible for retirement at her interview. Upon the

principal's retirement, several other teachers retired as well, and a younger principal and staff replaced them.

Jacob noticed the division of ages among the staff as well and suggested that the difference in age contributed to the lack of communication that takes place among staff at Nation, "The communication between teachers, it's just not very much...it really depends on age. The younger teachers will communicate with each other and the older teachers will just kind of go about their business and communicate here or there" (Jacob, interview, April 28, 2014). Jacob described that the staff was not conjoined as a group and that the overall energy of the school needed improvement. He explained the trickle effect that takes place when teachers are not energized to teach, which results in students not being energized to learn.

Jacob and Melanie both appreciate the teaching environment at Nation and recognize that they do not have the issues usually associated with lower-income schools. They also both mentioned the limited interactions between grade levels and staff. Melanie described that each grade level had a good culture, but there was not much interaction across the entire school. She wished she had the time or opportunity to build relationships with other teachers in the building. Jacob attributed the limited interactions to high job demands and being in the classroom nonstop. Mr. White indicated that at the beginning of the year, the staff had formed five or six different groups such as a Bunco group, book group, and prayer group so they would have a chance to interact outside of the school environment. However, Melanie said those were signups that took place at the beginning of the year and the groups maybe met once.

In contrast, Lauren compared the culture of Nation to the feeling of family because of how the staff pulls together during tragedies or celebrations. When the teachers learned that another faculty member had a recurring cancer that required multiple surgeries, they organized a fundraiser to help her with medical costs. Celebrations are organized by the staff for baby showers, retirements, and holidays. Prior to the school year, a teacher hosts a welcome back barbeque lunch for the entire faculty at his house, and another teacher hosts a Christmas party at

her house. Lauren acknowledged that because of teaching in the portable, she does not get the full scope of the school culture. Alluding to teachers gossiping about other teachers, she described that because she teaches all three grade levels, she does not really belong to a certain group. She explained how she tried to go to the lunchroom to strike a conversation, but often times there were only a couple of people in the lunchroom and she was unsuccessful in her attempts. She admitted that it was awkward and easier to just stay in her room during lunch.

The faculty recognizes one another during monthly faculty meetings with the “tireless award”, which is an old bicycle wheel, decorated with rhinestones and ribbons and is intended for those who go above and beyond in their work daily. Teachers pass the award to one another throughout the year and the previous month’s recipient presents the award to another teacher with a short speech describing what qualities and characteristics contributed to his or her selection. At the last faculty meeting of the year, the teacher presenting the award described that there were several teachers in the building who deserved the award and that it was a difficult decision to make. She chose a teacher who she described as committed to students, always seen helping students in her classroom before and after school, and who consistently displayed a positive and energetic attitude.

Teacher Frustrations. Scene Three portrays the common topics of discussion during a weekly team meeting in April. Instead of discussing student progress, the two main topics of discussion were state initiatives and logistics of state testing procedures.

Scene Three: Eighth Grade Team Meeting at Nation

During their weekly scheduled team meeting time, the eighth grade teachers gathered around the conference room table. In attendance was the assistant principal, Mrs. Bowman, four core teachers, and one student teacher. Due to the time of year, commonly referred to as “testing season”, the first topic on the agenda was discussing logistics of the upcoming testing schedules and procedures.

Mrs. Bowman: "We just received word that we are going to be conducting a field test on May 1st. We will test students through the history classes and will do one day only, there will be no make-up testing. Also on May 1st, we will be conducting roster verifications, required by the state department for testing, during your planning period."

Teachers quickly jotted down all this information in their planner and then moved on to discussing student concerns.

English teacher: "I now have way less students failing since they turned in their missing projects!"

History teacher: "Please keep an eye on Sam because his parents are going through a divorce. He has had multiple absences and I've noticed that he has started gravitating towards negative influences and is starting to act out more in class."

Science teacher: "I have noticed him acting out as well, thank you for that information."

Mrs. Bowman: "Moving on to the next topic, we just learned that kids' test scores will account for 50% of the teacher evaluation score."

All teachers collectively and quickly voiced their frustration and shock at such a high number.

History teacher: "That is extremely high, and I don't know how all of my students are going to pass the test. I have done my absolute best."

Math teacher: "That doesn't even seem fair."

Mrs. Bowman: "We agree that it isn't fair. How do we evaluate non-tested subjects, such as band and PE? Where does their score come from? Another example is that what if a math teacher has all the lower-level, prep classes, while another math teacher has the upper-level classes. It's not fair to the teacher who has the lower-level classes to have his teacher evaluation score affected based on student test scores. Oh well, they can't fire us all!"

History teacher: "I'm just glad I work in this district and school now, my scores in my last school would be WAY worse!"

Teachers at Nation feel the pressure from the state department, which leads to feeling pressure from and frustrations with administrators. Melanie indicated that she was not alone in her feelings that the administration has very high expectations of teachers. She also suggested that the high expectations stemmed from things that were, “coming down the pipes” (Interview, May 21, 2014). When asked how the school defined success, Melanie replied that it was unfortunate that success at her school was tied to student test scores, state testing and the A-F report card scores, in large part because of the competitive nature of Mr. White. Mr. White often compared Nation’s test scores with other middle schools in the district.

Teachers were also unhappy with the lack of visibility and accountability by the administration. Melanie acknowledged that administrators were busy and had overloaded schedules; however, she was still frustrated, “I feel like you could go weeks without seeing the administrators...I have had one walk through all year, and I don’t know if they are checking up on people who are new” (Interview, May 21, 2014). Jacob confirmed her feelings and likewise wished that administrators would come by his room more often. Melanie commented on the lack of accountability for their PLC meetings as well as mentor teachers. When asked how information is communicated in the school, Melanie responded that communication is one of Nation’s biggest issues due to the lack of communication between administrators and teachers. She described the frustrations felt by teachers when administrators send an email discussing a problem to the entire staff that should have only been addressed to a few teachers. Melanie said that communication is the main complaint among teachers.

Jacob was overwhelmed with the amount of communication that takes place through email, and the expectation by administrators and parents for quick responses, “They want you to be on top of your emails and email, email, email, well, when you’re teaching a class, lesson planning, and grading, emails are just filtered in there and it’s hard to keep up with communication” (Jacob, interview, April 28, 2014). Jacob had mixed feelings on team meetings. Because he struggled to stay up with emails, he found them to be informational. He found that

meetings were also beneficial because they could discuss strategies for specific students; however, he did not like the amount of meetings, often two to three meetings per week. Melanie seconded his feelings, “I think that that’s any teacher’s complaint, is that you give them a planning period and then a lot of times it’s dictated of what you can do with it” (Interview, May 21, 2014). Lauren does not belong to a certain grade level or team, so she does not attend these meetings due to her teaching schedule conflicting with meeting times.

Interactions with Beginning Teachers. Beginning teachers interact with faculty in multiple ways. Prior to school starting, they are assigned to a mentor teacher, generally a teacher who teaches the same subject. Due to the elimination of the state program and reduced district funds, mentor teachers are not paid. Mr. White indicated that several teachers on the staff leadership team showed interest in volunteering their time to be a mentor. He suggested that the team aspect was partly responsible, “I think they [teachers] recognize that if I’m on a team of teachers and this teacher over here is struggling, it’s only that much more work for the rest of us to manage behaviors and set expectations” (Mr. White, interview, May 20, 2014). Mr. White shows his appreciation to teachers who volunteer their time through giving them \$100 to spend on classroom supplies.

Lauren was assigned to another Spanish teacher in the building and felt that she could always go to her for questions. Conversely, Jacob was assigned to a mentor teacher but did not feel like she was someone he could trust. The first week of school, Jacob discussed a student issue with his mentor and shortly after, the student was asking Jacob why he was talking about him to other teachers. Jacob didn’t feel like he could go to her with any other issues for the rest of the year.

Beginning teachers interact with members of their team as well. Lauren is not even assigned to a team, so that interaction is irrelevant to her. She can attend any of the meetings if she has a specific student to discuss. Jacob, as described previously, just mentioned that the team meetings were beneficial to receive help with student concerns, but did not describe specific

interactions with other faculty members. Melanie described a beginning teacher in her grade level who struggled at first, but gave credit to her team for helping her know what was going on, how things are done at Nation, and what is expected of teachers.

Jacob and Lauren did not have similar experiences with the PLC team. Lauren did not receive a smartboard in her classroom until three weeks after school had already started. She received limited instruction during her university education program, but faculty members assisted her in learning to use the smartboard. Mark, another teacher in the building, assists with information technology needs in the building and he sent an instructional video to the staff. He also volunteered to host teacher trainings once a month after school and the first topic he covered was smartboard use. Lauren frequently interacts with Spanish teachers on her PLC team and they exchange lessons with each other.

When asked about how well the PLC teams work together across the school, Melanie's response was that as far as she could tell, the sixth grade teams work well together, but some of the other teams across the school did not. Jacob seemed to be on one of the teams that did not work well together. One team member has taught for eight or nine years and does not show interest in collaborating, while the other team member is younger and Jacob described their relationship to be a little better. Jacob will call the younger teacher on occasion to discuss current events that may affect their class, but other than that, little collaboration takes place among the team. PLC teams are expected to give common assessments but Jacob described that process as too time-consuming and unfair given the fact that they do not teach the topics in a similar depth and manner.

Students. Scene Four depicts the culture and behaviors of students at Nation.

Scene Four: Student Climate and Interactions at Nation

With just three days of school remaining, the front office at Nation was the place to be at 8:00 on Wednesday morning. Not only was textbook check-in taking place, but also the much-anticipated yearbooks were about to be released to students. The front office was a revolving

door checking students in who arrived late, parents bringing textbooks to students who left them at home, and parents bringing money for student yearbooks. Fielding all of the students and parents were the front office secretary and two office aides. What seemed likely to be chaotic and stressful was handled in a very positive and efficient manner.

Student Aide: "Welcome to Nation, how can I help you today?"

Parent: "I need this textbook delivered to my daughter, please."

Student Aide: "Sure thing, we will get right on that. Have a great day!"

Student Aide to Student: "Just sign your name right there and I will write you a pass to class. Enjoy your day!"

Student Aide to Student [student using crutches with a brace on his leg]: "Ouch! How are you feeling today? Just sign in and I will help you carry your things to class."

[Student aide takes books from student and opens the door to allow the student to go ahead with his crutches.]

Front Office Secretary to Student Aides: "We need to call the following students up to the office to speak with Mr. White."

The students are called to the front office for using their cell phones during class. Teachers noticed the cell phone use and turned them into Mr. White and the students had to visit with Mr. White before they could receive their phones. The first student enters his office and politely says, "You wanted to see me, sir"? Four students proceed to fill his office and as Mr. White is discussing the repercussions of using cell phones in class during the school day, one student is wiping away her tears. Mr. White gives the students their phones back, even though he told them the normal protocol is to have a parent pick them up, and all students express their gratitude and proceed with their day.

Student Climate. Students at Nation are polite and respectful, and that was the first thing Mr. White noticed upon becoming the principal, "I was named principal on May 2nd", so I got to spend two to three weeks here at the end of the year, and everybody was so nice, the kids were so

nice, and the staff was so nice” (Mr. White, interview, May 20, 2014). The previous scene was something I observed while waiting to interview Mr. White and my first impression was also how kind and polite the students were. Not only were the students respectful to parents, but also the interactions between the students demonstrated their care and concern for each other.

Mr. White attributed the politeness and kindness to the implementation of Rachel’s Challenge at Nation:

With our Rachel’s Challenge push, I think it’s going to be one of the kindest middle schools you see. I know this one is unlike any of the ones I’ve really spent a lot of time in. I mean the kids are nice to each other, the kids are respectful to their teachers, kids care about their education, and so the culture is that there’s an expectation of doing what we’re supposed to do, and we treat people the way they should be treated. (Mr. White, interview, May 20, 2014)

Students in all grade levels can choose to be part of the Friends of Rachel club. Each month, a school-wide meeting is held before school for students who choose to come. Mr. White said they always have good turnouts at these meetings and have even had as many as 200 students attend. On those days, students who have chosen to be part of the Friends of Rachel club have a meeting during lunch to either carry out or plan activities that will help others. There are six lunch periods at Nation, and usually two or three teachers volunteer to assist with this club and help guide the activities. Nation recently raised \$400 for the orphan animal rescue, and last year, the school collected money for the Moore tornado victims. Another activity chosen was to raise money and buy gas cards; a teacher walked students to the gas station where they gave random people the cards to help pay for gas. Something nice they did within the school was to write kind notes to students and slip them in random lockers.

In January of this school year, a sixth grade student passed away suddenly from cancer. Students created t-shirts and sold them as a fundraiser for the family. The t-shirts were blue and throughout the second semester, students would have “Remembering Ricky” days where the all

students and staff would wear blue. Through this tragedy, the student body at Nation came together to demonstrate their care and concern and to remember the life of their friend and classmate.

Students are generally well behaved and seem to want to be in school. Jacob indicated that this is a very easy school to teach at and appreciated that he could focus on lesson planning and teaching. He acknowledged the positive behavior of students, “You don’t have to worry about, am I going to have to make bathroom runs to make sure students aren’t clogging the toilets or smoking cigarettes...so you can worry about the classroom and what you’re going to teach” (Jacob, interview, April 28, 2014). Mr. White commended the students on their extremely low suspension rate, with 17 total suspensions in a school of 1300 students with 180 school days.

Student Incentives and Rewards. Scene Five portrays a student of the month recognition ceremony held at Nation.

Scene Five: Student of the Month Recognition Ceremony

Bright and early Friday morning on April 25, 2014, teachers were exchanging pleasantries and joking with each other, as their last faculty meeting for the year was about to begin. Mr. White mentioned a few quick topics to staff before students of the month were to be recognized in front of administrators, teachers, media center specialists, counselors, and parents. After the short faculty meeting, proud parents filed into the library full of anticipation for their children who had received student of the month. Each team selects two students, resulting in 18 students being recognized. Students come through the doors and fill the steps leading down to the media center creating a “stage” for the students.

Mr. White: “Welcome parents and students. We are proud of the students’ accomplishments in the classroom and would like to recognize them for their hard work and dedication in school. Parents, we appreciate all the work that you do on your end and for sending us such great kids. Be sure to look in the local paper for a story featuring your children.”

Mrs. Lakely: "I am Mrs. Lakely, a representative of team 601, and we would like to recognize the efforts of Sam and Lisa."

Sam and Lisa receive the award and take a picture with Mrs. Lakely. Each of the other eight teams proceeds through announcing their recipients. Proud parents line the back of the media center and all are smiling and have their cameras ready to capture this moment.

Mr. White: "Thank you all again, and now, it is a Nation tradition that we all give these wonderful, hardworking students a huge, standing round of applause."

The room erupts with clapping and cheers and students are led out into the hallway to take a group picture in front of the school mascot under the tunnel.

In addition to student of the month, Nation Café is a monthly event to reward students for good character and accomplishment of personal goals. Generally students who have shown improvement or are working exceptionally hard receive this award. Students on each team are selected by teachers and treated to pizza, drinks, and dessert for lunch served by the principals and counselors.

Parents and Community. Nation is a highly successful school in academics, athletics, and extracurricular activities. Along with success comes high expectations from parents and community to continue being successful in all areas. Mr. White, Jacob, and Melanie all mentioned the high expectations community; teachers expect a lot out of the students, parents expect a lot out of the school, and administrators expect a lot out of teachers. Jacob commented that the community controls the school and if the parents want something changed, it will be changed. Nation has strong financial parental support and an involved parent organization. Melanie coaches the academic team and was in need of technology; a parent wrote a check for \$750. The parent organization provides lunch for the teachers on occasion and often times, other organizations in the community donate items. The parent organization also sends out a weekly email to the staff and community with important reminders, upcoming events, student and teacher recognitions, opportunities for students, and tutoring options for struggling students.

Beginning Teacher Perceptions

In addition to the beginning teacher interactions with administrators and faculty as described previously, this section expands on beginning teachers' perceptions in relation to teaching and support. Both beginning teachers interviewed at Nation, Lauren and Jacob, have differing introductory teaching experiences and perceived levels of support.

Perceptions of Teaching. Lauren's teaching assignment includes sixth, seventh, and eighth grade Spanish and she teaches in one of the two portables on campus. Each grade level has a full-time Spanish teacher, but because of the large student population, an additional teacher was needed to take the overflow students in each grade level. She is not able to attend collaboration meetings with the other Spanish teachers because she is not on the same schedule as the rest of the school. While the PLC is beneficial to her due to teaching three different lessons each day, it is also a burden to find time to collaborate and plan with the other Spanish teachers. Being assigned to a portable caused her to feel very isolated during her first year of teaching. She felt like she was missing out on the conversations and collaborations that take place informally in the hallways during the school day. In addition to lacking connections and relationships and staff inside the building, she did not feel comfortable going to the teacher next door to ask questions; however, she did feel comfortable seeking help from other sources. Lauren described her second year of teaching:

By now, I kind of enjoy my solitude [laughter], and I have a lot of work, I don't want to be out in the hallway chit chatting with other teachers, I want to get my grades in, so you know, this second year I don't mind it [being in the portable], I feel like I'm comfortable enough where it's okay that I'm out here on my own. (Interview, April 24, 2014)

Her second year is going much better and a Spanish teacher was moved to the portable next to her. They became instant friends and Lauren feels much more comfortable with her next door.

In addition to Jacob teaching seventh grade geography, he also coaches volleyball, basketball, and baseball. He started coaching a week before school began and the seasons

overlapped through the rest of the school year. When asked if he wanted to coach, his response was that he always wanted to be a teacher first and that he did not go through the education program to be a coach. Earlywine struggles to find coaches at the middle school level, so an extra stipend is given to teachers who coach three sports. While Jacob admitted that he would not coach if the stipend was not given, he did appreciate the dynamic of interacting with students on a longer basis outside of school. On top of these responsibilities, he has lunch duty every day with the reason being that he got married this year and needed to make as much money as possible.

Frustrated and disheartened with the intense focus on teaching, testing, and political issues, Jacob believes that school should be a place that is a balance of learning and fun. Referencing the fact that there are no assemblies in school, other than an author visit, he commented, “It just makes it hard for younger teachers who are more energetic and outgoing, it kind of gets us already lull and dull because there is no excitement” (Jacob, interview, April 28, 2014). He attributed the lack of excitement to current political issues in education. He described the increased pressure this year,

With such an emphasis on testing and A-F, this year compared to last year has just been classroom, classroom, classroom, you cannot do anything but your subject, and you cannot do anything but your standards, and it’s just *so* not fun. This, it, [sigh] it’s not fun. (Jacob, interview, April 28, 2014)

When asked if he gets inspiration from or models other teachers, he responded that he does not even have time to see another teacher due to the increased grading responsibilities associated with common core standards. While the grading has increased, he does appreciate the common core standards more than the previous standards.

