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SCHOOL INITIATIVES AS MEANS FOR TEACHERS' INQUIRIES AND CONSIDERATIONS OF CHANGES TOWARD THEIR OWN INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

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By

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SCHOOL INITIATIVES AS MEANS FOR TEACHERS' INQUIRIES AND CONSIDERATIONS OF CHANGES TOWARD THEIR OWN INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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Truth, as described by many individuals, is subjective. For some, truth is dependent upon current situations, is elusive, and changes from one setting to another. For almost all people, however, truth-seeking missions are carried out within the institutions and environments constructed by individuals. This kind of truth seeking is only partial and confined. I cannot argue nor impose my beliefs as to the truth upon others. I can, however, share my experiences and perspectives about what is most meaningful to me.

I believe that real Truth is found in a Person. "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The verse, located in the New Testament book of John, chapter 8, is revolutionary. It is a life principle and belief that I choose to accept. Finally, this acknowledgement of Truth is primary and supersedes all other journeys toward knowledge and truth.

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Colleagues and mentors, such as Dr. John Scroggins and others, have supported my efforts. When I needed someone to offer a perspective, listen, or challenge my thoughts, there were many who fulfilled those roles.

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The five teachers and principal, who willingly shared their perspectives, proved that professional learning communities occur. The descriptions they provided towards this research question were valuable. I have learned from their experiences and will use them for reflection as I continue my educational and professional interests.

I expect the knowledge that I have gained, as a result of this project, to further my interest regarding the important work of public education. This research study is not an endpoint; it serves to inform my future goals.

DEDICATION

To my children, Olivia and Hope, your lives enrich my work, bring purpose, and help me to see the realities that children encounter in public schools.

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CHAPTER ONE

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers, who teach in schools that practice learning-centered principles, describe the phenomenon of externally imposed school initiatives, the instructional practice(s) as a result of the reforms, the culture of school change, and the participants' roles as adult learners. As a result of the influences directed towards their school, this investigation considers the perspectives of five elementary teachers whose school accepted various instructional proposals. In addition, an interest regarding the specific moments of teachers' lives that led to their decisions to act upon the reform measures accompanied this researcher's pursuit. Thus, this investigator is provided with knowledge from the perspectives of five public school practitioners who constructed meaning from their school reform experiences. As a result of this query, information related to teaching, learning, and the influences of external initiatives upon schools can be applied to current educational settings.

A naturalistic research method, phenomenology, permitted this researcher to examine the perspectives of these five participants. The qualitative nature of the study provided a forum to gather participant data. Through open-ended interview questions, the participants revealed themes associated with student academic achievement, their own learning, and the importance of positive relationships among colleagues and students.

Introduction

It is no surprise that since the publication of *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), Federal, State and local bodies of legislators have mandated change among public schools in the United States. A sense of urgency exists to make certain that the public schools in America provide environments that support academic achievement. Prior to this report, the topic of public schooling has always provided a forum for discussion and points of view among citizens. However, the accessibility of the print media, television, newspaper, Internet, and other forms of communication, has made it possible to access information about particular legislation, as well as various kinds of accountability reports on local schools. For example, a school patron may access, through media sources, a particular school of interest, and determine the rating given to it by the state's Department of Education.

In order to demonstrate that interest regarding school reform takes place among researchers and other community members, recent studies have examined various state and local educational mandates (Alvino, 1999; McElhoe, 1995; Palividas, 2001; Patterson, 2002; Stern-Gordon, 2002; Stritikus, 2000; Williams, 2002). In addition, state legislative statutes have impressed upon the public, the need for ways to measure and assess student learning. Many of these policies target literacy instruction and align with the United States federal government's goals toward reading achievement.

This public way of gaining information invites more scrutiny than in the past, and may create a heightened sense of liability and accountability among those educators who work within these statutes. Fuhrman and Odden (2001) wrote about the complexities among those who carry out the reform's intentions:

> The discussion of education reform is not always a harmonious one; conflicting opinions frequently create a clamor, as certain voices rise to the forefront and then fade away. It is hard for practitioners in our nation's schools to sort through the noise and understand what is working and what is not. (p. 59)

Recently, literacy instruction has received much consideration from governmental bodies (Snow, et al, 1998). In addition, the use of technology is both common and expected of teachers and students within today's classrooms. Becoming literate is contextual, and may be measured according to the environment in which one acts. For example, reading and language arts achievement, as measured by current schooling outcomes, are based upon a certain kind of school-related knowledge. The use of technology among students and educators is yet another common practice where being non-literate may distance a student from perceived goals of achievement.