Jacob is discouraged with the limited room for student and teacher creativity. Students created and signed a petition to bring back the faculty-student basketball game at the end of the year. The game was held after school hours and students paid admission to attend. Jacob responded, “I mean, the fact that the students had to do that is a shame” (Interview, April 28,

2014). With the current curriculum, students are writing and conducting analysis three times a week. Recognizing that students at the age of twelve and thirteen like to draw, Jacob wishes they had more time to incorporate other activities. Next year, the state department may eliminate the history test and Jacob is looking forward to that potential opportunity, “I’ve got all these great little things I can do, and things we can talk about and discuss and have more group projects and carousel around the classroom” (Interview, April 28, 2014). Summarizing Jacob’s perception of teaching is an analogy he used to describe the school:

I would say a Ford factory [laughter]. It is an assembly line, you work at your assembly and you send them on to the next one. And we’re working *so* hard and *so* fast that you don’t have any type of relationships; you don’t even build relationships with the kids...we don’t even have time for questions...because we are on such a time schedule...I feel bad for the kids, I know they’ve walked out of here and they’ve learned all their stuff but that’s all they’ve learned, their experience is limited, and that stinks for them. (Interview, April 28, 2014)

Perceptions of Support. Lauren felt supported by administrators, other Spanish teachers, experience, the district, and the teacher in charge of information technology. Referencing her first impressions of Nation, her response was, “I was impressed with the support we received as beginning teachers, definitely a feel for your welcome and any questions that you might have, anything that you might need, there’s always someone you can go to for help” (Lauren, interview, April 24, 2014). She mentioned that the other Spanish teachers fill her in on anything she may have missed in team meetings since she is not able to attend those meetings. She usually gets an email from another teacher passing on notes of what was discussed. She appreciates the professional development trainings provided by the district, but indicated that it was her responsibility to find those opportunities. Experience has also provided support to Lauren:

Now that I'm into my second year, I've had more time to play with different programs...where now I feel like I'm more comfortable, and adding stuff to lessons, the more you learn the more you know, the more you can add, to make things better for students. (Interview, April 24, 2014).

As discussed previously, Jacob did not feel supported by administration, his mentor teacher, or his PLC team; however, Jacob did seek and find other methods of support. His wife is also a seventh grade geography teacher in another district and he said they have leaned on each other through exchanging teaching strategies and listening to each other's frustrations. He also still reaches out to his student teaching mentor and described that much of his current teaching practice reflects what he learned from her. He spoke very highly of the district curriculum consultant and appreciated the support provided by her. In addition to the curriculum consultant creating the district benchmark and discussing results at monthly meetings, she also provided all of the reading material and curriculum for the transition to common core.

Fortunately, due to Jacob's introductory teaching experience, he has chosen to remain in the profession and to pursue becoming an administrator instead of falling within the statistics of 50% of teachers leaving within five years. His feelings have pushed him towards taking on more of a leadership role within the school. For the faculty-student basketball game, he emailed staff soliciting involvement and organizing half time shows and cheerleaders for the game. On the last day of school for teachers, he organized a family feud style game to lighten the mood and bring more energy and fun to the staff.

Education at the Local Level

Peak Middle School

History and Mission

Peak Middle School opened in 1989 and was the fourth middle school opened in Earlywine Public Schools. While Peak is a pseudonym given for this study, the original name of

the school was chosen because the location represented the highest point on a railroad connecting two large cities. Over the years, the school has experienced significant population growth, increased diversity, high administrative turnover, school renovations, changing educational philosophies, and flooding in part of the building. The current administrator, Mrs. Brooks, commended her staff for consistently pulling through and keeping kids at the heart of every decision.

Peak's mission statement is found on the front page of the school website, "Our mission is to inspire young people to think, learn, and grow to be their best in life. With students, parents, and teachers, we can all reach the top" (Peak Website). More prominent and known by staff, students, and parents are the core values of the school, or Peak's three R's: Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships. In a half-day professional development exercise, approximately five years ago, the staff chose these values to represent what is deemed important at Peak and what they wanted students to have learned during their middle school years. After these values had been implemented for a couple of years, the school decided that the three R's needed to be defined further for each different environment encountered by students. The staff explicitly defined expectations for respect, responsibilities, and relationships when students are in the commons area, hallway, classroom, cafeteria, or outside. For example, building relationships in the cafeteria means, "To invite others to sit you with you, acknowledge others by name", whereas building relationships outside means, "Include others, play fair and nice."

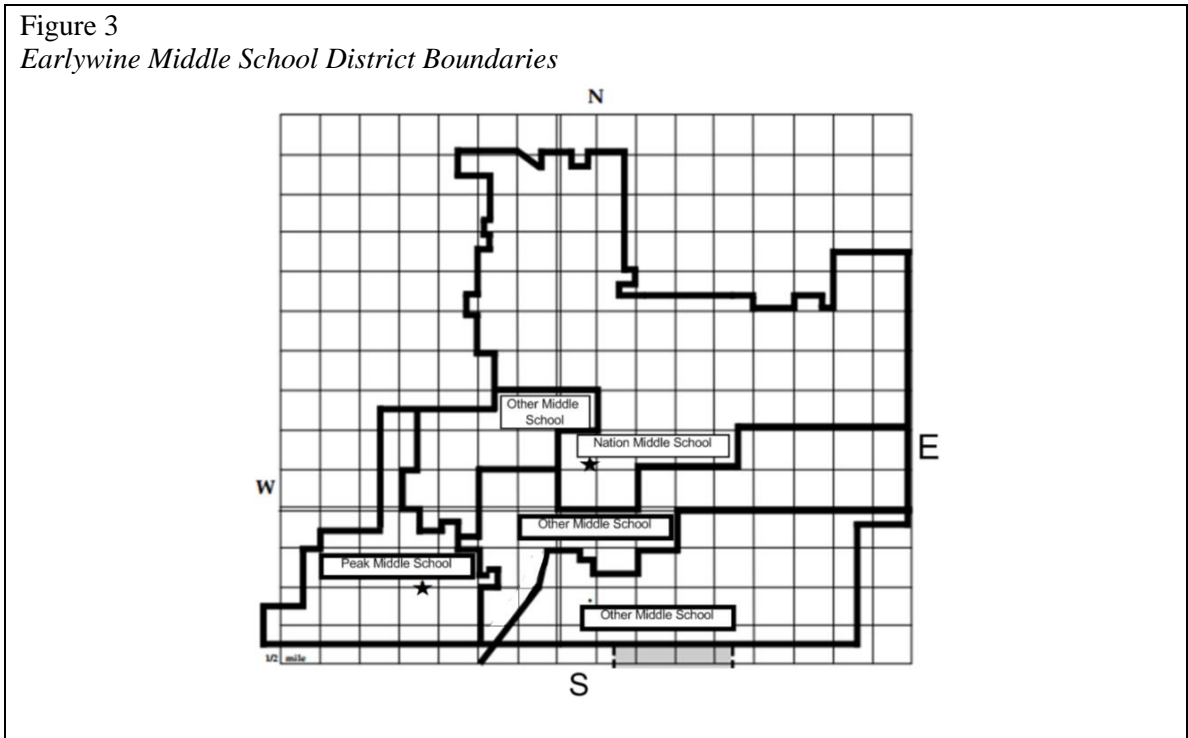
Framed and hanging on the wall in Mrs. Brooks' office is the 2013-2014 strategic plan for Peak. She described that the school's focus has changed over time to mirror the vision and goals set forth by the district. Peak's goals are:

- During the 2013-2014 school year, all students will demonstrate academic growth.
- During the 2013-2014 school year, we will implement Oklahoma Academic Standards in all content areas 100% of the time.

- During the 2013-2014 school year, we will integrate literacy standards and strategies throughout all content areas.
- During the 2013-2014 school year, we will continue to create a culture of respect, responsibility and the building of positive relationships.

School Setting

Geographically, Peak is located on the opposite side of the district from Nation in the southwest corner and outside of Earlywine city limits. Figure 3 shows the district boundaries for the five middle schools in Earlywine.



Peak has a mixture of upper, middle, and lower-income families and is rich in diversity. Peak’s ethnicity includes 49% White, 20% Black, 11% Asian, ten percent Hispanic, two percent American Indian, and eight percent with two or more races. Thirty-three different languages are spoken and twenty percent of the student population qualifies for free lunches, and five percent receive reduced-price lunches. Peak employs 75 certified staff, including three counselors, to serve just fewer than 1200 students.

Peak scored a B on the A-F report card for the 2012-2013 school year. High attendance rates and low dropout rates contributed to Peak receiving ten additional bonus points on the report card. Their lowest area was in the “Bottom Quartile Student Growth” category where they received a 59 (F) in reading, and a 62 (D) in math; however their overall student growth score was an 85 (B). Even though Peak is one of the lower-performing schools in the district, the students still achieve at high levels compared to state averages, and the school has achieved National Blue Ribbon Status.

School and Team Structure. The school and team structure of Peak is similar to Nation. Peak serves students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and also subscribes to the middle school teaming concept. Due to the ratio of Peak’s student population to the number of teachers, the school must be creative in the way that teams are formed. For example, both sixth and seventh grade are composed of two and a half teams. Two teams are full teams with four core subject teachers and two teachers who rotate between the teams for Literature and Spanish. The half team has fewer students and all teachers teach at least two different subjects. One teacher’s assignment is Literature first semester and Spanish second semester, in addition to one geography class and one focus elective. Eighth grade has two “super teams” with many teachers teaching two subjects, while teachers from other grade levels help cover classes. For example, the seventh grade Spanish teacher is assigned to one section of eighth grade Spanish.

In addition to the five core subjects, students are able to choose two electives. Electives offered at Peak include physical education, vocal music, band, orchestra, enrichment, family and consumer sciences, technology literacy, drama, multimedia exploration, enrichment, yearbook, and focus. Focus is an elective assigned to students if they do not pass the state reading or math Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test. At Peak, students can either be assigned to one or two semesters of focus depending on their needs. If a student failed both reading and math, he or she will be assigned to reading focus first semester, and math focus second semester. If only one

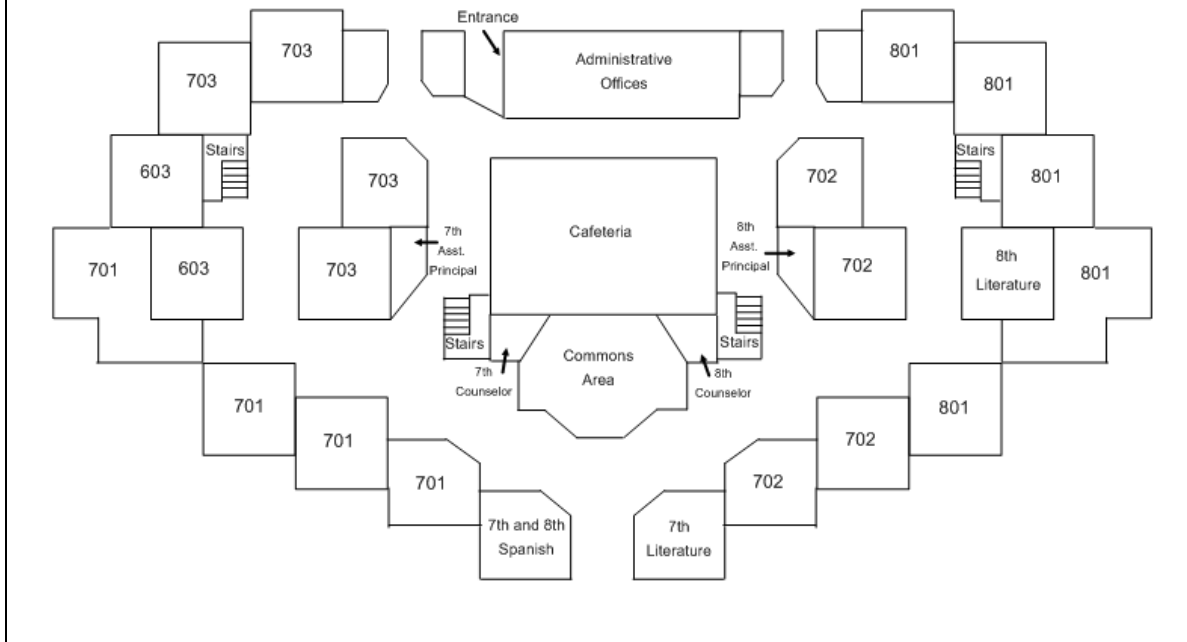
subject is necessary, students are enrolled in that section for one semester and have the option, if adequate progress is demonstrated, to enroll in an elective of their choice second semester.

Physical Structure. An elementary school is located just north of Peak creating a campus-like atmosphere. Both schools share entrances from the main road and a parking lot which causes many traffic and safety concerns, especially during drop off and pick up times. On the outside, Peak is a beautiful two-story building, and on the inside, consistent renovations have kept the building in good condition. Visitors enter the building on the second level and are directed straight to the main office where a driver's license is necessary to be granted further access into the building. All outside doors remain locked throughout the school day to ensure student safety.

Located on the first floor is the entrance to the cafeteria, the open commons area, and the media center. Eighth grade is in their own section in the northeast corner, while sixth grade is confined to their section on the west side of the building. Electives consume the southern and southeastern portions. The gym is located northeast of the main building and across the parking lot. Between the gym and main building are six portables containing more elective teachers. The second story of the building contains the main administrative offices, which includes the head principal, sixth grade assistant principal, secretaries, school resource officer, office aides, and the teacher workroom. The upstairs level of the building houses the seventh grade, one eighth grade team, and half of a sixth grade team. Figure 4 shows the layout of the second story.

Figure 4

Peak Second Story Layout



Mrs. Brooks was strategic and purposeful in the placement of classrooms so that grade levels, and specifically teams, could be next to one another. In Figure 4, classrooms labeled with 701 represent one seventh grade team of teachers and classrooms labeled with 801 represent an eighth grade team of teachers. Placement of the grade levels was also purposeful because of the drastic differences in development from sixth graders to eighth graders. All seventh grade teams are placed upstairs, so that sixth graders can be insulated downstairs. The staff decided a couple of years ago that it would be best to separate the eighth graders and have one team upstairs, and one team downstairs to give more physical space. Mrs. Brooks described the reasoning, “As they move through middle school, they’re friends [sixth grade], then they’re ‘frenemies’ [seventh grade], then enemies [eighth grade], and to separate those that have trouble working together and to give them space in a crowded place helps” (Interview, May 20, 2014).

Every person interviewed described the school as overcrowded. There is no conference room because all classrooms and rooms in the building are being used by teachers or support staff. When meetings or conferences must happen, Mrs. Brooks' office is used, but not very many people can fit. While there are ten teachers in the building teaching science classes, there are only four classrooms in the building equipped as a science lab. When teachers want to conduct a lab, they must coordinate a time to switch classrooms. A computer lab is available for teachers to use, but due to overcrowding, it is not as accessible to teachers. Four teachers share a classroom and travel to other classrooms to teach during other teacher's planning periods. Sixth graders must share lockers with each other because there are not enough lockers. With the gym being separated from the main building, there is not enough room when the students come in before school. Students must line the hallways in the morning which requires extra supervision from multiple teachers.

Lining all hallways and outside of teacher's classrooms is student art work and positive and motivational posters and phrases. Teachers are encouraged by Mrs. Brooks to share student work outside of their classrooms. Plates decorated with the pi symbol are found outside of the math classroom, which most likely corresponded to celebrating "Pi Day" on March 14 (3.14). Peak's Three R's are found in every hallway, inside the cafeteria, in the commons, in teacher's classrooms, and on the doors exiting the building. Hanging in the front entrance upstairs is the large Rachel's Challenge banner covered in student signatures signifying their acceptance of the challenge and serving as a daily reminder of their commitment. In the middle of all the student signatures is the pledge, "I accept the challenge to make Peak a great place to be". Rachel's Challenge posters hang in every hallway with the five challenges written out, "Look for the best in others, treat others the way you want to be treated, choose positive influences, speak words of kindness, and forgive yourself and others". Lining the cafeteria are the five challenges each on their own banner. See Appendix H for photographs of the banner and the five challenges.

Meeting Structure. The number of meetings required weekly for Peak is similar to Nation, but the schedule is slightly different. All administrators at Peak meet on Monday mornings from 8:15 to 10:00. For the first three weeks of the month, team meetings are held weekly during Wednesday's planning periods and an administrator and counselor are present at the meetings on the first and third week of the month. Teachers meet with their PLC groups to plan curriculum once a week, and on the second week of the month, the district consultant and an administrator are present at the meetings. RTI meetings are held weekly; math RTI groups meet on the first and third weeks and reading RTI groups meet on the second and fourth weeks. Student progress is charted daily and discussed during these meetings. The fourth week of the month is reserved for grade level and faculty meetings; teams and PLC groups are not required to meet during that week. An administrator generally leads the grade level meetings and the purpose of this meeting is for professional growth. Peak has done book studies in the past where they are assigned chapters in a book to discuss at the monthly meetings. Other times they have learned a new skill or completed state requirements for testing procedures. Faculty meetings are held after school in the media center and the purpose of this meeting is to recognize teachers and to discuss programs and events affecting the students. Logistics are not discussed during this time, but rather the overall idea and reasoning behind initiatives. Representatives from each team meet on the first and third weeks of the month after school for a team leader meeting.

Participant Profiles

Interview participants for this study included three teachers and one administrator from Peak. Of the three teachers interviewed, two were beginning teachers, Bailey and Tanner, in their second years of teaching, and one was a veteran teacher, Emily, with 22 years of experience. Due to her experience, combined with receiving the site-selected teacher of the year award, Emily was the first person sought after for the veteran teacher interview. The administrator interviewed, Mrs. Brooks, is the head principal at Peak.

Bailey. Bailey is a beginning teacher who earned her undergraduate degree in Biology. Upon graduation, she worked at a nearby university as a graduate assistant helping coach the track and cross-country teams. In the spring of 2012, she received a phone call from a track coach at a high school in Earlywine asking her to fill a long-term substitute position while helping coach the high school track team. Because she did not know what she wanted to do for a career at the time, she accepted the position and started the alternate certification process. She was hired at Peak the following fall, and is now completing her second year of teaching seventh grade science. She did not coach her first year because she was expecting her first child during the track season. This year, due to the track coach getting injured during the season, Bailey has taken over the coaching responsibilities for the remainder of the season. Eventually she wants to coach full time but first must take twelve hours of college classes to complete alternate certification. Other responsibilities include volunteering as sponsor for the Friends of Rachel club and reporting team information, such as student recognitions or classroom projects, to the local paper.

Tanner. Tanner is a beginning teacher in his second year of teaching. Originally majoring in engineering, he decided during his sophomore year that he wanted to be a teacher. He double majored in History and Secondary Social Studies Education, and shortly after graduating; he passed the science state certification test. At Peak, he teaches one section of eighth grade history, and four sections of eighth grade science. He coaches seventh and eighth grade junior varsity boys' basketball and has lunch duty second semester. When asked if he would coach basketball, he said yes because he wanted a job; however, the only experience he had with basketball was being a referee. He felt very fortunate and surprised to receive a call for an interview in such a good school district, especially with it being so late in the summer, and was hired during his initial interview.

Emily. Emily is in her 22nd year of teaching and has spent her entire career at Peak. Realizing her plans of becoming a professional golfer when she grew up were not going to work out, she decided that she loved kids and wanted to teach and coach. She originally wanted to be a

high school science teacher and coach, but fell in love with the middle school age group during her student teaching. She is currently teaching seventh grade science and coaching volleyball, but in the past has coached basketball, tennis, golf, and softball. The staff voted for Emily to receive the Teacher of the Year award for her contributions and dedication to the school. She also serves as team leader.

Mrs. Brooks. Mrs. Brooks has been the head principal at Peak for the past 11 years. This is her last year at Peak before she moves on to a new position as the Associate Director for Secondary Education and Reform at a nearby district. She was an assistant principal for three years in Earlywine prior to accepting the head principal position at Peak. She felt that the administrative profession chose her, because she had not always planned on becoming an administrator. She naturally gravitated towards leadership roles as a teacher and coach and eventually went into administration. She recently was named Oklahoma Middle Level Principal of the Year by the Oklahoma Association of Secondary School Principals and served as the president for the Oklahoma Middle Level Educators Association.

Table 4

Participant Profile Summary – Peak

Name	Age	Position	Years teaching/admin experience	Years at Peak	College Major	Additional School Responsibilities
Bailey	27	7 th grade science teacher	2	2	Biology	Team personal relations representative, track coach
Tanner	25	8 th grade history and science teacher	2	2	History and Social Studies Education	Boys 7 th & 8 th JV basketball coach, lunch duty
Emily	44	7 th grade science teacher	22	22	Science Education	coach, principal's advisory committee, team leader
Mrs. Brooks	43	Head Principal	14	11	N/A	N/A

People and Interactions

Leadership. Peak's leadership team consists of one head principal and three assistant principals. All three assistant principals are new to Peak and are completing their first year as administrators. Each of the three assistant principals is assigned to a grade level to handle discipline needs and team meetings. Assistant principals rotate through the grade levels each year, meaning the principal assigned to sixth grade last year, will move up to seventh grade next year. Peak has three counselors, and again, each is assigned to a grade level and they move through the grades with the students.

Administrative Influence. When Mrs. Brooks took over the head principal position at Peak, she was the seventh administrator over the past 14 years. She only had three years of experience as an assistant principal and did not feel qualified, at the age of 31, to take over leading a school. Previous administrators did not leave because of difficult working conditions, but rather to take other leadership roles in the expanding district. Her first challenge was to create structure, stability, and trust for teachers who were not confident in an administrator holding the position for very long. She established trust over time through continuing to remain in the position for 11 years. When she first started, there were only 700 students, which have now grown to 1200 students, so another focus was to maintain open and consistent lines of communication.

She manages communication effectively and strategically among her staff. In an effort to keep staff informed, she sends out weekly notes on Monday with upcoming important information for the next two weeks. Peak has a very informative and consistently updated website. She sends home monthly folders with students filled with information and forms for the upcoming month. She has specific purposes and intentions behind the different meetings and determines the best way to communicate district and state initiatives. Because she knows her staff, she knew that they were not ready to hear the phrase PLC, due to the overload of other district initiatives. Content teams were created and teachers began doing PLCs without realizing

that is what it was. Three years later, she took a team of teachers to a PLC training where they learned the true name.

She described Peak's culture as a culture of improvement. As a school, they are constantly reflecting and looking for ways to improve and better serve kids. The staff at Peak is kid-centered and focuses on doing what is best for kids, "Of course we want them to learn, curriculum is important, but to focus on educating the whole child, not just about those state assessments in April" (Mrs. Brooks, interview, May 20, 2014). She did comment that it is becoming increasingly difficult, with more creativity required, to implement fun in school. She also described a culture of high expectations from teachers and administrators alike:

It's a tough place to work because the expectations are so high. We just don't let kids fall through the cracks. We sit back and say, have we done everything possible, and if we cannot say yes, we go back to the drawing board. It's not go in your room and shut the door and go home at 3:00, you're working all the time. You better come to work, and when I saw work, I mean you better come and bring your game, because they'll [teachers] push you out fast. (Mrs. Brooks, interview, May 20, 2014)

She compared Peak to a team because everybody is doing their part, or role, that contributes to the overall success of the team.

One way Mrs. Brooks influences the culture of the team is through her hiring decisions. Benefitting from being in her position for 11 years now, she has been able to hire teachers who are in line with her vision and values. She does not hire a teacher based on their knowledge of curriculum, but rather teachers who have the ability to work well with others and if they like kids. She assumes that if a teacher has passed certification tests, combined with the supports provided by the district and other teachers in the building, then they will be able to handle the curriculum. Emily noted her skill in this area, "I think Mrs. [Brooks] has done a good job of hiring people that all work together" (Interview, May 12, 2014). Mrs. Brooks did mention that there is a group of teachers who were there before she arrived, who have struggled to adapt to the changing culture;

not so much in the school, but with changes to education in general. One last way Mrs. Brooks communicates her vision and values is through her signature line in emails and newsletters to Peak families, “Remember, everyone is someone at [Peak]”.

Administrative Interactions with Beginning Teachers. The first time Mrs. Brooks interacts with beginning teachers is the couple of days before school begins. First-year teachers, and teachers new to the district, attend an additional professional development day at the school targeted specifically for them. They learn about the mission, vision, and expectations of teaching at Peak. Mrs. Brooks’ main goal on that day is to get as many current staff in front of the new teachers as possible. Assistant principals each present a topic, counselors present information, and secretaries describe their job responsibilities that affect teachers. Her intentions are to start building relationships as early as possible and to allow the beginning teachers to meet several staff members.

Mrs. Brooks made a decision this school year to evaluate all first-year, second-year, and teachers who are new to Peak. Each teacher in their first and second year needs to be evaluated twice each semester, which entails a preconference, class observation, and post conference four times a year for each teacher. She made this decision, in large part, because she did not feel some teachers received necessary support the previous year under her former assistants. Bailey confirmed these thoughts and appreciated Mrs. Brooks’ evaluations:

My principal [last year] was kind of on the way out, so I don’t feel like she gave me as much constructive criticism as I should have gotten, and this year...I feel like [Mrs. Brooks] has done a better job of saying here’s what you did right and here’s what you did wrong, because I mean, it’s all great to pat me on the head and say you’re doing great, but I can’t learn from that. I think putting us with the most veteran administrator was a good idea this year, that’s made a big difference. (Bailey, interview, April 23, 2014)

Bailey described that Mrs. Brooks provided her instruction in the areas of time management and organization. Mrs. Brooks explained what other teachers in the school did, such as putting

markers on the clock to remind them of when it was time to start wrapping up a class period.

Bailey successfully implemented this technique in her classroom.

She also gained an additional assistant principal this year which meant that each of the three assistant principals would be assigned to a grade level allowing her more time to spend with the beginning teachers. She admitted that her idea did not go as smoothly as planned, due to training her new assistant principals, and she wished that she had been able to spend even more time with the beginning teachers. However, she does expect the culture of the team and staff to take care of the beginning teacher after those first days of school. She is in tune with the school culture enough to know which PLCs and teams work well and not so well together. Because of the time required of Mrs. Brooks to effectively observe, evaluate, and provide support, Tanner noticed that there was not much administrator interaction outside of serious student discipline issues and teacher evaluations.

Even though she wishes she had done a better job, beginning and veteran teachers noticed her repeated efforts. Emily commented that she knew it was more tiring for Mrs. Brooks, but she helped struggling beginning teachers with their classroom discipline and knew exactly which teachers needed specific improvements. Mrs. Brooks arranged for a substitute for four or five beginning teachers to go and observe other teachers and classrooms in the building. Beginning teachers were given specific instructions for what they should be learning from the other teachers. Despite the fact that Mrs. Brooks was overwhelmed with the additional work she was still happy with her decision:

I was glad I [took all beginning teachers], because I was really able to provide that feedback, and knowing, because I've been here ten years, where they fit in the staff, their potential for the staff, probably a lot better than my assistants would. So I was able to have some pretty direct conversations for some, encouraging conversations for most, and where they fit into the Peak family, and what their jobs are going to be in the future.

(Mrs. Brooks, interview, May 20, 2014)

Through completing all first and second year teacher observations, she is able to communicate her vision and values to the new staff, provide support during a critical time, and have necessary crucial conversations.

She has been amazed at the growth a teacher can demonstrate after having a difficult conversation. Mrs. Brooks provided anonymous teacher evaluations and one of her conversations with a first year teacher is that she has the heart of a teacher, but not the gift of a teacher due to her struggles with classroom management. As a result, Mrs. Brooks has spent time teaching the beginning teacher several classroom management techniques and scheduling observations in other teachers' classrooms. Mrs. Brooks indicated that because of the beginning teacher's desire to improve and her strong work ethic, she had shown great growth and is approaching a highly effective educator in a few of the teacher evaluation domains.

Faculty. Scene Six depicts a team leader meeting held at Peak and demonstrates the interactions and relationships among faculty members and Mrs. Brooks.

Scene Six: Team Leader Meeting at Peak

Every other Monday a team leader meeting is held. Present at this meeting is a representative from each team and Mrs. Brooks. Meetings are held in the media center with tables pushed together to form a large circle.

Mrs. Brooks: "Okay! Welcome to our second to last team leader meeting of the year. What have I missed that I should know about?"

Teacher: "I think they're [teachers] stressed about testing, I think you should put in an email that this is a pilot year for testing roster verification."

Mrs. Brooks: "Got it. Let's go through each of the grade levels one at a time, and tell me what your team has going on, or any issues I should know about."

6th Grade Teacher: "Our incentive party is coming up; parent club is hosting the movie and party arrangements."

8th Grade Teacher: "Where are you showing the movie, because we need that space on that Friday."

6th Grade Teacher [jokingly]: "Well, it doesn't matter because we scheduled it first!"

8th Grade Teacher: "Well, where can we have our incentive party, then?"

7th Grade Teacher: "Hey! I thought we were going in order, so that means you [8th grade teacher] need to wait your turn, and we will get to planning your party then!"

Mrs. Brooks to me: "Welcome to our team meeting, this is how they all go! However, I do agree, so back to the sixth grade party..."

Each team representative discusses their team issues, which mainly are about scheduling end of year incentives, parties, and award nights. Teachers continue to have lively and animated conversations. Laughter and sarcasm abound while many topics are being covered efficiently.

Mrs. Brooks: "My goal is to have the master schedule for next year complete and ready to send out next Monday."

7th Grade Teacher: "Just don't send the email out in a chicken-like way, like don't send it out on Friday at 3:00. Send it Monday MORNING so you can field our questions all day long!"

8th Grade Teacher: "Just don't make me change classrooms; I really don't want to pack everything up again this year."

Mrs. Brooks: "You're just saying that 'cause you're old!"

8th Grade Teacher: "Hey, you are just as old as I am!"

Mrs. Brooks: "True, and it's because we are good friends that I can say that to you."

Reflective of this team meeting scene, the culture of the teachers at Peak is playful and fun. Emily explained the impact the faculty culture has on students, "I don't think you can have a good educational culture if the kids don't want to be here, so I think we do a pretty good job of making sure the kids and adults want to be here" (Interview, May 12, 2014). She also described that most teachers are friends with each other and work well together. Many teachers have spent their entire educational career at Peak resulting in not only a large population of older veteran

teachers, but also teachers who have formed stronger relationships. However, several teachers have retired over the past few years and a group of younger beginning teachers have replaced them. A few teachers have left over the years, but the running joke at Peak is, “Don’t worry, they’ll be back”, because many teachers return after leaving.

Family and team are two words used by many staff members to describe Peak’s culture. Bailey described the culture of the teachers, “It really is ‘[Peak] family’, that’s one of the first things I was told by several teachers...and that’s how you’re treated, like this is family, we work together, we play together, we laugh together, we cry together” (Interview, April 23, 2014). Bailey explained the way the staff pulls together during difficult times. For example, one of the teacher’s husbands in the school passed away and a teacher’s wife was hospitalized. The staff quickly assembled who was going to collect money and food, and who was going to go visit. Describing the care and concern demonstrated by staff, Bailey commented, “That makes a big difference, to feel like your colleagues aren’t just there to work with you, but we all care about each other” (Interview, April 23, 2014). She went on to explain how the care and concern demonstrated by staff helps get through other times, “That really helps you overlook when you’re driving each other crazy”.

Bailey had a very difficult experience her first year of teaching. One of her students, Ricky, was the son of another teacher in the building. He was hospitalized over winter break with the flu and due to other complications, Ricky died unexpectedly. This loss was felt across the entire school and one teacher in the building, Sarah, wanted to help her colleague and friend more than just sending cards and food. A scholarship fund was created in honor of Ricky and Sarah coordinated events to raise money for the fund. As a behavioral incentive, students could attend a baseball game, Rally for Ricky, between students and Peak faculty for one dollar. On that day, students could break the school rules by paying one dollar to wear a baseball hat. T-shirts were sold and a golf tournament was also held outside of the school. All money raised went into a

scholarship fund to reward students who demonstrated Ricky's characteristics. This experience demonstrates the way the faculty pulls together and supports one another during difficult times.

Confirming Mrs. Brooks' perception of school culture, Tanner also described Peak's culture as one that values improving struggling students. Because of Mrs. Brooks emphasis on the role of RTI in school and the ability of that program to better serve students, Tanner described that the English teachers have been very successful in their remediation efforts resulting in multiple students improving their scores. Students who had scored unsatisfactory, the lowest category possible on the state test, improved their scores enough to not need remediation second semester. Tanner described how happy the reading teachers were and also expressed anxiety about the new administrator coming in next year, "That one [RTI program] is one of Mrs. Brooks' pet projects, everyone has bought into that...I'm a little bit interested to see what the new principal does...I don't know how it's going to go" (Interview, May 10, 2014).

Emily described the ways students receive recognition and mentioned that all were forms of extrinsic motivation, but then noted that even adults appreciate extrinsic motivation. She commented, "I mean, if someone comes up and pats me on the back, well that feels great... getting that recognition feels nice, so we try to do a fair amount of that" (Emily, interview, May 12, 2014). One way Peak recognized teachers is on the front page of the school website. Along the left column are awards and recognitions received by teachers such as Principal of the Year, Teacher of the Year, Oklahoma Music Educators Exemplary Teacher, and Oklahoma Council for Social Studies Secondary Teacher of the Year. Similar to the "tireless award" at Nation, Peak has a traveling teacher award that is passed from one teacher to another during faculty meetings. Each recipient presents the award at the next faculty meeting to another deserving teacher. While there is a traveling plaque passed around, each teacher recognized is given a pin with the following poem titled "Reaching for Success":

Success isn't just determined by a striving spirit or solid foundation, but by the support of the connections in between. Working together towards one purpose, we stretch further

than our past goals into a realm of new possibilities. With each individual on our team connected and strong, we can reach new heights. A team united stands tallest of all.

Teacher Frustrations. All three teachers interviewed at Peak mentioned the overwhelming number of meetings that take place each week during their planning periods. Tanner said they may lose three or four planning periods per week. While he appreciates that the school is on the same page, he does not like that he loses a large portion of planning time when he has so much that needs to be planned. He described the number of meetings as, “a real pain”. When Bailey was asked how information was communicated, her response was, “We have weekly meetings, it seems like we meet ALL the time” (Interview, April 23, 2014). Even though she knows the meetings are necessary to some extent, she still felt frustrated and that the number of meetings was excessive. Emily explained that her first impressions have changed over the years because of the increased job responsibilities with limited instructional planning time. Cognizant of the fact that she has been teaching for 22 years, she did not feel that this impacted her perceptions of teaching. Another veteran teacher and coach of 16 years, has decided that this is his last year of coaching due to increased teaching responsibilities, specifically RTI and common core requirements. He felt that he was a burden to his PLC partner and wanted to be able to help her out more next year.

In addition to the overwhelming number of meetings, all three teachers interviewed also mentioned how the crowded school and classrooms impacted teaching and behavior. The first thing Bailey said in her interview when asked about Peak was that they were, “bursting at the seams, we have a ton of kids” (Interview, April 23, 2014). Tanner commented that they were already full this year and getting bigger next year since the new middle school would not be completed yet. Mrs. Brooks indicated that the school’s population grows by 10% each year. Emily described the crowded schools as the major change in the school in the 22 years she has been there. She disagreed with the notion that teaching a class with 22 students is the same as teaching a class with 32 students. Emily explained,

I went from teaching four classes of 25 kids to I now teach five classes of 32 kids, and so your desire to want to give big huge projects and grade the essays, grade the labs, contact all the parents, that really goes down. (Interview, May 12, 2014)

Interactions with Beginning Teachers. The first way a beginning teacher interacts with other teachers on the faculty is through the assignment of a mentor. However, this is not a structured program, but more of a person that the beginning teacher can go to with questions. Bailey mentioned that Emily was her unofficially assigned mentor, because Emily had no idea that she was even supposed to be a mentor. Bailey said Mrs. Brooks told her, “Oh, you’ll be with Emily on your PLC, you’ll be fine” (Interview, April 23, 2014). Tanner, on the other hand, was assigned to the math teacher on his team, even though he taught social studies and science. He described that his mentor teacher was supportive and stopped by his classroom throughout the year to check on him or to let him know he was doing a good job. Mrs. Brooks described the drastic difference felt when the state department stopped funding the residency teacher program. She said teachers have a tough time critiquing one another, so being able to have the university professor and administrator in the classroom impacted the success rate of beginning teachers, “I know, I have two on campus, probably three, that could have really benefitted from that college professor, that administrator, in addition to the evaluation and a colleague coming in providing that positive feedback” (Mrs. Brooks, interview, May 20, 2014).

Bailey and Tanner both received strong curricular and instructional support from their PLCs. Tanner is on two different PLCs because he teaches two subjects. He described that his history PLC has an older teacher who is set in his ways and another teacher who is a “mother hen” who does not hesitate to share any of her resources with him. All four of his science PLC members were new to Peak last year during his first year of teaching, and he said they all stumbled through the first year together. He described that this year is going much more smoothly because they have a better understanding of each other’s instructional styles and more experience. He thought PLCs in general were beneficial, “It’s much easier to step down stairs

and say hey, how are you teaching blank because it didn't work when I tried to teach that yesterday, what are you doing differently" (Tanner, interview, May 10, 2014). Bailey also greatly benefitted from her science PLC. One teacher has taught for ten years, and the other has taught for 21 years, so she described that she had two great resources for instructional support. The other two teachers did not just send her the teaching files, but they actually took time to explain the lessons and reasoning behind a unit in addition to listening to Bailey's ideas.

Mrs. Brooks believes that the culture of the team is more important than the culture of the entire school, because teachers interact with their teams more often than the school. She explained that teams who are student-centered, learning-centered, have high expectations for all, and supportive of beginning teachers truly determines the success rate of beginning teachers. She described one team with contrasting expectations and felt that the progress that could have been made by a beginning teacher was inhibited due to the team. Bailey and Tanner both mentioned the separation of grade levels and limited interaction outside of their grade level and team. Bailey commented, "[We] really do function almost like three separate schools that cooperate" (Interview, April 23, 2014). Tanner agreed, "I don't see a lot of other teachers because we are off in our own wings...I only really see my corner of the eighth grade...I like the people I work with in eighth grade" (Interview, May 10, 2014).

Bailey enjoyed the culture of her team and believed that the physical environment and placement of team members next door to one another allowed for stronger relationships and collaboration to take place. She said they all stand in the hallways together during passing period each hour and have informal conversations. She appreciated the strong relationships with her team members because they spend so much time together. When parents are not supportive, Bailey's team comes together to support students on their team and brainstorm ideas for how to better meet each student's needs.

Beginning teachers interact with other veteran teachers as well. Emily appreciated that there was a fairly even ratio of veteran teachers to beginning teachers, "We really need the

beginning teachers to come in here and give us a whole bunch of energy, and we need the older veteran teachers to direct that energy to the correct places” (Interview, May 12, 2014). Mrs. Brooks mentioned that several of the beginning teachers were well-respected and looked to for implementing technology in the classroom. Emily perceived that the veteran teachers did a good job of helping beginning teachers. For example, a few veteran teachers offered to write the script for student award nominations for the beginning teachers. While the staff is usually willing to help teachers, Mrs. Brooks described a teacher, who would not be asked back next year, that other teachers in the building did not want to associate with any longer. Mrs. Brooks noticed that the staff started to remove themselves from interacting with this particular beginning teacher. Mrs. Brooks described another struggling beginning teacher who was in her second year of teaching, but due to her efforts to improve, the staff was willing to help her.

Students. Scene Seven shows the attitudes and behaviors of students at Peak.

Scene Seven: Student Climate and Interactions at Peak

Many students at Peak were struggling to get to class on time, so as the result, tardy sweeps were being conducted every hour. This meant that students, who were not in class when the bell rang, were locked out of class. An administrator rounded up students who were not in class and assigned a two-hour after school detention. Students were warned of this consequence prior to enacting the tardy sweep.