Regardless of the kind of literacy students are expected to demonstrate, the attention has resulted in political entities charging common schools with the need to include specific teaching strategies within elementary classrooms. Schools that receive public money for reading reform are required to prove that certain instructional, student assessment, and professional development components are happening in order to justify

their use of such resources. Not all educators agree with the findings of specific agencies. For example, since the publication of the Panel's Report, there has been considerable discussion about the way in which the study was conducted, as well as its outcome (Yatvin, 2000).

As an example of the ongoing debate among various groups, another research group, (Camilli et al., 2003) replicated the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis related to phonics instruction, and determined that some of their findings varied from the 1997 government study. Certain components, such as the systematic use of phonics were effective when paired with language activities. Thus, the ongoing debate about policy and practice continues among policy makers who are, at times, removed from the daily practice of providing instruction to children. For example, one can find resources that suggest reading policies are derived to perpetuate the protection of property, rather than the well-being of people (Shannon, 1998). The spectrum of opinion as to how instruction and educational policy is put forth varies among educational constituents and could be viewed as political in nature.

Education Policy entitled *The No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) reauthorizes monies for states to use for academic and educators' professional development. These allotments are devoted to schools whose student enrollment reflects a high poverty rate. For the ways in which schools measure educational success, the monies are earmarked to help students whose non-school environments may lack resources deemed necessary. In

addition, schools that have not made "Adequate Yearly Progress" are candidates for funding as well, depending upon individual states' criteria. Title II of this Act states that the measure should increase student academic achievement by improving teacher and principal quality.

Because of the accessibility of print, television, newspaper, and electronic retrieval systems such as the Internet, a citizen can choose to become more informed about the status of legislation concerning public schools. Furthermore, the individual may assume and expect that certain instructional strategies are taking place.

Are these components of instruction, as proposed by legislatures or other external agencies, realized in schools that enact reform initiatives? If so, how often are the specific practices utilized? To what extent are teachers implementing external directives? For example, the National Reading Panel's Report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1997) indicated that components of reading instruction such as phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, word study and fluency, are important tools for schools to include when addressing the needs of students. Questions remain about the implementation of such strategies and the resulting modifications of instructional practice.

One can find much literature regarding the process of change, principal leadership, and the importance of creating collegiality among those who work in schools. The emphasis of this present study, however, focuses upon the

examination of teachers' perspectives towards implemented change in their particular school.

By listening to teachers' perspectives regarding their own realizations and acknowledgments of expectations related to instruction, the change(s) in practice, belief, and/or theory can be described, reflected upon, and used as marking points for perspective transformation among teachers. This kind of information can benefit schools that embark upon school-wide reform initiatives. Thus, educators are provided with perspectives from those within the teaching field as various reform measures are introduced. In addition, the kinds of knowledge gained from this study will assist pre-service educational leadership programs as they prepare campus administrators and teachers to assume acts of leadership within public schools.

Background

This researcher's work experiences as an elementary principal provided firsthand opportunities to observe teachers' interactions with change initiatives. By participating with other educators who were involved with school reform, instances of learning about proposed initiatives were common. For example, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, various schools in Oklahoma, in one aspect or another, were engaged in school reform. The intent of these projects was to assist and develop the professional knowledge of teachers and to dialogue with other teachers, thus creating a professional learning community.

Two types of initiatives that received support from educators across the state pertained to literacy instruction and technology integration. Literacy First, Phase IV, (Professional Development Institute, 2000) focused upon the implementation of reading instructional strategies into elementary classrooms. The OK-ACTS Project, utilized technology and democratic school processes as means of enacting systemic change. Teachers were faced with instructional decisions as they interacted with the guidelines and recommendations of these two initiatives.

An instructional reading model, entitled Literacy First, was granted approval from the Oklahoma Commission on Teacher Preparation as a means to enact the provisions of the *Oklahoma Reading Sufficiency Act* (1997). State legislatures, such as those in Oklahoma, began such efforts to influence the teaching of reading within primary and elementary classrooms. Professional development, peer coaching, site visits from consultants, and publications that provide information about reading instructional practice, are elements found within this professional development model. Yet, inquiries based upon Oklahoma schools that implemented the process are rare.