During the five-minute passing period, students in the eighth grade hall were very loud, animated, and boisterous. Students chased after one another exchanging fake punches and yelling across the hallways to one another.

Teacher: “Let’s go! Get to class; you only have two minutes remaining!”

When students were reprimanded by teachers, arguments between teachers and students ensued. One student refused to let a teacher, currently in her second year of teaching, close the door.

Teacher: “It’s time for class, please come in a have a seat.”

Student [holding door open]: “Oh, come on Mrs. B! Don’t close the door yet, Micah is almost here!”

Teacher: “That is his choice to not be in class on time, let go of my door.”

Student: “Just a couple more seconds!”

The bell rings. Appearing exasperated and frustrated, the teacher started trying to physically move the student past her classroom door. Five or six students remain in the hallway and an assistant principal gathers them together and walks towards the office.

Student: “It was not my fault that I was late to class! Just let me go back to class.”

Student: “What are you doing with us, this isn’t fair!”

Assistant Principal: “Please follow me to my office.”

Once inside the office the students continue arguing with the assistant principal and it takes multiple attempts by the principal to get the students quiet enough to listen. The students fill out their own tardy slip and select the day that they will attend detention.

Student: “What happens if I don’t show up for detention?”

Assistant Principal: “You need to show up on the day you select, but if you don’t you will be assigned to AISP [alternative in-school placement] the following day.”

Student: “Ughh! This is so stupid!”

Student Climate. When the three teachers and Mrs. Brooks were asked the opening interview question, “How would you describe this school?” all responses included the diversity of the student population. Mrs. Brooks described that Peak has a lot of different cultures, religions, and disabilities. She pointed out that respect, responsibilities, and building relationships looks different from one culture to another resulting in the staff being responsible for promoting an environment of tolerance and respect. Emily has definitely noticed and appreciated the change in diversity over her 22 years at Peak. She loves that students are receiving more of a real-world experience through having a more diverse group in regards to income levels, race, and religion. Bailey and Tanner both recognize the differences across the middle schools in Earlywine and

understand that they have a unique set of challenges before them. Tanner described, “It’s one of the poorer schools in Earlywine...you know, it’s more of a challenge than I would have guessed” (Interview, May 10, 2014). Bailey agreed, “We have a different set of kids as far as socioeconomic status and that means a lot of kids in RTI, a lot of kids on IEPs [Individualized Education Plans]” (Interview, April 23, 2014). A veteran teacher, with 16 years of experience at Peak, described that because the demographics have changed so drastically over the years, “[the] students have become tougher to teach”. He indicated that he noticed an increase in the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunches when multiple apartment complexes were built on the southern edge of the school boundary. Peak had a total of 103 suspensions for the year.

Students at Peak participate in Rachel’s Challenge as well. In August 2012, a student-led behavior initiative campaign was created by students to focus on “Doing the Right Thing”. One of the “right” things, originally started by faculty and staff eight years ago, involved a student-led donation drive to collect items to send to an orphanage in Africa. A former teacher from Peak is now living at the orphanage and caring for sick and orphaned babies. For the past two years, the Friends of Rachel groups have coordinated the collection, sorting, and shipping of donated items. A day is set aside during the school year for the students to make approximately 500 bags of goods. In addition to collecting baby items, each classroom also sponsors a child and receives a specific list of the child’s needs. The community assists in this initiative through dentists donating toothbrushes and toothpaste, and nearby hotels donating soap. This program provides perspective for students as shown by a student who commented, “These children don’t have nearly what we do, and it makes me feel good to help them...it’s hard to imagine children not having toothbrushes, toothpaste, books, or pencils” (as quoted in Earlywine newspaper, December 20, 2013). Students raised close to \$3,400 in donations along with thousands of baby supplies.

Student Incentives and Rewards. In an effort to emphasize positive student behaviors, students are consistently recognized for making good decisions. “Caught Ya’ Being Good” or “Gotchas” is an ongoing reward system intended to recognize students for doing the right thing. Students earn “Gotcha” tickets through acts of kindness, good behavior, and helping others. Teachers and staff give students tickets and twice a month, students can “spend” their tickets in a student store filled with items such as bracelets, iTunes cards, and Peak spirit items. A veteran teacher at the school described that this program was more popular among sixth and seventh grade students, but it seems to have lost its appeal for eighth graders.

Each month, teachers from each team nominate students to receive recognition for their dedication, effort, respectful attitude, positive choices, or improvement in a certain area. Teachers fill out a certificate explaining why that student is receiving the award. Teachers present the awards to students and then students are treated to a pizza lunch. Students are also treated to incentive parties at the end of the year. Students who end the year in good academic and behavioral standings are able to attend their grade level celebration party. Sixth grade students watch a movie in the gym during the school day, seventh grade students take a field trip to the movie theater during the school day, and eighth grade students are allowed to attend the Remembering Ricky baseball game.

The much anticipated Golden Peak Awards, the highest honor any student can receive at Peak, is given at the end of the school year and recognizes students’ outstanding contributions in the areas of scholarship, leadership, and citizenship. One boy and one girl are nominated from each team of teachers and an award night is held to honor these students. Ten years ago, a sixth grade sister and seventh grade brother made history by both receiving the award on the same night. Tragically, the following summer, the brother was killed in a boating accident. Since then, the parents of the student killed attend the award night and present the Brady Page award to a deserving seventh grade student. Scene Eight represents this year’s Golden Peak Award Ceremony and demonstrates student qualities and characteristics deemed important at Peak.

Scene Eight: Golden Peak Award Ceremony

Mrs. Brooks: “Hello students, parents, and other family members! We welcome you to our favorite night of the school year, a night where we can celebrate students who consistently demonstrate Peak’s Three R’s: Respect, Responsibility, and building Relationships. We appreciate the contributions of these students to our school and classrooms.”

6th Grade Teacher: “Good evening. I teach sixth grade English with these lovely people right here and I am happy to recognize Sam and Kathy. [Sam walks on stage.] Sam, please tell us who is here with you this evening.”

Sam: “My mom, Linda, my dad, Mike, my sister, Avery, and my Aunt Kim.”

[Linda is standing in the middle of the aisle with her camera snapping pictures.]

6th Grade Teacher: “Sam has a contagious excitement for learning, constantly displays Peak’s Three R’s, and we all love how you encourage those around you to do their best.”

[Sam exits the stage and Kathy approaches.]

6th Grade Teacher: “This is Kathy, please tell us who is here with you tonight.”

Kathy: “My grandma, dad, and sister.”

6th Grade Teacher: “Kathy never flaunts her knowledge, she is trustworthy, dependable and considerate, and she’s smart, but more importantly, she is kind.”

Each teacher presents the awards to the students in a similar fashion with their team standing behind them. As they read the reasoning for a student being chosen, all teachers nod and smile in agreement. Mrs. Brooks and the teachers on stage are smiling proudly as well. Parents of the students are easily identified as they are standing and taking pictures, cheering loudly, and smiling from ear to ear.

Parents and Community. In general, parental involvement at Peak is very low compared to other schools in Earlywine. Bailey attributed the limited involvement to the higher population of lower socioeconomic status families and said, “We have a larger population of students with parents that either don’t have the time or energy to be involved or they simply don’t

want to be” (Interview, April 23, 2014). One veteran teacher described that he gets very few calls from parents concerned about their child’s grade or progress in the class. However, there is a group of very involved parents who operate the parent organization at Peak and Bailey mentioned that these parents are highly supportive. Emily commented that the parent club is not able to bring in as much money as other schools in Earlywine because they do not have as many “upper-end” kids as the other schools do. While their fundraisers do not raise as much money as the others, Peak was one of the first schools in Earlywine to all have smartboards in their classrooms, in large part due to the parent organization funding the purchases.

The parent club and Peak staff realized that many students at Peak were leaving school on Friday and not eating anything until breakfast on Monday. Twenty-five percent of students at Peak receive free and reduced lunch, and of that 25%, 20% qualify for free lunches indicating a limited family income. Peak and the parent club created a solution for these students, called the Peak Community Pantry, where students are able to take home food for the weekend. Financial and food donations are accepted and each student receives five protein based foods, two breakfast foods, five fruits, five snack items, and two juices. Through parents volunteering and running this program, students are able to receive the nutrition necessary to focus on school.

Beginning Teacher Perceptions

Perceptions of Teaching. Tanner’s second year of teaching has actually been more challenging than his first year for a couple of reasons. Even though he had never coached basketball before, he agreed to coach seventh and eighth grade boys’ basketball. While Tanner did not have experience coaching, he did enjoy getting to know the students outside of school and felt that it helped him better enforce discipline in the hallways and classroom because of the relationships formed. Because he coaches two teams, he has practice Monday through Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 8:00. He enjoyed coaching his first year and often used the time between school ending and basketball beginning to grade, plan, and stay caught up with his teaching responsibilities. He was engaged during his first year while his fiancé was completing her final

semester at a college that was a couple of hours away. He got married over the summer and now that they are living together, he prefers to use his time between school ending and basketball beginning to go home and see his wife before he is gone for the evening coaching basketball. Teaching became more difficult when there was not as much time to plan and grade.

The second year was also more difficult for Tanner because of the administrative rotation that takes place on the leadership team. A first-year administrator was now in charge of the eighth grade discipline and team meetings. Tanner described that the change in administration from a very proactive administrator who was constantly visible in the hallways to an administrator who he sees as not very effective with student discipline and not visible, has contributed to a more challenging second year. He also thinks his team has more discipline and behavior issues than the other team. Tanner indicated that the change in administration has caused more “griping” and frustration among his team members. While he did agree that teaching the second year was much easier because of teaching with the same group of teachers and having experience, he did feel that the “newness” had worn off and the topics were not as exciting to teach.

The physical environment has also caused Tanner to have more challenges. He was fortunate to receive one of the few science classrooms in the building; however, because there are so few, all of the teachers store their lab material in his classroom which creates limited space for his items. He also must coordinate switching classrooms with other science teachers who would like to use his classroom for a science lab. In addition to teaching difficulties associated with limited space, he also does not like that his classroom is an “L-shaped” room. He is not able to see the entire classroom which allows for increased misbehavior by students.

Bailey also has had a challenging introductory experience with teaching, mostly due to being pregnant and having a baby during her first year of teaching while needing to complete alternate certification requirements within three years. Like Tanner, Bailey described that her second year of teaching was slightly more difficult. Her first year, she was able to stay at school

late when she got behind with planning and grading, but this year, she cannot stay late and must pick her daughter up at daycare right after school. Expressing her frustration, she said:

This year, it's been all I could do to get to school on time, do what I need to do, and still make it to get [my daughter] picked up, so there was no way for me to get [the classes] in, so I now have one year to get 12 credits, and work...I'll be able to manage, it's just a lot. (Bailey, interview, April 23, 2014)

Bailey was shocked to find that teachers have so many additional responsibilities outside of teaching as shown through her comment, "Oh my gosh! You don't get to just teach" (Interview, April 23, 2014). She thought she only wanted to teach high school, but was surprised that she did actually enjoy the middle school level. Coming from an alternate certification background, she wishes that they had more time and opportunities to go observe other teachers in the building. She felt that veteran teachers in the building would have the best understanding, with similar students, and be able to provide meaningful insight. Bailey enjoys helping her team leader with her responsibilities and to be involved in any way she can.

Perceptions of Support. In addition to receiving instructional and curricular support from his PLC, Tanner also felt supported through access to technology and instructional materials, experience in the profession, and by other veteran teachers in the building. He described that there was a good system in place for maintaining technology and he was on the list for a new projector and computer for the next school year. He felt that his science lab was relatively well-supplied for what he needed to teach the students. While recognizing that he still has room to grow, he explained that his experience in his position has contributed to his improvement in classroom management and instructional ability. Being on the same PLC team both years has been beneficial to instructional planning and the ability to improve as a team.

Tanner looked to other teachers in the building for support as well. For example, he said the science teachers experience more vertical integration, collaboration between grade levels, than other subjects. Because of developing those relationships, he feels that he can go to more

people in the building with his questions, specifically questions related to instructional needs. Tanner learned instructional strategies from a geography teacher who retired last year. Tanner would observe his class occasionally and now wishes he had taken more time to sit in the back of his class. He admired the ability of the teacher to manage a classroom effectively and to achieve a balance between fun and hard work, “I tried to figure out how to do that myself...but I wish I had more time to do that” (Tanner, interview, May 10, 2014). Tanner misses that teacher’s personality and explained how the retired teacher occasionally will email the staff on bad weather days with a picture of himself drinking hot chocolate next to a fire. Through these supports provided to Tanner, he indicated that he intended to remain in the profession and that he is looking forward to his third year of teaching.

As described previously, Bailey received a great deal of support from her team and PLC. She received support from the team culture of the school as well, “We really do function as a team, which is nice, because I feel like I have someone to go to anytime that we discuss our curriculum, our behavior problems, so it’s a nice setup” (Bailey, interview, April 23, 2014). Bailey described the same veteran teacher as Tanner and appreciated the support he provided as well. She also admired this teacher’s ability to effectively manage a classroom, “He just had it [classroom management], they [students] would be doing something wild and crazy, and they’d be singing and dancing and the next thing you know, they’re on task, they’re working, he’d got it” (Bailey, interview, April 23, 2014). Bailey asked him how he was able to do that, but said that his explanation made no sense. He had a student teacher during Bailey’s first year of teaching, so when the student teacher was teaching his class, he would occasionally come observe Bailey. He provided feedback and told her that she did a really great job of giving notes while capturing the student’s attention. Bailey appreciated this feedback from a colleague and it made her reflect more deeply about why she was good at this aspect of teaching and how that could translate to other areas.

Bailey described not being able to keep students on task when working individually. After discussing this weakness with another science teacher, she learned more effective techniques, such as using blocks of time and setting time limits for students. Through the veteran teacher's suggestions and Bailey implementing the suggestions, she has seen great improvement in this area. When asked how the efforts to support her in her first year of teaching have been successful, Bailey commented, "When I've been given things to try and I implement them and they work well...the confidence I get from that is the biggest part" (Interview, April 23, 2014). Bailey enjoys learning from veteran teachers and wishes she had more opportunities to observe other teachers' classrooms, especially because of being alternatively certified.

Summary

Chapter Four presents an explanation of the current state of education in Oklahoma, highlighting the vast number of reform initiatives implemented in a short amount of time with decreased funding. Because the two middle schools selected are located in the same district, a description of district-wide initiatives and programs are included. Finally, the stories of the two middle schools are presented to help explain the culture and interactions encountered by beginning teachers. Chapter Five analyzes the two schools and how they supported the educational practices of beginning teachers through the lens of cultural symbols.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data were collected from a variety of sources including observations, interviews, school tours, documents, artifacts, and school website information. Information presented in Chapter Four is used to analyze the data in this chapter. The purpose of the study is to describe how school culture supports the educational practices of beginning teachers at two selected middle schools. The theoretical framework selected for this study draws from the symbolic cultural theory espoused by Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000), and Harris (2005) and includes the following cultural symbols: vision and values; rituals and ceremonies; history and stories; cultural network; heroes and heroines; and architecture and artifacts. Chapter Five analyzes the data through the lens of these cultural symbols for each of the two school settings.

Manifestations of Cultural Symbols at Nation

Vision and Values

Vision and values are the foundation of school culture and both have the ability to bring meaning and purpose to the educational setting. For some schools, the mission and vision provide a unified direction for staff; for others, the mission and vision is an abstract and unknown document rarely discussed (Deal & Peterson, 1999). At Nation, the only place the mission

statement was mentioned was on a fifth grade parent night handout for incoming students the following school year. The mission could not be found on any other documents sent to staff or on the school website. The more prominent school motto, “Learn like a Champion Today” was posted everywhere in the building, but none of the four people interviewed mentioned this motto during observations or interviews. Further, Mr. White said he communicates his vision to the staff by doing his best to lead by example, but that leading by example during stressful times did not come naturally to him. This indicates that a strong mission and vision are not clearly evident at Nation.

While a well-known and widely discussed mission and vision are lacking at Nation, a strong sense of values is present. Deal and Peterson (1999) defined values as, “The conscious expression of what an organization stands for... Values are not simply goals or outcomes; values are a deeper sense of what is important” (p. 26). The ways in which schools define success can reveal much about the values held by those within the organization. Nation defines success through student achievements in academics, extracurricular activities, and good student behavior. Mr. White spoke highly of good student test scores, athletic victories, student awards and low student suspension rates. Melanie and Jacob both mentioned the high expectations by administrators and community, including the emphasis placed on testing. Lauren, who does not teach a state-tested subject, did not mention high expectations by administrators or testing. Melanie and Jacob also both valued good student behavior and felt that it was an environment where student learning could thrive.

Deal and Peterson (1994) identified positive norms found in schools. One norm, “Speak with pride about your school and unit” could easily be aligned with Mr. White, Melanie, and Lauren’s interview responses. Lauren already had a sense of appreciation and respect for the school because her three children attended Nation prior to her acceptance of the job. She spoke highly of the school as a whole and felt supported in her first two years of teaching. Jacob, on the other hand, felt pressure from the high expectations of the community and administration,

especially with the emphasis on state testing. He did not speak with pride about the school as a whole and felt that the “fun” had been removed from the school setting. The emphasis placed on the values held by Nation influenced his perception of teaching in a negative way.

Rituals and Ceremonies

Deal and Peterson (1999) defined rituals as, “Procedures or routines that are infused with deeper meaning. . . when these routine events can be connected to a school’s mission and values, they summon spirit and reinforce cultural ties” (p. 32). For example, when students jump to hit the, “Learn like a Champion Today” sign hanging above the entrance to a tunnel, they are constantly being reminded of the school motto with a deeper symbolic meaning of achieving at high levels. Another student ritual is seen through the Friends of Rachel clubs and meetings each month. Deal and Peterson (1999) further define rituals as, “significant traditional events with special history and meaning. The tradition unfolds year in and year out” (p. 33). Students learned about who Rachel was through pictures and stories shared as the school-wide assembly and have a special connection to her. When Rachel’s Challenge was first initiated in the school, it was teacher-led, but over time has become more student-led. Because of students taking ownership and focusing on how to help each other and the community, a culture of support and kindness is the main focus. Good student behavior thrives in this culture and is valued and appreciated by teachers, administrators, and parents.

Deal and Peterson (1999) indicated that some schools have “initiation rituals” that connect a newcomer to the school community. Earlywine hosts a separate professional development for first-year teachers as well as teachers who are new to the district to acquaint them with the district mission and vision. Nation has first-year teachers come one day before all other teachers to introduce them to the building. Jacob greatly appreciated these days to “get a feel” for the school and building before meeting an entire staff of teachers the following day. First-year teachers are also assigned a mentor teacher at Nation; however, this is not a formalized program and there are no rules or requirements for mentor teachers. The mentor teachers are

mostly just someone for beginning teachers to go to with questions. Lauren was assigned to another Spanish teacher and felt supported; while Jacob was assigned to a teacher he did not trust after their first encounter. Both of the initiation ritual examples, separate professional development day and mentor teachers, are efforts being made to support beginning teachers; however, the programs have no accountability or follow-through and do not extend past the beginning of the year.

Another ritual very common at Nation is the meetings that take place each week. While the number of meetings held each week during instructional planning time is a source of frustration for all teachers, the teachers still gather together to discuss student learning, compare test scores, and find ways to better support students. Meetings also provide time for teachers to build professional relationships with one another; however, Jacob and Lauren both did not have positive experiences in this area. Lauren did not belong to a certain team because she taught all grade levels, so she was unable to attend PLC meeting with other Spanish teachers. Further, she did not belong to a team and was isolated in the portable, resulting in limited time and interactions for relationships to grow. Jacob did not have a good experience with his PLC team and did not benefit from collaboration with others in his content area. He did form better relationships with his team and felt that the team meetings were beneficial for discussing student concerns.

Lauren compared Nation's culture to family due to the way the staff draws together to support one another during tough times. When there is a sickness on staff or loss of a loved one, the teachers immediately find ways to support that teacher whether it's providing meals or organizing fundraisers. A student died during the school year at Nation and the school sold blue t-shirts for students and staff to wear on designated "Remembering Ricky" days. Funds raised were given to Ricky's family to help with expenses. The staff gathers together to celebrate good times as well as seen through hosting baby showers, retirement receptions, and holidays. Nation's automatic response to supporting one another during tough and good times demonstrates

how this ritual has become a common expectation among staff members. Deal and Peterson (1999) effectively summarized, “Students and teachers don’t leave their humanity behind when they come to school. They need special moments in the daily grind to reflect on what’s really important [and] to connect with one another” (p. 32).

Ceremonies refer to larger school functions and social gatherings that mark important time periods throughout the school year. Deal and Peterson (1999) identified “recognition ceremonies” as times, “to celebrate, commemorate, and salute the accomplishments of others...this heightens the feelings of being on a winning team, of being part of something greater than themselves” (p. 38). Nation has several recognitions ceremonies such as the Student of the Month award, the Tireless Award for teachers, and Nation Café. Nation Café recognizes students who have made improvements in the classroom academically or behaviorally and special attention is provided to them as administrators and counselors serve them a pizza lunch. The tireless award highlights teachers who go above and beyond for students and teachers are recognized in front of the entire staff during faculty meetings. Deal and Peterson (1999) identified special elements in ceremonies such as “meaningful symbols and artifacts” and “value-filled language and commentary” (p. 40). Teachers are presented with an old bicycle tire that is decorated with rhinestones and jewels along with a short speech explaining the values portrayed by the teacher.

The Student of the Month award is a monthly celebration that reinforces Nation’s cultural values by recognizing and honoring good student behavior and academic achievement. This specific recognition ceremony is, “Carefully designed and arranged to communicate values, celebrate core accomplishments, and build a tight sense of community” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 41). Parents, teachers, counselors, librarians, and administrators come together to celebrate the accomplishments of deserving students. A special element included in this ceremony is “Attention to who is invited and where they sit” (p. 40). Parents share in the successes of their children as they proudly escort them into the media center. At the end of the ceremony, parents

are separately acknowledged with a standing ovation from teachers to recognize and show appreciation for their contributions as well.

History and Stories

School culture is reinforced through the sharing of school history and stories. Deal and Peterson (1999) explained, “Cultural patterns and traditions evolve over time. They are initiated as the school is founded and thereafter shaped by critical incidents, forged through controversy and conflict, and crystallized through triumph and tragedy” (p. 49). Knowing the history of the school is crucial in understanding how the culture has evolved over time. While Nation has a history, I did not observe that beginning teachers knew much about that history. My interview with Melanie revealed how much the culture has changed in the eight years she has been at the school due to the change in leadership. The change in leadership created a separation of ages among the staff because when the previous principal retired, several other teachers retired as well and a much younger group of teachers replaced them.

The stories shared by members of the school community reveal the values and assumptions held by those members. Teachers who are new to the school are highly impressionable as they seek to understand school culture. The stories shared by Jacob during his interview indicated that he has a negative outlook on the teaching profession. In the analogy he shared for describing Nation, he compared the school to a Ford factory because of working so hard and so fast that there is limited time to build relationships. He described the teaching staff as having no energy, no fun, and that the other teachers come tired. Jacob described the story of the students sending around a petition to be signed to bring back the student versus faculty basketball game. Because of the intense focus on state testing and the new A-F grading system, Nation did not have time to fit the game into the regular school day. Because enough students had signed the petition, Mr. White and staff agreed to have the basketball game, but it was held after school and students were charged admission to attend. This story reveals Nation’s more deeply held values of an intense focus on student achievement.

Another common topic of conversation is how political issues are affecting teachers in the classroom. For example, while preparing for the state education rally, Mr. White held a special voluntary meeting for teachers to help them understand what was taking place and how they would be affected with even less funding the upcoming year. Then, during the last faculty meeting of the school year, Mr. White provided the staff a legislative update, but remained positive and optimistic about the possibility of better funding education. In a team meeting, the topic of conversation, outside of logistics of testing, was how student test scores would be factored into their teacher evaluation scores the upcoming year. Teachers expressed frustration and anxiety about the high percentage. These stories reveal how political issues at the state level are affecting the educational practices and focus of all teachers at the site level.

Cultural Network. The cultural network guides, “the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time” (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 28). As mentioned previously, beginning teachers did not mention the history of the school or indicate knowledge of a change in leadership that resulted in a disconnected staff. Jacob, however, felt a distinct separation of age groups among the staff; the older veteran teachers were a group, and the younger beginning teachers were a group. Jacob indicated that there were very few teachers in the middle of these two groups, but those that were had “chosen their sides” (Jacob, interview, April 28, 2014). Jacob attributed the separation of ages for the staff not being conjoined as a group. Again, Lauren was in a portable and indicated that she was already isolated, but when she did make an attempt to socialize in the faculty room during lunch, she felt very awkward and uncomfortable. Melanie commented on the lack of interaction among grade levels but did indicate that each grade level had a distinct culture of their own.

Melanie commented that communication was one of the biggest issues and sources of teacher frustration at Nation. Melanie mentioned how information was not communicated in an appropriate avenue which indicates that Mr. White does not have a good read or understanding of the cultural network. Potentially due to his limited time in his administrative role, he has not

quite learned which types of communication are best at certain times. Jacob also described the lack of communication that takes place from the staff as a whole. He did not feel that the staff was joined together as a group which contributed to their lack of interaction with one another.

Harris (2005) explained that anthropologists approached culture from at least three different perspectives: holistic, symbolic, and dualistic. In the dualistic approach, a disconnect exists between ideas and actions, and that is evident at Nation. A signup occurred at the beginning of the year where teachers were encouraged to choose a social group in which to participate. The intention was that teachers would be able to socialize outside of school and form stronger relationships, but this was an action that did not occur. Another example is shown through team meetings. While meetings were scheduled and had good intentions, Melanie was frustrated with the lack of administrator presence at the meetings when they were supposed to be there. Jacob and Melanie both wished that administrators would be more visible in the classrooms and hallways. Administrators know they should be visible, but sometimes get caught up with completing teacher evaluations or other responsibilities.

Heroes and Heroines. Heroes and heroines are the embodiment of school culture and core values and act as role models for the staff. Teachers anointed during the faculty meetings for the Tireless Award represent the heroes and heroines in the school. The language used in the presentation speech signifies what is valued, respected, and recognized within Nation as being positive attributes of teachers. Deal and Peterson (1999) emphasized that heroes and heroines, “show us what we can become [and that] they provide the culture with an image of the best that is in us” (p. 58). Beginning teachers get a more complete understanding of what is valued in the school.

I asked Jacob and Lauren if they get inspiration or model their teaching practices after anyone else in the building. Lauren responded by describing her Spanish PLC team and that she borrows resources from them, but still adapts her lessons to meet her teaching style. She did not describe anyone specifically that she sees as a hero or heroine. Jacob said that to be inspired by

someone else in the building that he would need a chance to watch them model good teaching; however, there is not any extra time in the schedule to see another teacher due to increased grading responsibilities associated with common core standards and the number of meetings held during instructional planning time. Outside of the heroes and heroines recognized for the teaching awards, the two beginning teachers interviewed did not benefit from heroes and heroines within the school culture.

Architecture and Artifacts

The physical layout and environment of a school symbolize the school culture. Despite the age of the building, Nation is kept in very good and clean condition. Mr. White attributes the cleanliness of the building to good student behavior. He compared it to athletes getting dressed up on game days. When they are dressed the part, they are more likely to act the part as well. As part of recent renovations, the media center was completely remodeled and expanded. This reinforces the values of student achievement as well as the students love for reading. The author banners created by students, and signed by famous authors, line the media center walls and are easily visible to all in the building due to the clear windows leading into the library.

Due to overcrowding of Earlywine middle schools, Lauren is assigned to one of two portables on campus and that has limited her ability to interact with others on her PLC team. Because of the physical layout of the building, the other teachers she collaborates with are on complete opposite ends of the building thus inhibiting her ability to interact with those teachers. In addition, grade levels are separated into sections, but teams and PLCs are not arranged in a way that encourages easier collaboration to take place. This represents another example of the dualistic approach where there is a disconnect between ideas and action. The idea is that teams and PLCs should collaborate on a regular basis; however, the action on Mr. White's part is lacking for setting up a layout that would make it easier for teachers to accomplish that task. Mr. White's office is separated from the other administrators, counselors, and central office staff. This separation could potentially symbolize the overall lack of cohesion among staff. Artifacts

line the halls of Nation representing students' artistic creativity, Rachel's Challenge, student work hanging outside of classrooms, and posters encouraging students to eat a good breakfast the day of the test. The artifacts symbolize Nation's values.

Manifestations of Cultural Symbols at Peak

Vision and Values

While I observed that the official mission statement at Peak is rarely discussed, the very prominent and well-known vision is Peak's Three R's: Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships. Administrators and teachers collectively decided this vision during a professional development day about five years ago. Each year, teachers revisit this vision to ensure the components are still reflective of and relevant to the school's culture. Due to the teachers' involvement in creating and updating the vision, teachers are more connected to Peak's vision and the Three R's influence all decision-making within the school. Mrs. Brooks communicates her vision to the staff through leading by example and in her hiring decisions. Because she has been in her position for 11 years, she is able to hire people who she knows will fit well into the culture of the school. Peak's strong vision influences all elements of the school's culture.

The ways in which schools define success reveals much about the deeper values and assumptions held by those within the organization. Deal and Peterson (1999) identified purposes and definitions of success, "Some schools give their heart and soul to seeking high standards of learning for all students. In these cultures teachers focus on the learning needs of everyone, from the most highly succeeding to the furthest behind" (p. 25). Peak has very high expectations of teachers to do everything possible to assist struggling students. Mrs. Brooks said their goal is to not let any of their students fall through the cracks. Some children do not have very supportive parents and Peak sees it as their responsibility to step in and take care of those kids. As a result, Peak is always focused on how their decisions will affect their students, because students are the top priority. Rather than student achievement and high test scores, Peak values student improvement and effort.

Peak also values collaboration and the concept of teams. Mrs. Brooks compared Peak to a team because everyone works together to accomplish tasks. Norms identified by Deal and Peterson (1994) that are reflective of Peak's culture are, "See everyone as a potential source of valuable insights and expertise" and "Be helpful and supportive of the others in the school" (p. 28). Examples of these are shown through the interactions between veteran teachers and beginning teachers. Emily explained that beginning teachers are valued for their energy and excitement for the profession and that veteran teachers need to steer that energy to the correct places. Mrs. Brooks added that beginning teachers are looked to by veteran teachers for their expertise in using technology. Bailey and Tanner both value and implement advice provided from veteran teachers in the building, and both have seen improvements in their educational practices. Because of the mutual exchange of ideas and resources from veteran teachers to beginning teachers, Peak's vision and values are passed on to beginning teachers.

Rituals and Ceremonies

Rituals and ceremonies, an expression of the vision and values held by those within a school, are referred to by Deal and Peterson (1999) as, "culture in action" (p. 31). Peak faculty recognized a need within the school for several students who would not have access to food over the weekend or during school breaks. Together, faculty, parent club, and community prepare a weekend set of meals to send home with students on Friday afternoon. This demonstrates Peak's values of keeping students at the heart of decision-making and finding a way to meet their students' needs. Another example of "culture in action" is seen through the donation drive for the orphanage in Africa. Representative of the team culture, school staff wanted to find a way to assist a former faculty member who now worked at the orphanage. The fundraiser was created and now is student-led through the Friends of Rachel clubs.

Similar to Nation, Peak also has "initiation rituals" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 34) to connect newcomers to the school community. Mrs. Brooks' intentions with hosting the day for beginning teachers one day prior to all teachers returning is to have the new teachers meet as

many people as possible. This communicates the values of building a team culture so that beginning teachers can immediately begin forming relationships. Mrs. Brooks assigns mentor teachers to beginning teachers in a very informal way. The definition of a mentor for Peak is similar to a “buddy” teacher, or someone for the beginning teacher to use as a resource. Tanner was assigned to another teacher on his team, and that teacher stopped by throughout the year to check on Tanner. Emily was assigned to Bailey, but Emily did not know she was a mentor. Bailey indicated that Mrs. Brooks trusted that Emily would take care of her. Mrs. Brooks confirmed Bailey’s thoughts and said she expected the culture of the PLC and team to support beginning teachers.

All teachers interviewed at Peak commented on the overwhelming number of meetings held each week during instructional planning time; however, they did still appreciate and use the time to collaborate with one another and devise ways to better support struggling students. One veteran teacher, and coach of 16 years, decided to give up his coaching responsibilities so he would no longer be a burden to his PLC partner and so that he could focus more on RTI for struggling students. Bailey and Tanner both received strong instructional support from their PLC groups. Rituals are an expression of the vision and values held by those within the school, and through these meeting rituals, Peak constantly reinforces the vision and values of collaboration, teamwork, and supporting one another. Mrs. Brooks believes that the culture of the team is more important than the culture of the entire school because teachers interact with their teams more often than the school.

Deal and Peterson (1999) defined ceremonies as, “Complex, culturally sanctioned ways that a school celebrates successes, communicates its values, and recognizes special contributions of staff and students” (p. 35). Teacher and student contributions are acknowledged through “Recognition Ceremonies” such as the Teacher Awards and Golden Peak Awards. Similar to Nation, teachers have a traveling teacher award passed from one teacher to the next during monthly faculty meetings. Special elements of this ceremony include “Value-filled language and

commentary”, “Recognition of those who have shown exemplary commitment”, and “meaningful symbols and artifacts” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 40). Teachers present the award with a short speech revealing the qualities and contributions of the deserving teacher. In addition to a traveling trophy that is passed around, each teacher recipient is given a pin with a poem describing the importance of being part of a team, which reinforces Peak’s values. Another small way Peak recognizes teacher accomplishments is through posting awards received by teachers on the front page of the website. The Golden Peak Ceremony is the highest honor a student can achieve at Peak. Special attention is paid to who is invited and where they sit because students verbally recognize who is there supporting them prior to receiving their award. Teachers presented each student their awards through a short speech, and almost all of the speeches referenced Peak’s Three R’s.

Another type of ceremony, identified by Deal and Peterson (1999) as “Memorial Ceremonies”, are ceremonies dedicated as, “Times to remember the contributions and trials of others... and to connect to the history of one’s school” (p. 39). Bailey had a colleagues’ son in her class when the student passed away over winter break. Peak faculty bonded through this tough time and found a way support the teacher who had lost her son through creating the “Rally for Ricky” baseball game. Now, each year, the school comes together to remember their colleagues’ son while raising money for a scholarship foundation in Ricky’s memory. Bailey appreciated the way the staff bonded through difficult situations and described the family-like culture of Peak. Deal and Peterson (1999) observed, “When people honor traditional rituals, it gives them a cultural foundation to weather challenges, difficulty, and change” (p. 33). Bailey agreed with this statement and appreciated that the faculty had been more than just colleagues to her. Their closeness to one another helped them through times when they were “driving each other crazy” (Bailey, interview, April 23, 2014). One last memorial ceremony at Peak is the presentation of the Brady Page award during the Golden Peak Awards. Brady was the student killed in a boating accident the summer after he received the Golden Peak Award. A separate

award was created in his honor and represented special characteristics displayed by Brady. Each year his parents attend the ceremony to present the award to a deserving student.

Deal and Peterson (1999) also designated “Special Ceremonies” as ceremonies that, “mark the beginning or end of unique events. Transitions are important times in the lives of people and of schools...Successful cultures find ways to highlight transitions to reinforce and build cultural values” (p. 39). As a result of Peak valuing student improvement and effort, the staff has created multiple incentive opportunities for students. For example, at the end of each year, each grade level has a special and unique celebration event that can only be attended by students who are in good standing academically and behaviorally. This incentive sets an expectation for students to strive to achieve and students are rewarded for their efforts. Another student incentive is the “Caught Ya’ Being Good”, or “Gotcha”, program. This program represents daily rituals that constantly reinforce good student behavior and choices. Lastly, the students selected each month to attend the pizza lunch are chosen because they have shown improvement in some area. Again, the focus on student improvement is one of Peak’s values.

History and Stories

Peak’s history involves significant population growth, increased diversity, high administrative turnover, school renovations, and changing educational philosophies. Defining the cultural element of history, Deal and Peterson (1999) explained, “The culture becomes what it is over time as people cope with problems, establish routines and rituals, and develop traditions and ceremonies that strengthen and sustain the underlying norms, values, and beliefs” (p. 51). When Mrs. Brooks’ assumed the principal position, she was the seventh administrator in 14 years and she indicated that it took time to gain the trust of her staff and to be able to provide structure and stability. She established a cohesive vision with yearly input from the staff and has influenced the routines, rituals, traditions and ceremonies that represent Peak’s values. Mrs. Brooks’ and Emily both described the significant population growth that had taken place over the past few

years, resulting in crowded classrooms. While I observed that Bailey and Tanner were unaware of the history of the school, they definitely recognized the crowded halls and classrooms.

Peak's demographics have changed drastically over the years as well. One of the veteran teachers appreciated the increased diversity of the students and felt that they were exposed to more of a real-world setting. Another veteran teacher described that the students have become more difficult to teach, which could be a result of the increased diversity or overcrowded classrooms. Mrs. Brooks explained that the reason the faculty revisits the vision each year is because of the changing student population. She wants the school's vision to be reflective of the students they teach and explained that different cultures have different definitions of Respect, Responsibilities, and Building Relationships. Tanner was surprised by how challenging it was to teach in an Earlywine school, which indicates he was unaware of the history and changing demographics.

One story shared by Tanner was about how the reading teachers were able to improve their students' reading scores through the RTI initiative. Fitting the description of Peak, Deal and Peterson (1999) described, "Schools are filled with poignant stories of teachers who made a difference, students who turned around, and tough situations that were transformed into joyful events" (p. 55). Students who were assigned to Reading RTI due to scoring unsatisfactory on the state OCCT test, were able to improve their scores enough to not need remediation the second semester. Tanner described that the reading teachers were happy and proud of their students' accomplishments. This story reinforces Peak's values of improving struggling students.

Cultural Network. The cultural network represents the underground flow of communication and ideas among key players within the organization (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Many of the key players within Peak are the team leaders who attend team leader meeting each month. Each month, these leaders meet as representatives of their team and are the gatekeepers for sharing information from and to their team. Mrs. Brooks has a good understanding of the cultural network, "Leaders nurture and support the positive players of the network. Specifically,

school leaders know who resides in the central roles of the network; consult priests and priestesses at critical junctures, especially before launching major changes...” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 58). Mrs. Brooks strategically and systematically plans how to communicate and implement state and district initiatives so that they are best received by staff. She uses the multiple meetings to communicate specific information so that time is used most effectively. Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000) referred to the cultural network, “Working the network effectively is the only way to get things done or to understand what’s really going on” (p. 15). Mrs. Brooks is able to effectively navigate the network and has a very good understanding of the school’s culture.