There are, however, other examinations of teachers' and principals' perspectives regarding their implementation and support of instructional strategies within their own classrooms and schools. These studies provide additional information about the phenomena of school change. For example, Shepherd (2001), Martin (2001), and Walkup (1997), examined similar environments in other states. These studies were enacted to gauge the effect

of reading reform and to gain a better understanding of literacy orientation. Individual educators, from across the state of Oklahoma, began to inquire about effective literacy instruction as well.

Beginning in 1998, public school elementary teachers and administrators in the state of Oklahoma were able to participate in professional development sessions offered by the Professional Development Institute branch of the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation. The staff development days were intended to provide information to teachers and administrators about the various components of reading instruction, such as word study, phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, and fluency. Paid consultants led these four days of in-service training, from an organization called "Literacy First" offered by P.D.I. Incorporated, Mill Creek, WA. The state legislature awarded this group a contract to provide these services as means to promote teacher knowledge and student achievement. The organization, accommodation, and coordination of the training were granted to the Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation (OCTP).

Established in May, 1995, by the Oklahoma Legislature (HB 1549), the OCTP is responsible for the development and implementation of a competency-based system, that includes teacher preparation, candidate assessment, and professional development. As part of their charge, the OCTP provides Oklahoma teachers with high-quality professional development experiences, emphasizing collaboration, active learning, hands

on training, and follow-up training, to encourage transfer to classroom practices (SEDL website).

This relatively new organization was distinct from the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Because of the separation of the two agencies, it appeared as though leaders in the Department of Education were not directly involved with the Literacy First training. Furthermore, House Bill 2017 of the Oklahoma Legislature, passed in 1997, provided the following expectation:

> ...the 'Reading Sufficiency Act' that gave OCTP the statutory authority to establish Professional Development Institutes (PDI's) in Reading, Mentoring, and inquiry based Science/Math. The legislation was prescriptive in that the PDI's had to meet stringent guidelines and be evaluated externally. (OCTP, 2003)

Thus, another organization had been formed in order to further and support teacher and administrator knowledge. By 2001, 13,700 teachers and administrators had attended these in-service opportunities, offered by the PDI (OCTP, 2003).

With the large numbers of educators who attended these sessions, it would appear as though many instances of changes and implementations occurred within elementary classrooms. During the next two years, the Literacy First process developed from the four-day workshop setting, to include a school-wide reform model, deemed Phase IV. School sites in other states, such as Florida, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Wyoming, had called upon this organization to provide professional reading staff development to teachers previously. In Oklahoma, 38 sites had moved to adopt this model. By the 2000-2001 school year, these schools were known as "Phase IV

Schools". At this level of implementation, on-site consultants from the Literacy First organization provided six consultations per school year, literacy resource specialists served within each school, and periodic reading assessments were given by classroom teachers so that reading achievement could be gathered and monitored. These assessments were used to measure areas such as comprehension, phonics, phonemic awareness, word study and fluency. Classroom teachers administered the assessments and data were charted for kindergarten, first, and second grade students. One of the requirements to become a Phase IV school was an 80% staff commitment to enact the reform over the next three years. In addition, partial funding for part of the literacy resource coach's salary was derived from the monies given by OCTP. The other portion, if necessary and in order to supplement salaries, came from the school or district. At times, federal dollars such as those received from Title One funds, were utilized to fund the remaining part of a literacy resource specialist's salary. In other instances, the remainder of the money for the salary came from another source of the district's funds.

Teachers and administrators, who worked within these 38 Phase IV schools, experienced firsthand internal and external scrutiny from colleagues, site and district administrators, and others within the school community, regarding their instructional practices. Peer coaches, walk-through visits from administrators, and classroom appointments for the consultants and literacy resource coaches were essential requirements of the Phase. In addition, periodic assessments of students' growth were charted and examined in

order to monitor the goal of 90% of third grade students reading on or above grade level. It seemed as though the teacher isolationism to which Lortie (1975) referred, was not to occur in Literacy First classrooms, and that instructional changes would be undertaken.

This Researcher's Initial and Informal Inquiry

In order to gain more understanding about the complexity of change related to teacher development/professional growth, leadership, and reading reform, a preliminary examination was conducted in order to consider changes that women educators experienced, as they moved from classroom teacher to administrator. In addition, this researcher was interested in knowing if a certain group of educators was able to identify a particular moment that led to a turning point in their understanding of their roles as teachers. These individuals, all knowledgeable about the practices of Literacy First, had either served as principals in Phase IV schools, or had provided consultation to those teachers and personnel in schools who had received training from the Professional Development Institute of Mill, Creek, WA.