Due to Mrs. Brooks’ being in tune with the culture of the school, she noticed that beginning teachers did not receive the necessary support from previous administrators. Accordingly, she chose to evaluate all first-year, second-year, and teachers new to Peak so that she could best understand where they fit into the culture of the school. Because of her decision, and even though she increased her administrative responsibilities, she is able to better understand the beginning teachers and support them during a crucial time. This decision allows her to better understand the cultural network as well. She was immediately aware of the beginning teachers who were struggling and assigned those teachers to visit veteran teachers’ classrooms. She aligned instructional styles so that beginning teachers would best benefit from their observations. Bailey noticed the lack of administrative support during her first year, but her educational practice benefitted greatly from Mrs. Brooks evaluations and feedback during her second year.

Peak has a strong instructional culture and Mrs. Brooks’ described a beginning teacher who did not reflect this culture or Peak’s values. Teachers started to remove themselves from the beginning teacher and did not want to associate with them any longer. Referencing the impact of culture, Deal and Peterson (1999) stated:

Teachers can succeed in a culture focused on productivity (rather than on maintenance or ease of work), performance (hard work, dedication, perseverance), and improvement

(continuous fine-tuning and refinement of teaching). Such a culture helps teachers overcome the uncertainty of their work (Lortie, 1975) by providing focus and collegiality. It provides social motivation to persevere in the demanding work of teaching thirty children in a small space. (p. 7)

Beginning teachers are able to succeed in this culture when they become part of the team and portray the values held by staff. Teachers at Peak are focused on productivity, hard work, and constant reflection on improving their educational practices. It is this combined team mentality that helps teachers overcome the changing diversity, crowded classrooms, and large amount of change implemented at the state level.

Mirroring the playful and fun culture of the team leaders and the relationships they have formed over time, Mrs. Brooks described that most teachers at Peak are friends with one another. Bailey noted that she was told by several teachers that she was now part of Peak family and that they would laugh, cry, and play together. Because many teachers have spent their entire career at Peak, stronger relationships have formed among the veteran teachers resulting in overall staff cohesiveness. Veteran teachers are able to pass these relationships, expectations, and values effectively on to beginning teachers.

Heroes and Heroines. Similar to Nation, heroes and heroines are anointed at Peak through the Teacher Awards presented during faculty meetings. The value-filled language used during the presentation of the next teacher recipient reinforces what is recognized and appreciated in Peak's culture. Beginning teachers gather a deeper understanding of characteristics and qualities they should strive to attain. Deal and Peterson (1999) described that heroes and heroines show us what we can become. Peak's Teacher of the Year, Emily, is a heroine within the school as well. The school nominates teachers for this award and then vote as a staff for one teacher to represent them in competing for district teacher of the year. Emily has been teaching at Peak for 22 years and it is clearly evident that she is well-respected among her colleagues. She has an infectious, energetic, positive, and "can-do" attitude. She has a distinct personality and is very

vocal in faculty gatherings. Bailey and Tanner both mentioned her enthusiasm and because they all teach science, both beginning teachers have looked to her for advice.

Another hero in the school, Wayne, was one of the veteran teachers of many years, who retired after Bailey and Tanner's first year of teaching. Wayne had a student teacher his last semester prior to retirement, so he used this time to observe and interact with other teachers in the building. Bailey appreciated his specific feedback to reflect more on her educational practices. Wayne commented that she had the ability to capture the students' attention while giving notes, so Bailey used this advice to try and figure out how to apply that to other areas of teaching. Bailey and Tanner both described his unique and special ability to effectively manage a classroom of students. They enjoyed their time in his classroom and tried to implement his teaching techniques in their own classrooms. Both wished they had more time to observe him before he retired. Deal and Peterson (1999) described that stories shared by staff often involve heroes and heroines. One of the stories shared by staff is how Wayne sent them an email on a snowy morning when teachers were most likely scraping their car windows getting ready for work. He sent a picture of himself sitting in front of a fire, with a blanket wrapped around him, with some hot chocolate and indicated how great retirement was and to enjoy their day. Wayne is still influencing the culture of the school in a positive way even though he no longer teaches there.

Architecture and Artifacts

Mrs. Brooks intentionally structured the physical environment in a way that allowed for collaboration to take place easily among grade levels and teams. Teams are located very close in proximity to one another so that students and teachers can interact more frequently. Bailey appreciated being able to quickly ask a teacher a question during passing periods or just having time for conversations in general. Peak's value of teamwork is reinforced through this example. Grade levels are physically separated with the social and emotional development of students in mind. Sixth grade is sheltered from the other two grades and eighth graders need more physical

space, so they are on two different levels. The focus on student development through the middle school years reinforces the values of being a child-centered culture.

The architecture does affect the educational practices of science teachers in the building due to the limited number of science classrooms available. Out of ten science teachers in the building, only four are equipped with science laboratory materials. Bailey does not have a science classroom and must make special accommodations and arrangements to conduct a lab. Tanner has a science classroom but is often asked by other teachers to switch classrooms for their labs. Even if the school was not overcrowded, there are still not enough science classrooms at Peak. The shape of Tanner's classroom also causes difficulty in classroom management. Because it is "L-shaped", he sometimes cannot see all of the students in his classroom from certain areas.

Examples of symbolic artifacts in schools include display and prominence of mission statement, displays of student work, banners hung around the school communicating the importance of hard work, displays of past achievements, symbols of diversity, and mascots (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Peak's Three R's are posted throughout hallways, cafeteria, outside, commons area, teachers' classrooms, and Mrs. Brooks' office to reinforce Peak's vision. Teachers are encouraged by Mrs. Brooks to line the hallways with student work to constantly remind the students of their hard work and focus on learning. The signed Rachel's Challenge poster is immediately visible upon entering the building through the main doors. Again, this reminds the students of the challenge they accepted to make the school a better and more kind place. Rachel's five challenges line the hallways and cafeteria as well.

Summary

Information presented and analyzed in this chapter was collected through interviews, observations, document reviews, and artifacts. This information is analyzed through the lens of symbolic cultural theory espoused by Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000), and Harris (2005) and includes the following cultural symbols: vision and values; rituals

and ceremonies; history and stories; heroes and heroines; the cultural network; and architecture and artifacts. Through analyzing the two school sites selected, similarities and differences emerged regarding the manifestations of cultural symbols at each site. Chapter VI presents findings of the study through answering the study's research questions. Implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed and recommendations for future research are offered.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ingersoll and Merrill (2012) discovered a bimodal peak representing the ages of teachers in the workforce; one peak represented the veteran teachers reaching retirement age, and the other represented the high amount of beginning teachers entering the profession. The bimodal peak was evident in both of the middle schools selected in this study. Many veteran teachers retired and a much younger staff of beginning teachers replaced them. Teacher attrition statistics reveal that approximately fifty percent of teachers leave the profession within three to five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2011; Ingersoll & Perda, 2012; NCTAF, 2003). With the high number of teachers reaching retirement age and the large number of teachers leaving the profession within three to five years, providing support to beginning teachers is even more crucial at this point in education.

In addition to the limited number of teachers entering the profession with a high attrition rate, the current state of education in Oklahoma is unstable. Educational funding in Oklahoma is at an all-time low and funding has still not been restored to pre-recession levels, even though student population numbers continue to rise. Compounding the lack of funding are the multiple initiatives and programs that have been implemented by the Oklahoma State Department of Education that affects teachers on a daily basis.

Chapter VI presents findings of the study through answering the research questions. Conclusions are drawn from the findings and implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed. Finally, recommendations for future research are offered followed by a summary of the study.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe how school culture supported the educational practices of beginning teachers at two selected middle schools. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) How were beginning teachers supported in the two selected middle schools?
- 2) How did cultural symbols support, or inhibit, the educational practices of beginning teachers in the two selected middle schools?
- 3) What other realities existed in this study?

Based on the cases presented in Chapter IV and the data analyzed in Chapter V, these research questions are answered below.

Research Question One: How were beginning teachers supported in the two selected middle schools?

Prior to 2010, the Oklahoma Residency Program was the primary method of supporting beginning teachers. A committee composed of an administrator, a veteran teacher, and a university faculty member provided intense and structured support to beginning teachers during their first year. However, due to funding, this program was placed on a two year moratorium that has yet to be reinstated as of the 2013-2014 school year. The two administrators and two veteran teachers interviewed in this study mentioned the undesirable consequences resulting from the elimination of the program. Mrs. Brooks, Peak's school administrator, said that she really felt a difference in the support received by beginning teachers when the state program was eliminated. She explained that the educational practices of two beginning teachers were hindered because they did not receive feedback and support from a variety of sources. Melanie also felt that

without the program, no one was holding beginning teachers accountable. Melanie described a beginning teacher in the building who could have been more successful with proper guidance from a mentor, administrator, and university supervisor. Resulting from the lack of support from the state department, the task of supporting beginning teachers was now the responsibilities of school districts and sites. The beginning teachers in this study received varying levels of support from the district, school sites, and other sources.

District. Earlywine provided support to beginning teachers through the Bright Beginnings program and curriculum consultants for each subject. While Mrs. Brooks and Mr. White felt that Bright Beginnings was a great program, the beginning teachers interviewed had mixed feelings. They did not necessarily like the pre-assigned topics that may or may not apply to them, but they did appreciate and benefit from the time to connect with other first-year teachers in the district. Tanner wanted to have more opportunities to meet other history teachers across the district so that he could expand his instructional support network and share resources. Data collected from first-year teachers' attendance at Bright Beginning meetings indicated a very low attendance rate after the first two monthly sessions. Only two of the twelve first-year teachers attended in November and January, one of the twelve attended in February, and none attended the March or April sessions. While this is an effort by the district to provide support to beginning teachers, the support is not possible if teachers are not attending the sessions.

District curriculum consultants are each responsible for one subject area and for coordinating curriculum across the district. Jacob greatly appreciated his district curriculum consultant, especially as the state was going through the transition to common core. His consultant provided the entire district's required reading materials and curriculum which were a great source of support to Jacob and helped him through a potentially stressful time. Mrs. Brooks understands the influence of the curriculum consultant as seen through her hiring decisions. She hires people who likes kids and can work well with others, not based on their knowledge of the

curriculum. She knows that the district will provide excellent support through the curriculum consultants and that all beginning teachers will have their curriculum needs met.

Beginning teachers are indirectly supported by the district through Earlywine's mission and vision, community support, and fiscal responsibility. As a district, Earlywine values teamwork and collaboration as shown through the expectations of Professional Learning Communities and teaming in the middle schools. Strong community support has allowed the passage of the past 54 consecutive bond issues that provides for continuous school renovations and improvements. Tanner said he felt supported through access to technology and instructional materials. The district has a rotation schedule in place to continually update technology in teachers' classrooms. Earlywine demonstrates fiscal responsibility with the district budget that allows beginning teachers to have what they need for teaching.

School Site. As shown through the two schools presented in the study, each setting is completely unique and district-wide professional development and programs do not always meet the specific needs of beginning teachers. Each school has a distinct role in supporting beginning teachers. Beginning teachers in this study received varying levels of support from PLCs, teams, administrators, and veteran teachers. Some PLCs and teams worked better together than others. Lauren was not an active member of a team because she taught three different grade levels, but she received good support from her Spanish PLC members. Bailey received excellent support from her team and grade level. She enjoyed the team culture, feeling of family, and relationships formed among her colleagues. Bailey received emotional support from the entire faculty when she experienced the death of a student, who was also a colleague's son. Tanner had a unique experience with his science PLC because they were all new the previous year, so they bonded through navigating curriculum development together. All teachers returned this past year and their PLC team is stronger as the result. Because teachers interact with their team members on a regular basis, Mrs. Brooks explained that the culture of the team impacts beginning teachers more than the culture of the school.

Beginning teachers in this study described several different veteran teachers who supported them during their first year. Lauren struggled with learning how to use the smartboard, but another teacher in the building offered free training sessions after school for teachers in the building. Bailey and Tanner both admired the same veteran teacher in the building for his ability to effectively manage a classroom. The veteran teacher even observed Bailey's classroom on occasion and provided constructive criticism that caused Bailey to reflect more deeply about her teaching methods. Because of Bailey's ability to seek help when needed, she was able to receive support from other science teachers when she struggled with finding ways to keep students on task while working individually. She discussed various strategies with other science teachers in the building and has seen great improvement in this area of her practice.

Beginning teachers received administrative support in some instances, and not in others. Mrs. Brooks' decision to evaluate all beginning teachers at Peak was one of the greatest ways beginning teachers were supported. Mrs. Brooks was able to better understand the unique needs of each beginning teacher and provide resources and support accordingly. She provided targeted feedback to Bailey through teaching her ways to better manage her time. Tanner did not feel supported during his second year of teaching due to the way assistant principals rotate through grade levels each year. His first year, he had an excellent and visible administrator assigned to his grade level and felt highly supported. However, his second year, a first-year principal joined the staff and was assigned to his grade level. This principal was not as visible and not as effective in handling student discipline. Tanner commented that there was more complaining and frustration among team members as the result. Lauren felt very supported by administrators, especially through the teacher evaluation conferences. She appreciated the time to reflect on her strengths and weaknesses. Jacob did not feel supported by administrators. Jacob specifically asked to attend classroom management training, but was denied the request due to funding. Mr. White recognizes beginning teacher struggles, but waits until there is a problem before addressing

the issue. Mr. White's approach to supporting beginning teachers with classroom management is reactive rather than proactive resulting in teachers not receiving the necessary support.

Other Sources of Support. Jacob was the beginning teacher who felt least supported by his administrators, team, PLC, and veteran teachers; however, he was able to seek out other sources of support. Jacob had a unique situation and his wife became a primary source of support during his second year of teaching. His wife taught the same grade level and subject as Jacob, so they frequently discussed curriculum and planning matters together after school hours. Jacob also had a very good mentor during his student teaching experience. Because of the relationship formed during his student teaching, he is able to go to her for advice any time.

Beginning teachers' personalities and their experience in the profession were other sources of support. Lauren felt comfortable asking other teachers in the building for help anytime she had a question. Bailey and Jacob enjoyed taking on leadership roles which involved them more heavily in the culture of the school. Tanner and Lauren felt supported through their experience in the profession. Both were currently in their second year of teaching and felt that they had a much better understanding of the curriculum, expectations, and instructional technology. While realizing they still had room to grow, they both noticed an improvement in their ability to manage a classroom the second year.

Research Question Two: How did cultural symbols support the educational practices of beginning teachers in the two middle schools?

Nation and Peak each had two distinctively separate school cultures and each culture supported beginning teachers in different ways. Chapter V described the manifestations of cultural symbols at both Peak and Nation. This section summarizes the analysis with specific attention paid to how cultural symbols supported, or in some cases did not support, the educational practices of beginning teachers.

Vision and Values. Nation did not have a strong vision in place guiding all other elements of school culture. The lack of vision resulted in a disconnected staff; however, Nation

had very distinct values of student achievement and good student behavior. While Jacob appreciated good student behavior, his perception of teaching was affected in a negative way due to the emphasis placed on student achievement and testing. Lauren had a unique situation being out in the portable and not teaching a state-tested subject. Nation's vision and values neither supported, nor inhibited, her educational practices.

Peak, on the other hand, had a strong vision and values in place which resulted in a unified staff. Bailey and Tanner's educational practices benefitted from the support and advice from veteran teachers which was possible due to the relationships among veteran teachers and beginning teachers. Peak valued keeping students at the heart of every decision and pulled together to assist struggling students. Collaboration and teamwork were also valued at Peak and again, Bailey and Tanner both benefitted from these values. Bailey enjoyed being part of a team and felt supported through interactions with staff.

Rituals and Ceremonies. Both schools had very similar rituals and ceremonies in place that either supported, or inhibited, the educational practices of beginning teachers. Rachel's Challenge, Student of the Month, and various student incentives such as the Caught Ya' Being Good program at Peak, promote good student behavior and a culture of kindness. By emphasizing and rewarding good student behavior, teachers were able to better focus on their educational practices. Jacob noted and appreciated the ability to focus on instructional strategies rather than managing student behavior.

Nation and Peak had the same initiation rituals, a professional development day specifically for beginning teachers and the assignment of informal mentors. Mrs. Brooks had precise intentions, connected to Peak's vision, of introducing beginning teachers to as many staff members as possible on the professional development day. This demonstrates and reinforces Peak's values of teamwork and building relationships. I did not observe that Nation had a specific purpose with that day; however, Jacob appreciated the time to get acquainted with the school prior to all teachers returning. The informal assignment of mentors did not greatly impact

the educational practices of beginning teachers. Bailey's mentor did not know she was assigned as a mentor to Bailey. Tanner's mentor taught a different subject and stopped by occasionally to check on Tanner. Lauren's mentor was on her Spanish PLC, so she was supported more through the PLC than the assignment of a mentor. Jacob was not supported by his mentor and did not trust her with information.

PLCs and teams provided varying levels of support to beginning teachers. Jacob received very little support from his PLC and was not supported in his educational practices. Although Lauren could not attend the PLC and team meetings, she was still supported by her PLC team members through sharing instructional resources. Bailey and Tanner both received excellent support from their teams and PLCs. While the PLCs and teams mostly provided support for beginning teachers' educational practices, they also inhibited their ability to plan, grade, and contact parents during their planning periods that were consumed with multiple meetings.

Bailey and Lauren both mentioned the family-like culture of the school and the way their schools bonded together during tough times. Showing care and concern for one another provided emotional support to beginning teachers. While this does not directly support the educational practices of beginning teachers, it does contribute to the overall culture experienced by beginning teachers. Deal and Peterson stated, "[Students and teachers] need special moments in the daily grind to reflect on what's really important [and] to connect with one another" (p. 32). The entire staff connects with one another through these experiences allowing for deeper relationships to form.

History and Stories. Veteran teachers and administrators discussed the history of the school and how the school had changed over time; however, I did not observe that beginning teachers knew anything about the history of the schools. Beginning teachers noticed the effects of how the school changed, but not the history behind the change. For example, Jacob described a disconnected staff, but did not mention anything about the change in administration in the past

three years or the high number of teacher retirements. The educational practices of beginning teachers did not appear to be supported by the cultural element of history.

The stories shared by beginning teachers revealed more about their perception of teaching. Jacob described how the students had to send around a petition to sign to bring back the student versus faculty basketball game. He also compared Nation to a Ford factory with teachers representing the workers and students representing the product being made. Through these examples, it is evident that Jacob's attitude towards his educational practice was affected negatively through the stories shared. At Peak, Tanner described a story about the reading teachers who were excited about improving students reading scores, which directly relates to Peak's vision of improving struggling students. This story reinforces the vision and values of Peak.

Cultural Network. The cultural network at Peak played a major role in supporting the educational practices of beginning teachers. Their family-like school culture and team focus assisted the entire staff as they encountered adversity and change. They have a more challenging student population but because of their work ethic and collaboration efforts, they were able to address these challenges together. Mrs. Brooks had a very good understanding of the cultural network through her experience in the position and recognized that beginning teachers were not being provided the necessary support. Through her decision to evaluate all beginning teachers and teachers new to Peak, she was able to greatly support the educational practices of beginning teachers. She provided valuable and specific feedback to Bailey that assisted her in enhancing her instructional abilities. Conversely, the cultural network at Nation did not provide support to beginning teachers' educational practices. The disconnected culture among the staff was felt by Jacob and Lauren. Mr. White did not appear to have a good understanding of the cultural network as demonstrated through his reliance on team leaders to notify him when beginning teachers were struggling.

Heroes and Heroines. Beginning teachers at Peak were able to describe specific heroes and heroines within the school culture. Bailey and Tanner mentioned the same veteran teacher who had the ability to effectively manage a classroom. They both commented that they tried to mirror his teaching techniques within their classrooms. Peak's Teacher of the Year recipient, Emily, was nominated by staff and Bailey and Tanner relied on her for advice and support in their science curriculum. These two examples demonstrate how beginning teachers' educational practices at Peak were positively influenced by heroes and heroines within the school. On the other hand, beginning teachers at Nation were not able to describe any heroes and heroines within their school culture. Jacob commented that he would need to have the opportunity to observe a teacher in the classroom before he could model any of their instructional strategies; however, time did not allow for this practice. I did not observe that the educational practices of beginning teachers were supported by heroes and heroines at Nation. I also did not collect any specific data or information regarding how beginning teachers were supported through the presentation of the teacher awards at faculty meetings. Ideally, beginning teachers gather a better understanding of what is expected of them within each school culture, but I do not have evidence to confirm this theory.

Architecture and Artifacts. The physical environment and layout of the school influenced the educational practices of beginning teachers at both schools. Mrs. Brooks intentionally arranged the teams so that they were next to each other to encourage collaboration. Bailey was supported by the relationships formed among her team members through informal conversations in the hallway during passing time. She also used this time to discuss instructional strategies with her PLC team members who were nearby due to arranging the grade levels to be in the same sections of the school. Mr. White did not intentionally structure the teams or PLCs to be next to one another. Lauren was in a portable on the far east end of campus while her three other PLC members were located in opposite sections of the building. Jacob was not near his team or

PLC members and he did not build positive relationships with them either. Jacob and Lauren’s educational practices were not supported through the physical layout of the school.

The architecture at Peak and Nation affected beginning teachers. Not having enough science classrooms at Peak affected the educational practices of Bailey and Tanner. Tanner has a science classroom but must remain flexible to allow the other teachers to use his classroom for labs. When Bailey wants to conduct a hands-on lab, she must make special arrangements with other teachers. Lauren is isolated from her peers in a portable because there are not enough classrooms available in the building. Outside of the limited space available in both buildings, both schools are kept in very good condition, especially considering the age. Renovations have taken place at both schools in an effort to keep up with the rapid population growth, but the district is not able to keep pace, especially with less funding.

Artifacts lining the hallways of Nation and Peak communicate the vision as well as posters encouraging good student behavior. Both schools implemented Rachel’s Challenge. The signed banner is posted at the entrance of each school and the five challenges line hallways and cafeterias. Student work is also displayed throughout the schools. These artifacts do not necessarily directly impact beginning teachers’ educational practices; however, they contribute to communicating a school’s vision and values and symbolizing the school culture.

Table 5

Similarities and Differences in How Cultural Symbols Supported the Educational Practices of Beginning Teachers at Nation and Peak

Cultural Symbols	Nation Middle School	Peak Middle School
Vision and Values	Vision was not prominent and well-known by staff	Vision was prominent, highly discussed, and well-known by staff Administrators and teachers collectively decided vision during a professional development day and revisited the vision each year to adjust if necessary

	Lacked a strong vision that influenced all other elements of school culture	Vision influenced rituals and ceremonies, stories, cultural network, heroes and heroines, and architecture
	Valued student achievements in academics and extracurricular activities; good student behavior	Valued student improvement and effort, collaboration, and teamwork
	Vision and values created a disconnected staff, beginning teachers' educational practices were not supported	Vision and values created a connected staff, beginning teachers' educational practices were supported through interactions with veteran teachers
Rituals and Ceremonies	Rituals and ceremonies promoted good student behavior and a culture of kindness, supports beginning teachers' educational practices because they are able to focus on teaching	Rituals and ceremonies promoted good student behavior and a culture of kindness, supports beginning teachers' educational practices because they are able to focus on teaching
	Initiation rituals supported beginning teachers' educational practices by allowing time to get acquainted with school	Initiation rituals supported beginning teachers' educational practices by introducing vision, values, and staff, Administrator's purpose in introducing staff was to start building relationships early.
	PLCs and Teams – supported Lauren's educational practice, but not Jacob's educational practice	PLCs and Teams – supported the educational practices of both Tanner and Bailey
	Bonding through difficult situations, demonstrating care and concern for one another supported beginning teachers emotionally and contributed to the overall culture of the school	Bonding through difficult situations, demonstrating care and concern for one another supported beginning teachers emotionally and contributed to the overall culture of the school
History and Stories	History of the school was not shared with beginning teachers and did not support their educational practices	History of the school was not shared with beginning teachers and did not support their educational practices
	Stories shared revealed a negative perception of the school, beginning teachers' educational practices were not supported	Stories shared revealed deeper values, heroes, and heroines of Peak, beginning teachers' educational practices were supported
Cultural Network	Administrator did not have a good understanding of the cultural network	Administrator had a very good understanding of the cultural network
		Administrator chose to evaluate all beginning teachers and directly supported the educational practices of beginning teachers

	Disconnected school culture did not support the educational practices of beginning teachers through lack of communication among staff	Connected school culture supported the educational practices of beginning teachers through collaboration and team work
Heroes and Heroines	Beginning teachers were not able to describe any heroes and heroines within the school	Bailey and Tanner described the same veteran teacher whom they tried to mirror his classroom management techniques. Both teachers' educational practices were supported.
Architecture and Artifacts	Physical environment and layout did not encourage collaboration and teamwork and did not support the educational practices of beginning teachers	Physical environment and layout did encourage collaboration and teamwork and did support the educational practices of beginning teachers
	Four science classrooms with ten science teachers, architecture did not support beginning teachers' educational practices	Lauren was separated from peers in one of two portables on campus; did not support her educational practice by not being able to collaborate
	Artifacts did not directly support the educational practices of beginning teachers, but rather contributed to the overall school culture encountered by beginning teachers	Artifacts did not directly support the educational practices of beginning teachers, but rather contributed to the overall school culture encountered by beginning teachers

Research Question Three: What other realities existed in this study?

Outside of cultural symbols, other realities existed in this study that should be considered when understanding how beginning teachers were supported, or not supported, at Peak and Nation.

Administrator Role. Administrators have a prominent role in shaping a school culture that best supports beginning teachers. Earlywine provides a framework of programs and initiatives that are to be implemented across all middle schools in the district. Implementation of these programs and initiatives allows for a certain level of successful interactions to occur. For example, teams, PLCs, teacher recognition, and Rachel's Challenge encourage the district mission through focusing on collaboration, acknowledging good teaching, and encouraging a culture of kindness among students. Administrators implement these district-wide programs and

initiatives, and then are given the opportunity to add their own personal touch. Deal and Peterson (1999) stated, “These complex entities [cultures] do not develop overnight. In schools, for example, they are shaped by the ways principals, teachers, and key people reinforce, nurture, or transform underlying norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions” (p. 4). Mrs. Brooks had the advantage of being in her position for eleven years which allowed her to better understand, shape, and transform the culture of the school. She was able to bring in new staff that aligned with her vision and values. Mr. White, on the other hand, was hired after a beloved administrator of twenty years retired and had only been in his position for three years. Further, half of the staff retired along with the beloved administrator resulting in a large amount of new staff. He has not shaped a school culture that best supports beginning teachers as seen through the disconnected culture and lack of strong vision.

In addition to shaping the culture of the school, administrators play a major role in supporting beginning teachers. As described previously, Mrs. Brooks decided to evaluate all beginning teachers and new teachers to the school. Through her decision, she was able to better understand where teachers needed support and where they fit in to the culture of the school. Mr. White approached supporting beginning teachers in a reactive, rather than proactive, way and was not visible in teachers’ classrooms. Ellen Moir (1990) created the “Phases of New Teacher Development” graph shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Phases of First-Year Teachers' Attitude Toward Teaching



Moir, E. (1990, 2011). Phases of first-year teaching. New Teacher Center. Retrieved from <http://www.newteachercenter.org/blog/phases-first-year-teaching>

Teachers enter the profession with much anticipation and excitement. As the year begins, they transition to survival mode as they cope with the many challenges of teaching while learning the school culture. In November and December, beginning teachers enter the disillusionment phase before turning around after winter break. Mr. White does not have a plan in place to support beginning teachers after the first days of school and that is when beginning teachers need support the most. Through waiting for other teacher leaders to inform him if a beginning teacher is struggling, it will likely be during the disillusionment phase.

Political Aspects. Beginning teachers' educational practices are greatly affected by political aspects. Lack of funding creates difficulties on the entire educational community, including beginning teachers. Earlywine did not have the funding necessary to open the sixth middle school causing all other middle schools to be overcrowded. This results in teachers having much larger class sizes, which is especially difficult for beginning teachers as they are learning how to effectively manage a classroom. Jacob specifically asked to attend classroom management professional development which indicated that he was struggling in this area and further, funds did not allow for him to be supported in this way. Bailey and Tanner's teaching

abilities were restricted through Peak not having access to enough science classrooms and Lauren was removed from her peers in a portable. All teachers and administrators mentioned how crowded the schools were and all looked forward to the new middle school opening. If money had been allocated appropriately during the most recent legislative session, schools would be receiving more money.

In addition to the funding issues created at the state level, the state of education in Oklahoma is extremely volatile. Administrators and teachers feel more pressure and increased frustrations from multiple initiatives being implemented at the same time along with high stakes testing and new accountability systems. Teachers must attend multiple meetings each week during their designated instructional planning time, often times three of the five days, to learn and implement state initiatives. Deal and Peterson explained the significance of school culture in responding to change, “While policymakers and reformers are pressing for new structures and more rational assessments, it is important to remember that these changes cannot be successful without cultural support” (p. xii). While Nation is a high-achieving school academically and athletically, the focus on high expectations from administrators and community negatively affected Jacob’s outlook on the teaching profession. Mrs. Brooks and Emily understood the need to create a fun a positive school culture in light of high stakes testing and accountability which resulted in stronger, more cohesive school culture.

Life Events for Beginning Teachers Outside of Teaching. In addition to navigating difficulties of classroom management, teaching new and changing curriculum, and learning expectations from teachers, administrators, community, and staff, each of the three younger beginning teachers had life events outside of teaching, compounded by coaching responsibilities, to make their beginning years challenging. Bailey got pregnant during her first year while needing to complete twelve hours of college coursework for alternate certification. She was not able to take classes during her first year due to going on maternity leave during the second semester. Her second year she was trying to figure out life with teaching and having a newborn,

so she did not take any college classes. Now, she has one year left to complete all twelve hours. Jacob and Tanner were in similar situations. They both got married during their first year of teaching and then wanted to make as much money as possible through coaching and lunch duty. Jacob did not necessarily want to coach three sports; however, there was an additional stipend for coaching three, so he did. Compounding these life events, Jacob, Bailey, and Tanner all teach core tested subjects. Lauren, at 46 years old, was more established in her life and did not have these same issues. She had a mostly positive outlook on teaching and the profession. She did not teach a state tested subject and did not attend multiple meetings during her planning period. She also chose teaching after being in a different line of work for many years.

Conclusions

The findings from this study indicate that there are some similarities and some differences in how Peak and Nation's school culture supported the educational practices of beginning teachers. As noted in Chapter I and II, one single cultural symbol is not responsible for shaping the culture of the school, but rather it is the interconnectivity of all symbols combined. Similarly, in this study, one single element is not responsible for supporting the educational practices of beginning teachers, but rather each element contributes to the overall school culture that is experienced by beginning teachers. For example, artifacts lining the hallways did not directly support the educational practices of beginning teachers, but rather highlighted the importance of recognizing students and communicating vision and values. Figure 6 demonstrates the interrelationship of cultural symbols as they related to this study.

Figure 6: Interrelationship of Cultural Symbols as Related to this Study

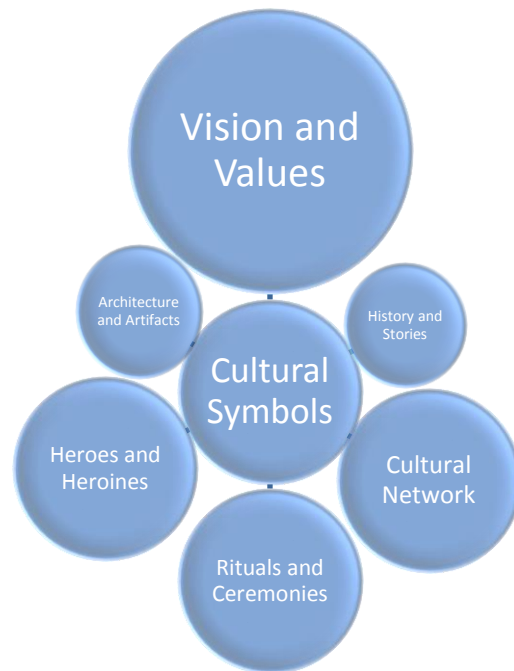


Figure 1. Visual representation of the interconnectivity of cultural symbols. Adapted from “The Cultural Web” by G. Johnson and K. Scholes, 1999, p. 77 as cited in “Organizational Culture and Its Themes” by S. Sun, 2008, *International Journal of Business and Management*, 3(12).

Findings revealed that some elements of school culture were more influential than others. Vision and values, implemented and guided by administrators, are the foundation of school culture. Peak and Nation showed significant differences in the manifestation of vision and values. Deal and Peterson (1999) explained the role of administrators, “One of the most significant roles of leaders (and of leadership) is the creation, encouragement, and refinement of the symbols and symbolic activity that give meaning to the organization” (p. 10). Nation lacked a strong vision and that negatively influenced several other elements of school culture such as the cultural network, stories, architecture, and heroes and heroines, which resulted in a disconnected school culture. Peak had a strong vision, created by administrators and teachers, and that positively influenced all other elements of school culture resulting in a cohesive and supportive culture.

Mrs. Brooks was deliberate in reinforcing her vision and values throughout the school in every way possible. Building relationships was one of Peak's Three R's and as a result, the staff developed positive and supportive relationships with one another. At Nation, Jacob and Lauren both mentioned not having any time to build relationships because they used any spare time to grade, prepare lessons, or attend meetings. Teachers at Peak have these same responsibilities, but were able to still focus on building a collaborative school culture. Relationships between veteran teachers and beginning teachers at Peak allowed Bailey and Tanner to feel supported by the collaborative school culture, which is consistent with previous research (Hudson, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001; Richardson, 2011). Conversely, the lack of relationships and disconnected staff at Nation contributed to Lauren and Jacob not feeling supported by the school culture (Kardos et al., 2001).

Beginning teachers in this study received support from a variety of sources, which is consistent with previous findings (Kapadia, Coca, & Easton, 2007). Some methods of support were more beneficial for some teachers than others, which demonstrates the importance of having multiple methods of support available to beginning teachers. Jacob was not supported by mentoring, PLCs, his team, or school culture; he was supported by his previous student teaching mentor, his wife, and the district curriculum consultant. In addition to these supports, administrators can assist in meeting the needs of beginning teachers by having a good understanding of the cultural network. This allows the administrator to steer teachers to the right places for support. All beginning teachers in this study indicated intent to remain in the profession, which supports the notion that the support provided was effective.

Realities existed outside of cultural symbols that impacted the educational practices of beginning teachers such as political aspects related to funding and state initiatives, life events for beginning teachers outside of teaching, and the role of administrators in providing support. Being part of a collaborative school culture helped Bailey and Tanner overcome the stresses usually associated with the beginning years of teaching, which is consistent with the findings of Wenzel

(2009), and contributed to their optimistic outlooks on the profession. On the contrary, Jacob was not part of a collaborative school culture contributing to him feeling more pressure from high expectations and his overall negative opinion regarding teaching as a profession.

Implications

The findings from this study have implications for research, theory, and practice.

Examples of these implications are delineated below.

Implications for Research

Due to the high attrition rate, determining the best way to support beginning teachers in the profession has been a topic of research for many years. When support is provided to beginning teachers, they remain in the profession longer, which allows more time to improve their educational practices. The primary method of supporting beginning teachers for several years had been through mentor programs; however, due to funding and time, many of these programs were not sustainable. Without formalized programs in place, districts and schools are faced with the task of supporting beginning teachers. Findings of this study confirmed findings from previous research regarding the ability of supportive and collaborative school cultures to support beginning teachers (Andrews & Quinn, 2005; Certo & Fox, 2002; Hudson, 2012; Kapadia, Coca, & Easton, 2007; Kardos et al., 2001; Wenzel, 2009).

Using symbolic cultural theory espoused by Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000), and Harris (2005) as the theoretical framework for this study expanded the research base to include the role of school culture in supporting the educational practices of beginning teachers. Each of the six elements of school culture were analyzed separately for the two middle schools to determine how each element supported, or did not support, the educational practices of beginning teachers. Findings revealed that some elements were more influential than others, and also that the school culture encountered by beginning teachers was a result of the interaction of all symbols combined.

Implications for Theory

Symbolic cultural theory espoused by Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000), and Harris (2005) was used to describe the manifestations of cultural symbols within the two schools. Cultural symbols have been used in the past to describe the overall culture of the school. This study contributed to symbolic cultural theory by focusing on how cultural symbols supported the educational practices of beginning teachers specifically, which had not been done previously. This study showed how the theory can be useful in explaining the interrelationship and interconnectivity of vision and values, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, the cultural network, heroes and heroines, and architecture and artifacts.

Implications for Practice

This study had implications for state, district, and school leaders.

State Leaders. First and foremost, Oklahoma state leaders must make funding education appropriately a priority. It is unacceptable that school funding has still not been restored to pre-recession levels from 2008, especially considering the increase in student enrollment over the past six years. Oklahoma had money available during the 2014 legislative session if allocated appropriately; however, decisions were made that benefited the oil and gas industry rather than education. Districts, schools, and teachers all are affected from lack of funding. Second, state leaders need to make an effort to bring stability to education. The implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS), followed by the rejection of CCSS, causes much uncertainty, undue stress, and wasted time and money for educators. Third, state leaders should also consider all that is currently being asked of districts, sites, and teachers. Compounding the instability at the state level is the implementation of multiple initiatives all at once. New methods for teacher and school accountability are being implemented with a constantly fluctuating teaching curriculum. Last, with more teachers retiring, and fewer teachers entering the profession, consideration should be given to reinstating the Oklahoma Residency Program, or at least developing some other form of providing support to beginning teachers.

District Leaders. District leaders must realize that due to the elimination of the state program, there is no formal method of providing support to beginning teachers. Districts are responsible for developing, implementing, and stewarding accountability systems and methods that support the educational practices of beginning teachers. One way districts can provide support is through hiring administrators who understand the importance of school culture and the positive impact a collaborative and supportive culture has on beginning teachers. Earlywine recognizes the need to provide support as seen through the Bright Beginnings program. However, Bright Beginnings is a program that is not fully reaching the needs of beginning teachers. Instead of pre-assigned topics, the time should be used as an opportunity for beginning teachers to network, interact, and communicate with one another. Chapter Four depicted a scene between two English teachers who traded instructional strategies for their Shakespeare unit prior to the last Bright Beginnings meeting. This was not part of the formalized program, but demonstrates that beginning teachers want the time and opportunity to exchange ideas. One way networking could occur within this program is to have teachers from all the schools come together, meet the new teachers, and share, explain, and bring extra copies of their favorite lessons from a unit. Beginning teachers would be able to meet other teachers in their curriculum area as well as gain additional instructional resources for a unit.

School Leaders. Administrators have an increased role in maintaining a positive school culture in light of increased pressures on administrators, teachers, and schools. Teachers are feeling the effects initiatives implemented by the state department and reduced funding and it would be beneficial if administrators tried to help teachers understand the reasoning behind state initiatives, rather than hearing it as an imposed mandate. Mr. White did a good job of informing teachers of legislative issues affecting education. Mrs. Brooks had a good understanding of the cultural network and knew how to present information in a way that was best received among staff.