The content for this qualitative inquiry was the participants' descriptions and histories of their personal work experiences. The outcome of the study provided knowledge to this researcher about their personal leadership experiences. The participants were chosen specifically due to their involvement with reading instruction. The questions posed to the individuals brought forth the educators' own experiences regarding their

careers in education and provided information to the researcher about those individuals who provide leadership to these specific kinds of Literacy First schools. The five participants were purposefully selected due to their involvement within the Literacy First organization and were active in community and educational issues. The interviews were conducted by this researcher, recorded, and then transcribed in order to determine if certain themes emerged from their responses and were common to all of their experiences. A critical incident or turning point was not mentioned in their interviews, although they all mentioned various acts of leadership that were instrumental in their life experiences. For example, the need to support teachers was mentioned as a necessary act for all of them. This information is important to consider, when those that initiate reforms neglect the needs of teachers.

The preliminary study was limited and intended for this researcher's own knowledge. Therefore, it may not be generalized to other populations or presented for research purposes. Furthermore, the sample size was small and took place within two mid-sized districts in Oklahoma. Both of these districts had support, at the time, from the school's administrative personnel and were actively supported regarding the training and funding of the Literacy First grant.

The Literacy First grant provided a preliminary picture of how teachers implement changes at the classroom level. While the dialogue with administrators provided insight into their professional experiences, teachers'

perspectives regarding personal and instructional changes were not gathered from the conversations. Temes (2002) argued that reforms begin at another level:

> The key is to focus less on reforming the institutions and more on supporting the individuals who teach. Radical change will come to schools if great teachers get the support they need, but by focusing on great teachers the change will be bottom-up and highly customized to the real situations of specific schools and classrooms. This is the kind of change that lasts. (p. 15)

This Researcher's Inquiry Regarding Learning Communities

As a means to establish learning communities based upon democratic ideas, The Oklahoma Achievement Through Collaboration and Technology Support (OK-ACTS) Grant, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, began in 2001. The initiative was designed to assist Oklahoma superintendents and principals in establishing learning communities within their districts or schools. The use of technology was a key tool and provided a means to help other educators assess their current practices and personal learning regarding professional knowledge. OK-ACTS, which was based upon the work of O'Hair et al (2000), included a framework that emphasized specific goals. For instance, inquiry, discourse, equity, authenticity, leadership, and service are means to support school improvement.

Achieving education through democracy has grounded others' educational efforts as well. For example, in Romanish's (2001) review of influential books suggested by Kridel (2000), inclusion of John Dewey's works demonstrates that democracy and education have been important for quite some time:

> Dewey's position views democracy as a necessary set of conditions for freedom of the mind to develop. Democracy exists for freedom's sake. Freedom is first and foremost an intellectual consideration, which provides an essential basis for the role of education, without which democracy is not possible. (p. 2)

Through community partnerships, the OK-ACTS program received financial and personnel support. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided $350 million dollars for states to establish programs that assisted principals and superintendents with school reform. In addition, other agencies and organizations partnered with the Foundation to increase opportunities for educators. Each state was allowed to submit one application with the goal of each state being awarded a grant by 2003. In Oklahoma, the University of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Education Technology Trust, and the National Science Foundation's Authentic Teaching Alliance, sought to train 800 head principals and superintendents over three years (2001-2004), in the use of technology and school reform practices in order to develop professional learning communities. Phase One of the OK-ACTS program, centered upon the training of these educators. Phase Two focused upon funding technology and professional development to assist administrators in leading the reform process in their schools and communities. Furthermore, this phase emphasized the development of practices of high-performing schools that produce academic achievement.

Technology use among school personnel is varied and is used to accomplish specific goals. Bruno (2000) reported that major differences were found among teachers with regard to change. Technology was one

component of the reform and it was determined that temporal orientations across age and gender groups were demonstrated. The use of technology to establish networks among teachers of mathematics has been useful to create a learning community. Weidemann and Humphrey (2002) used a technology tool to help dialogue about changes in instructional practices. As another example of the role of technology, Lapp and Flood (1998) wrote that on-line conversations through chat rooms, might help to provide a network of colleagues interested in helping students with literacy skills.

The use of technology, as one educational tool, may begin to initiate further dialogue about school improvement. The Oklahoma schools that have experienced a relationship with the OK-ACTS projects may provide locations for professional learning communities. Within these environments, teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding authentic learning may be found. Unlike the Literacy First initiative mentioned earlier, the OK-ACTS networks encompass a range of issues associated with school change due to the complexity of technology advancements. Inquiry into teachers' own learning, and the possible resulting change of instructional practices, may characterize professional authenticity among educators.

Purpose

An issue that appears to be imbedded within schools that adopt a new reform or propose new expectations of how instructional services are delivered relates to the complexity of the change process. Changes occur, not only at the administrative level, but also among all members of the school

community. At first glance, the reform models may be driven from external agencies, such as federal and state legislatures, school districts, and other bureaucratic boards. Change is expected from those personnel who belong to such organizations (policy writers, district administrators, teachers), and other individuals (legislators, parents, etc.) who believe that public schools should carry out the practices put forth in policy acts. Classroom instruction may be mandated by outside sources, but must, however, be implemented by the individual teacher(s) who encounter the responsibilities of the reform models. It is at the practitioner level, that the origin of the decision for change among teachers occurs. Therefore, it is imperative that the experiences of these teachers be made known in order to assist similar endeavors.

Whether or not teachers decide to implement a particular strategy, the outside accountability forces, oftentimes isolated from the happenings on the day-to-day basis of teaching and student learning, will put forth their measurement of student success. The decisions that teachers and administrators make regarding their instructional practice may occur as an outcome of other events and vary from one context to another. Some of the motivating forces may be the teacher's sense of duty, new knowledge related to the reform, collaboration with others, and/or the professional relationships that they share with other teachers and principals. Actions may be influenced by a variety of motives in those involved with the innovation.

It is important to note that shared decision-making, when confronted with school change, may provide a deeper and more sustainable outcome.

Rather than directives, participant knowledge and contributions may cause the innovation to be accepted more fully. In writing about the importance of democratic decision making, O'Hair et al., (2000) wrote,

> Unless we as teachers develop strong democratic foundations and guiding beliefs, we leave ourselves open to being influenced and overwhelmed by educational fads and trends, regardless of their merit and congruence with our needs and context. (p. 4)

Question Guiding This Study

The need to study the origin of a teacher's decision whether to act upon the reform emphasis, is important to consider when school-wide change happens or is being considered. A deeper examination of teachers' decisions regarding acceptance of an innovation, needs to be pursued so that their personal transformations, if any, can be acknowledged. The following question will help to guide the study and provide direction to the outcome of this investigation:

1. How do teachers, who teach in schools that practice learning-centered principles, describe:
    a. the phenomenon of school change initiatives or programs?
    b. their practice as a result of school change initiatives?
    c. the culture of change that constitutes their school?
    d. their needs regarding their own professional learning?

Schools are knowledge organizations and are entrusted with the duty to carry out endeavors for learning among students. It is important to recognize, for individuals who author such proposals, as well as those who

carry out the new reforms, that teachers construct their own knowledge pertaining to the reform in meaningful ways. Furthermore, the broad application of reform should help to create a learning organization whereby knowledge transformation is organically developed and supported. Robertson (1996) wrote that:

> "Examination of the adult educator literature regarding the inter-intra personal dynamics of the educational helping relationships, particularly in the cases of transformative learning, reveals that with few exceptions, the literature largely neglects the topic." (p. 47)

Classrooms provide environments where change is made operational. The adult learner who facilitates these changes may need conditions that foster and support his or her own learning endeavors. Caudron (2000), in writing about the needs of adult learners, stated that, "The most unforgettable and transformational learning experiences occur through personal experience, group support, or mentoring." (p. 54)

Elementary school sites contain many opportunities for teachers, as adult learners, to experience job-embedded knowledge in various ways. Because of the potential critical moments of decision-making, a turning point within the teacher's learning perspective may be presented. Cross (1981) referred to an earlier work of Sheehy's and wrote that: "...there are predictable turning points in the lives of adults and that these turning points represent an internal unfolding in a sequence of natural growth" (p.169) The manner in which teachers and colleagues work together in order to develop these turning points may foster transformative learning perspectives.

Turning points are defined as moments in a person's experience that moves him or her to alter a perspective; individuals may change actions that are associated with life or work experiences. An example of adult educators' experiences regarding their professional choices is described in a study conducted by Havelock (2002). In this work, he identified five turning points among teachers that characterized their work experiences: an initial decision to enter graduate work, the intellectual environment of the school, mentoring, the importance of scholarship, and gaining other perspectives regarding interactions among teacher practitioners after the completion of their graduate study.