Administrators must have a strong vision implemented in the school because the vision influences all other elements of school culture. Peak's vision was even stronger since it was created in collaboration among administrators and teachers. When a strong vision is in place, administrators can make hiring decisions based on whether that person aligns with the vision and values of the school. Mrs. Brooks only hires people who work well with others and likes kids.

Beginning teachers in this study did not know very much about the history of the school. Deal and Peterson (1999) observed the importance of sharing school history with newcomers:

Staff new to a school are in a heightened sense of awareness as they join the group and try to read the culture. It is an important time to tell stories that exemplifies what the school stands for, what is valued, and what has been accomplished. These stories should be real, engaging, and richly textured to capture the imagination of the listener. Stories are powerful ways of communicating values, reinforcing norms, and celebrating cultural accomplishments. (p. 55)

Deal and Peterson (1999) provided an excellent example, used in a New York school district, for administrators and veteran teachers to share the history of the school with newcomers. In the professional development days leading to the first day of school, veteran teachers take over the professional development and share the school history with beginning teachers. Not only are the veteran teachers connecting with beginning teachers, but they are reliving the past and sharing stories that communicate the schools values. The principal of the school commented that while this day was influential for beginning teachers, it had an even more profound impact on veteran teachers because they were able to pass on traditions and stories to the next generation of teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for further research are provided as possible extensions of this research study. This same study could be applied to other school districts with different demographics to observe manifestations of cultural symbols in a different context. Earlywine had

a strong instructional culture and teachers wanted to teach in that district as shown through 90 graduating college seniors attending a reception to learn more about the district. Earlywine also has a framework in place and expectations for schools to have collaborative cultures. Other districts could be studied to determine how school culture supports the educational practices of beginning teachers.

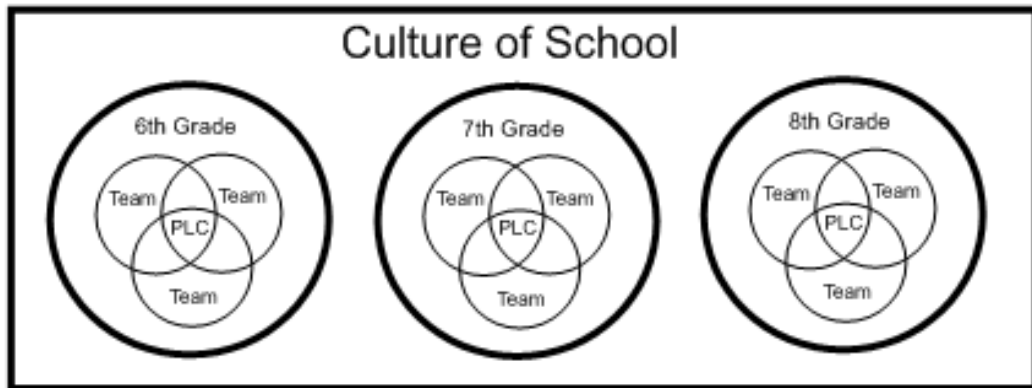
Only five total beginning teachers responded to my email soliciting participation in the study; the four that did participate were all in their second year of teaching. I was interested in hearing specifically from first-year teachers as well, but did not have that opportunity since I received zero responses. This same study could be conducted with a more representative sample of beginning teachers in each of the three beginning years.

This study relied on the interview responses of two beginning teachers, one veteran teacher, and one administrator for each school. To gather more perspectives, a future study could include a survey for the entire school to complete that would provide a more comprehensive picture of the school culture. This could be done through an open-ended, anonymous survey sent through email, or through the application of a different theoretical framework such as Mary Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology. In this theoretical framework, the entire staff would take a school culture survey and results are plotted on a graph. This would provide a deeper explanation of the school culture.

Mrs. Brooks commented that the culture of the team or PLC is more important than the overall culture of the school, because beginning teachers interact with their team and PLC on a more consistent basis. Figure 7 depicts the nested culture and varying levels of support.

Figure 7

Levels of Support Provided to Beginning Teachers



PLCs have the potential to provide the most intense support for beginning teachers' educational practices, then team followed by grade level. Each grade level has a distinct culture of its own, but it is all of the cultures combined that represent the culture of the school. A future study could apply Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group typology to the entire school, and then break down each team or PLC to see where they fall on the graph in relation to the entire school.

Finally, one conclusion of this study was that beginning teachers should have access to a variety of supports. A quantitative study could explore which type of supports are most beneficial to beginning teachers.

Summary

Earlywine has made it well known that teachers in the district are retiring in large numbers and even more teachers are needed. Earlywine has focused their efforts on recruiting and retaining high quality teachers as seen through the first year of the "Start Here, Stay Here" initiative. The University of Oklahoma initiated a new program this year to repay student loans over time for graduates who stay in Oklahoma to teach. Oklahoma began the 2014-2015 school year with just over 800 teacher vacancies (Torp, 2014). It is even more important in these educational times to have strong instructional and collaborative school cultures that support beginning teachers in Oklahoma schools.

Chapter II reviewed the literature in regards to methods used to support beginning teachers. In the past, beginning teachers have largely been supported through formalized induction programs. At one point, 38 states offered induction programs. The large number of induction programs was in response to the high numbers of teachers leaving the profession. Many successful programs were implemented; however, due to time and funding, these programs were not sustainable. Oklahoma is an example of a program that was eliminated due to funding. There is no formalized program in place now to support beginning teachers even though the attrition rate remains at the same high level, which reveals the need and purpose of this study: to describe how school culture supports the educational practices of beginning teachers at two selected middle schools.

Chapter III described the qualitative case study methodology selected for this study. Two of the five middle schools in Earlywine were chosen based on the number of beginning teachers. Data collection occurred during the second semester of the 2013-2014 school year and included observations, interviews, document reviews, anonymous beginning teacher evaluations, and artifacts. I observed team meetings, student of the month celebrations, faculty meetings, team leader meetings, district beginning teacher program meetings, award nights, and the environment of each school. I conducted interviews of two beginning teachers, one veteran teacher, and one administrator at each site for a total of eight interviews. I collected information from the school websites and took photographs of architecture and artifacts at each school. Collected data were analyzed using methods of data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Selection of the symbolic cultural theory framework occurred prior to conducting the study and provided a lens through which to analyze each school's culture.

The epistemological perspective guiding this study is constructionism. In this study, knowledge was constructed by administrators, teachers, students, and community through interactions with one another. Meaning ascribed to and actions resulting from those interactions defined the school culture. Accordingly, Chapter IV presented the stories of the two school sites

by describing the interactions among these groups using thick, rich description. Chapter V analyzed these interactions through the lens of symbolic cultural theory espoused by Deal and Peterson (1999, 2009), Deal and Kennedy (1982, 2000), and Harris (2005) and includes the following cultural symbols: vision and values; rituals and ceremonies; history and stories; the cultural network; heroes and heroines; and architecture and artifacts.

Findings confirmed that one single element was not responsible for supporting the educational practices of beginning teachers, but rather each element contributed to the overall school culture experienced by beginning teachers. Some elements were more influential than others such as vision because that is the foundation of school culture. Peak and Nation provided two contrasting examples regarding vision. Peak had a strong vision that influenced all other elements of school culture resulting in a cohesive school culture where mutual exchange of ideas was present. Nation did not have a strong vision and that negatively affected the other cultural symbols which allowed for a disconnected school culture to exist. These two different cultures were responsible for the interactions among beginning teachers and veteran teachers. The educational practices of beginning teachers at Peak benefited from the relationships formed among veteran teachers, while teachers at Nation did not.

Findings also revealed that the educational practices of beginning teachers were supported through having access to a variety of supports. Administrators play a large role in supporting the educational practices of beginning teachers. Understanding the cultural network contributes to administrators crafting a culture that supports beginning teachers. Realities existed outside of the symbolic cultural theory framework that affected the educational practices and support received by beginning teachers. Political aspects created an unstable teaching environment in Oklahoma with changing standards, multiple initiatives, and reduced funding. Also, life events for beginning teachers outside of teaching added to the difficulties normally associated with the first years of teaching. Chapter VI concluded with implications for research, theory, and practice and recommendations for future research.

Researcher Comments

I was surprised to find how strongly and directly decisions made at the state level impacted district, schools, and individual teachers. Reduced educational funding affects every area of education. Districts are reaching their maximum sizes with fewer teachers. Also, initiatives implemented by the state have instant and undesirable consequences for districts, administrators, and teachers. Districts must spend time and money sending staff to learn about the new initiatives. It was difficult for me to attend PLC and team meetings during the time I was collecting data due to it being in March, April, and May. When I wanted to attend a meeting, I was told that teachers were learning about roster verification or were completing requirements for administering state tests. Further, meetings were put on hold for two weeks during testing. All of this takes away from the ability to focus on students. The A-F Report Card, CCSS, and teacher evaluations are all complex systems for administrators to not only learn, but also to teach to staff, all while tending to other job-related responsibilities. These pressures from the state level affect the amount of time given to administrators to provide support to beginning teachers and to create and maintain a positive, collaborative, and supportive school culture.

At the time of writing this dissertation, the educational environment in Oklahoma continues to lack stability. Due to rejecting CCSS at the last minute, Oklahoma has now lost the No Child Left Behind waiver. This will greatly affect schools for the 2014-2015 school year. This event also contributes to the volatile legislature as political parties are blaming one another. It is unfortunate that those at the state level appear to be using these educational initiatives for political gains because they are entirely missing the point of education...the kids. It is my hope that education in Oklahoma can make dramatic changes in the near future; however, the unstable educational environment highlights the importance once again, the need to support beginning teachers and keep them in the profession.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter of Permission for Access

February 5, 2014

Dear Dr. Superintendent:

In fulfillment of the research component required of students in Oklahoma State University's Doctorate of Education, I am seeking your permission to gain access to the staff of _____ and _____ Middle Schools. I have already spoken with the principals of both sites and, pending your approval, both have indicated their willingness to participate.

I would like to conduct research this spring 2014 that will involve interviewing two principals, two veteran teachers, and four beginning teachers (years 1-3). The primary method of data collection will be audio-taped interviews, supplemented with direct observation, documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts. While middle school students ages 11-14 may be present during observations during the school day, they will not be interview subjects. A copy of my Institutional Review Board application packet is attached to lend further insight. If you desire, I can also provide a copy of the entire research proposal.

Upon receiving approval of the Institutional Review Board, the study will commence in the spring of 2014. Data collection will extend throughout the spring semester. Any necessary follow-up interviews will be conducted to ensure credibility; member checks of the transcribed interviews will ensure accurate representation of the subjects' words and ideas. Data gathering and analysis should be complete by May 2014.

If you are willing to allow me to proceed with this research, please indicate so with your signature below. If you require additional assurances, please contact me for further discussion.

Email address: shawnarichardson77@gmail.com Cell phone: 405.760.4153

Sincerely,

Shawna Richardson

Superintendent's Signature

APPENDIX B

Letter of Introduction

(letter to be sent via email to each middle school site)

To Middle School Staff:

My name is Shawna Richardson. I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, pursuing a degree in School Administration. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and your site has been selected for my study. I have taught six years in Bricktown Public Schools and I am now staying at home with my two children while completing the requirements for my degree.

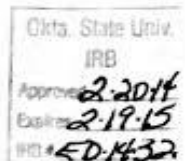
I am conducting a case study to better understand the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers as they navigate their beginning years of teaching. The purpose of my study is to describe how school culture supports the educational practices of beginning teachers (years 1-3) at selected middle schools. The resulting analysis should be insightful to school administrators and others in the education community.

I have been granted access to _____ Middle School by the superintendent, Dr. Superintendent, and the principal of your school. I will be present at the school throughout this semester and will attend some school meetings and functions. In the following weeks, I will be seeking assistance of teachers with one to three years of experience as well as veteran teachers with many years of experience to agree to a 30 to 45 minute interview. The data collected from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential. If you decide to participate in this research, your identity and responses will not be revealed to the principal, or even in my dissertation. The principal will have no knowledge of who has agreed to be interviewed.

If you have any further questions about this study, respond to this email or call at 405.760.4153.

Sincerely,

Shawna Richardson



APPENDIX C

Script for Soliciting Volunteers for Participation

(letter to be sent via email)

In fulfillment of the research component required of students in Oklahoma State University's Doctorate of Education, I have chosen to conduct a case study on various aspects of this middle school. Both Dr. Xxxx and your principal have agreed to allow the staff members of this school to participate in the study. I am now seeking volunteers willing to participate in a 30 to 45 minute interview. I will record the interview on my iPhone so that I may later transcribe the interview word-for-word to more effectively analyze the content.

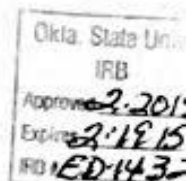
Your decision to participate is entirely voluntary. If at any time you feel compelled to withdraw from the study, you are welcome to do so. This study is in no way connected to your performance or evaluation at this middle school. Data gathered from this study will be used to inform the ways in which school culture helps support the educational practice of beginning teachers.

Should you decide to participate, your identity will be carefully and respectfully guarded. All findings and subsequent published material referencing this study will be masked to maintain the confidentiality of the school site and the specific participants. As teacher participants, your decision to participate will be withheld from the principal. He/she will not be given access to either your decision to participate or your responses. To ensure accurate representation of participants' words and ideas, scripted copies of all interviews will be provided to interviewees prior to the analysis of data. Corrections, additions or deletions will be made as noted by the participants.

If you are open to the possibility of an interview, please complete the requested demographic information form attached to this email. You can either fill out the document on the computer and email back to me, or print a hard copy and I will come pick it up from you. I will make every effort to comply with your schedule and preferences for date and time. I will be contacting those of you who indicate an interest in participating.

Thank you,

Shawna Richardson



APPENDIX E

Informed Consent

The Role of School Culture in Supporting Beginning Teachers: A Case Study

Investigator: Shawna Richardson, Doctoral Candidate, Oklahoma State University

Purpose:

You are being invited to participate in a study on the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers. The purpose of this study is to describe how cultural symbols support and influence the educational practices of beginning teachers (years 1-3) at selected middle schools. Participants will be asked to share their insights regarding school culture and the efforts made to support the educational practices of beginning teachers in their first three years.

Procedures:

As a participant in this study, you have been purposefully selected to participate in an interview, where you will be asked questions regarding general information about yourself, induction experiences of beginning teachers, and school culture. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted in the location of your choice. I will record the interview on my iPhone so that I can later transcribe the interview. I will provide a copy of the transcribed interview to you so that you can verify the accuracy and content of the interview.

Risks of Participation:

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you. The results of this study will inform university programs, mentor teachers, administrators, legislators, and beginning teachers of the role of school culture in supporting beginning teachers.

Confidentiality:

The records and results of this study will be kept private and confidential. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants in the study. Consent forms will be kept separate from all other documents. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research. Interviews will be recorded

Oklahoma State University
IRB
Approved 2-20-14
Expires 2-19-15
IRB # 5D-14-32

on my iPhone, and data files will be transferred to a flash drive that will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Immediately following the interview, all transcriptions will be completed by the researcher to ensure maximum confidentiality. As soon as transcription is complete, the data files will be permanently removed from my iPhone. Data will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided for participation in research.

Contacts:

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

Shawna Richardson
Ed.D. Candidate
2833 NW 182nd Street
Edmond, OK 73012
(405)760-4153
shawna.richardson@okstate.edu

or

Dr. Ed Harris, Advisor
Oklahoma State University
College of Education
308 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078
(405)744-7932
ed.harris@okstate.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact:

Shelia Kennison
219 Cordell North
Stillwater, OK 74078
(405)744-3377
irb@okstate.edu

Participant Rights:

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue participation at any time with no risk or penalty.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Oklahoma State U.
IRB
Approved 2/20/14
Expires 2/19/15
IRB # ED14-32

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions for Beginning Teachers

- 1) Tell me about this school?
- 2) What were your first impressions when you came here?
 - a. How has that changed during the time you've been here?
- 3) How did you obtain your teaching certification?
- 4) Why did you decide to become a teacher?
- 5) What other responsibilities, if any, do you have in addition to teaching?
- 6) How is information communicated in this school?
 - a. Describe scenarios that illustrate how teachers give and receive information.
- 7) Describe the physical environment at your school.
 - a. How does it influence the teaching and learning process?
- 8) In what ways, if any, have efforts been made to support beginning teachers (teachers in their first three years)?
 - a. People? Programs? Resources? (Site-based and district-wide)
- 9) How do these efforts made by the school or district support beginning teachers:
 - a. Align with instructional needs (improve educational practice)?
 - b. Arrive in a timely manner?
 - c. Provide a benefit or burden for teachers?
 - d. Include a variety of modes (online, one-on-one, small groups)?
- 10) How have these efforts to support you in your beginning years been successful?
 - a. How can they be improved?
- 11) School culture can be defined by Peterson and Deal (1998) as:

The underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools. (p. 28)

How would you describe the culture of this school?
- 12) What is an analogy that would describe this school?

Interview Questions for Veteran Teachers & Administrators

- 1) How would you describe this school?
- 2) What were your first impressions when you came here?
 - a. How has that changed during the time you've been here?
- 3) Why did you decide to become a principal?
- 4) How is information communicated in this school?
 - a. Describe scenarios that illustrate how teachers give and receive information.
- 5) Describe the physical environment at your school.
 - a. How does it influence the teaching and learning process?
- 6) In what ways, if any, have efforts been made to support beginning teachers (teachers in their first three years)?
 - a. People? Programs? Resources? (Site-based and district-wide)
- 7) How do these efforts made by the school or district support beginning teachers:
 - a. Align with instructional needs (improve educational practice)?
 - b. Arrive in a timely manner?
 - c. Provide a benefit or burden for teachers?
 - d. Include a variety of modes (online, one-on-one, small groups)?
- 8) How have these efforts been successful?
 - a. How can they be improved?
- 9) School culture can be defined by Peterson and Deal (1998) as:

The underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools. (p. 28)

How would you describe the culture of this school?

APPENDIX G
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, February 20, 2014
IRB Application No ED1432
Proposal Title: The Role of School Culture in Supporting Beginning Teachers: A Case Study

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 2/19/2015

Principal Investigator(s):

Shawna Richardson 2833 NW 182nd St Edmond, OK 73012	Edward Harris 308 Willard Stillwater, OK 74078
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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX H

PHOTOGRAPHS OF ARTIFACTS

Photographs were taken at Peak Middle School of Rachel's Challenge posters. The first picture shown is of Rachel's Five Challenges. The second is the poster with Peak student signatures accepting the five challenges.



Photograph of the tunnel at Nation Middle School. Students passing under the tunnel would jump and try to hit the “Learn Like a Champion Today” sign.



These two photographs were taken at Nation Middle School. These posters were hanging in the hallway during state testing.



This photograph was taken at Nation Middle School. This is Nation's media center with the author banners lining the walls.



VITA

Shawna Lenz Richardson

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL CULTURE IN SUPPORTING BEGINNING
TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in School Administration at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK in 2009.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Math Education at Oklahoma Christian University, Edmond, OK in 2005.

Experience:

Edmond Memorial High School – August 2010 to 2012

- Math Department Chair
- Taught Algebra I, Intermediate Algebra, and Preparing for Algebra I
- Mentored a first-year teacher and student teacher

Cheyenne Middle School (Edmond) – August 2006 to 2010

- 8th Grade Math Teacher – Pre-Algebra & Pre-AP Algebra I
- Assistant softball coach, Fall 2006 & 2007
- Head track coach, Spring 2007 & 2008

Central Middle School (Putnam City) – January 2006 to May 2006

Professional Memberships:

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development