Rationale

There remains a need to examine teachers' descriptions regarding their own learning perspectives. Therefore, this kind of inquiry is warranted among schools that have enacted reform measures based upon external policies or other local initiatives. The teachers' knowledge, related to the proposals, is constructed as a result of a critical incident or turning point. These significant events (experiences, reflections, dissonant events) occur as the teacher interacts and reflects upon the proposals. This process ultimately leads to teacher decisions regarding the new teaching practices. The reform measures, at first, might have initially run counter to their unexamined beliefs regarding the proposed change. The actions that teachers put forth as a result of a meaningful experience(s) regarding new instructional expectations can be reviewed in order to seek further understanding of a change process.

The contexts of schools that adopt reform models based upon political entities, whether local, district, state, or federal, are environments that harbor opportunities for study. These settings hold life and job experiences of teachers who work in the public schools of today. Furthermore, these are natural settings that are not fabricated, occur daily in the field of public education, and provide meaningful knowledge for those who experience or are curious about the outcomes of political policy directed towards education.

What appear to be changes imposed from the external entities, may not capture the true essence of the principals and teachers who experience the responsibilities of implementation on a day-to-day basis. Without the belief, acceptance, and action of all those involved in carrying out these duties, the change may be short-lived. The rationale for this study is not whether or not the innovation achieves the goals for which it is intended. Rather, the life cycle of a teacher's work regarding the reform, regardless of the way in which it originated, is important to note in order to understand the sustainability of the innovation and/or the transformational perspective of the teacher. Thus, the voices of the actors who carry out these duties in public schools should be heard. The messages that these individuals voice, can add to the dialogue of professional development, collegial relationships, and school reform.

Definition of Terms

In order to provide additional background knowledge when reviewing this study, there are several terms that are important to note when interpreting the data.

Learning-Centered Schools were comprised of individuals who demonstrated and practiced principles based upon democratic ideals. Another term, professional learning communities, is also used to describe schools whose members participated in inquiry, discourse, equity, authentic teaching, leadership and service. (O'Hair et al, 2000)

Regular Classroom Teachers were those teachers who were responsible for teaching specific instructional objectives to students within their own schools or classrooms.

Instructional Coaches were charged with providing support to the regular classroom teacher or principal, by providing literacy resources, teaching sessions, technology, and guidance. These measures were intended to help facilitate the reform practices. Coaches worked either full or part time at schools located in other districts across the state. They may or may not have been responsible for teaching individual classrooms of students, and worked closely with teachers and/or principals.

Consultants are sometimes used in reform models. They may be paid in order to offer their expertise regarding certain instructional components. Their positions, either through staff development or

specific grants, were utilized to assist school personnel with gaining new understandings with the accountability issues and expectations of the innovation. They may also provide staff development to those schools that were funded by the grant.

Supervisors were assistant principals or principals who were charged with providing some sort of evaluation for the regular classroom teacher. Not only did the principal or assistant principal monitor the performance gains of students but also were responsible for the evaluation process necessary for teacher contract renewal.

Field Coordinators maintained contact among administrators who were involved in the OK-ACTS initiative. They provided support for groups of administrators and were allocated to various clusters of participants, based upon geographic location and proximity to one another.

Student Assessments given periodically throughout the year, were used to determine student academic achievement. The students were measured using these assessments and their growth was charted throughout the year. This information may or not be provided to the school's principal/ assistant principal, literacy coach, consultant, or other supervisors who were interested in knowing the outcomes. Students' scores communicated to outside personnel, were kept confidential.

Peer Coaches involved educators who paired with one another and observed each other's instructional reading practices. These

arrangements were used to provide dialogue, and were initiated by the classroom teachers themselves.

Literacy Components that were measured by these periodic assessments included phonemic awareness, phonics, reading comprehension, word study, and fluency.

Authentic Instruction puts forth the idea that students construct their own knowledge and this provides avenues for deeper learning. Students may have more invested in the learning, due to the interactions and personal meaning-making that is facilitated by others or themselves.

Objectives

Due to the unique and varied background of each reader of this study, he or she may envision and offer his or her own objectives. However, this researcher's objective was to examine the teachers' descriptions in order to describe the phenomenon of externally imposed school initiatives, their instructional practices, the school culture and their own construction of knowledge regarding the initiatives. Furthermore, how were their perspectives influenced as a result of the reform? For some school personnel, these new requirements were unique and provided new expectations and accountability measures not experienced previously. This possible change in practice, brought about by many issues, may further or stall the cause of school-wide reform. The dilemma may lead to more

reflective behaviors, thus deepening the understanding of the particular change that accompanies school-wide reform. Glickman (2001) wrote:

> "Faculty in schools that have high intellectual standards and educate virtually all their students well work in collegial, critical ways with each other, clearly knowing what they want of all students and striving to close the gap between the rhetoric of education aims and the hard, professional work of practice. Successful schools stand in great contrast to mediocre and low-performing schools where faculty work apart from each other, without common purpose, and with self-centered beliefs that they are doing the best they can." (pp 5,6)

Because of the requirements of the innovation studied, such as collegial relationships, peer consultations, supervision, and scrutiny from others outside the classroom, this model of reform contains organic elements of change. Therefore, how do teachers, who practice learning centered principles describe the phenomenon of school change, their practices, culture and their own professional learning as a result of externally imposed initiatives?

Assumptions

The following assumptions are known by the researcher to be considered when interpreting the outcome of the study:

1. Classroom teachers describe their interpretations of their experiences honestly and in a truthful manner.
2. Administrators, who work closely with classroom teachers, are knowledgeable about the teachers' changes, and noted modifications as to how instruction was arranged by the teacher.

3. Classroom teachers and administrators have perceptions about local policy. These understandings require reform and changes in practice related to their respective roles.
4. Classroom teachers and administrators report factual information regarding their experiences related to policy implementation.
5. The policies are means to establish fairness and equity among students. Furthermore, public school personnel, who believe that equity is necessary for all students, enact legislative educational policy.

Limitations of the Research

1. The research study was limited to school personnel within one state and region of the United States.
2. All of the participants were recipients of a state grant that awarded money, teacher training, and other resources such as professional literature and consultation services by the outside organizations.
3. The perspectives of the participants were unique to them, contextual, and may not be necessarily true for every classroom teacher or principal.

Significance of the Research

The knowledge that is gained from examining the perspectives of those teachers and principals who work on the frontline of local policy implementation is important to consider for future and current policy initiatives. The query and study of the participants' responses will provide

understanding and new knowledge regarding the complex issues associated with school change. The essence of the participants' experiences will assist those individuals who seek to create conditions within schools that foster and support adult learning among all participants. Regardless of the roles they play, teachers, administrators, and policy makers can use the data to inform their own practice.

Importance to the Researcher

This researcher spent ten and one-half years as a classroom teacher and worked in a variety of public school settings. The information gleaned from each of these perspectives (military posts, inner city, suburban) has helped to create knowledge for the researcher within the fields of curriculum, instruction, and educational administration. Furthermore, the past eight years have provided experiences as principal and assistant principal.

With the increased diversity of perceptions, cultures, and beliefs, that can be found in public schools today (Schlecty, 2001), the responses to changes and adaptations to new expectations are important for all to consider. The school environment is not excluded from the political movements and perspectives of the greater community, and provides a naturalistic setting for all members of a community to learn about themselves and others. If dialogue, democratic action, and respect for individuals are important, a natural place to study the outcomes of these behaviors and tools, is within individual public school classrooms. The origin or beginning point for

a new perspective should be examined fully. Without this knowledge, change imposed externally may not be substantive.

As a community member and educator, it is important for the researcher to gain knowledge about the best environments that create conditions of support for all members of the learning community. It is expected that this study will provide such knowledge.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter One contained the background, rationale, purpose and other pertinent information. A need exists to examine teachers' descriptions regarding the phenomenon of externally imposed school initiatives, their practice, the culture, and their own construction of knowledge regarding the reform. A historical background and review of literature, in Chapter Two, will present information that relates to this topic and provide theories that are important to consider when examining the topic. Chapter Three will explain the methodology used by the researcher. The findings from the participants will be reported in Chapter Four, as well as the analysis of the data. Chapter Five will put forth the outcomes of the study and will be utilized as a means for discussion of the implications of the study. In addition, the final chapter will relay the need for further research related to this topic.

CHAPTER TWO

Historical Background

The systems that encompass American public schools are constructed as a result of the values, beliefs, and orientations of specific societies and times. Individuals, whether they are students, parents, educators, or community members, help to shape and determine the decisions and actions that occur within schools (Caine & Caine, 1997). In addition, political entities such as local, state and Federal governing boards are known to interject expectations by way of statutes or policies.

This kind of involvement by such groups, to a greater or lesser extent, has taken place since the time when America was defined as colonies, operating under the control of other governments from another continent. Even today, and as evidenced by the current manner in which information is shared through listserv, a recent article about the nature of reading research produced many differing ideas and meanings among participants. Brabham and Villaume (2003) reported:

> Electronic literacies exercised on the listerv alerted subscribers to reports of political actions and reactions resulting from the NRP's research summary and added teachers to audiences that were immediately privy to these events. The RTEACHER listerve gave reading teachers an electronic platform for voicing their perspectives on political maneuvers that aimed the NRP's summary of scientific research at reforms in the teaching of reading. (p.1)

For a few, the term, academic freedom, does not apply to public schools. Their explanation is one in which schools are created by tax-paying

citizens, whose ideas and opinions are justified due to their monetary contributions. Others might argue against such beliefs. Yet, the direction and mission that schools take depends on their current and/or historical context. Presently, professional learning communities offer opportunities for teachers to describe their experiences related to school reform measures. Their accounts provide evidence of the phenomenon of school reform associated with instructional practices, culture, and their own needs with regard to learning. Therefore, the teachers' experiences provide current perspectives of their teaching experiences, as a result of their encounter with school reform initiatives.

Schools As Representatives of Communities

In describing the origin of the school setting in America, Campbell et al (1990) mentioned that schools began as private or parochial institutions. Even though laws and reform movements dealt with education during the 1600s, it seemed as though only certain groups of children were able or chose to access this kind of academic environment. Hirschland and Steinmo (2003) reported, "...from the time of the Founding Fathers, America has witnessed waves of reform efforts in which political elites at the national level have attempted to improve the quality and delivery of education across the country." (p. 344)

The apparent exclusive nature of the ways in which schools were organized seemed to discriminate against those who were not aware of such mandates, and therefore did not allow them to participate fully in obtaining a

public education. For example, the privileged, or those who had been exposed to an academic environment in European countries, perpetuated the belief that higher academic learning should be afforded to select groups of people.

Wortham (1992) described how new institutions for higher learning began at this time. She indicated that the purpose of many of these schools was to educate the privileged, so that they may lead the masses. These particular schools, in her description, were designed for white men and not the immigrants, Native Americans, or slaves that made up the constituencies.

The colonies, however, were formed into a new country and separated into states as a means to establish particular jurisdictions. Ultimately, the states began to grow and become more established. School units within these areas were dependent upon the laws of the local governments and operated under the control of governing boards. Because of new laws and statutes, the increasing numbers and diversity of immigrants from other countries, and the development of new political entities, a need for a more pluralistic view of schooling began to take shape. Furthermore, as the young and democratic authority of the United States was formed, many individuals and communities began to view the government as one that should provide for inclusiveness and fairness for all members of society. For example, due to the periodic influx of immigrants from certain countries, such debatable programs as bilingual education have had moments in history of tolerance (Ovando, 2003).

For others, however, the divisions that kept the states apart, before and during the Civil War, continued to shape policy and funding long after the ideas of equality were settled in the constitution (Hirschland & Steinmo, 2003). Because the federal government's role regarding education was not clearly defined in the constitution, the issues were left for individual states to decide and fund.

Due to the fact that schooling was carried out in the communities of these states, ideas about educational issues began to be translated into the language of states' constitutions and statutes by the 18th and 19th century. Campbell et al (1990), continued their explanation:

> In the development of public education, as we have previously suggested, there have been a number of legal milestones that deserve some mention. The first of these was the establishment of the legal basis for public education in the various states. By 1820 thirteen of the twenty-three states then in existence had constitutional provisions and seventeen had statutory provisions pertaining to public education. (p. 11)

Politicizing school issues by way of either government action or intervention has played a role in the decisions that members of school communities have made. Some might argue that, since the government of the United States was established by the rule of the constitution, amendments, legislative intent, and elected by eligible voters, it is natural that differences of opinions will continue to exist. For a few educational issues, the differences of opinions may continue until there is a need for other parts of the government, such as judicial branches, to intervene in the affairs of school. While this kind of involvement is rare, these decisions set new

policies for schools. Alexander and Alexander (1992) wrote about the historical change that had been occurring during the 1900s:

> The power of the legislature would not generally be questioned unless the legislation transgressed on the more important freedom provisions such as the right to life, liberty, happiness, and prosperity. Lately, however, this view has changed. The courts have become more assertive and have begun to more carefully scrutinize legislation in light of education provisions. (p. 29)

In addition to the states' responsibilities to accommodate education, the federal government began to exert its influence in the ways that many consider to be politically motivated (Brandt, 2000). As the government played a more active role in the affairs of schools in the 1900s, as well as today, policies have been enacted, and are meant to direct the goals of public schools. Some of these mandates were created in response to the societal issues of the day (Sarason, 1976).

Just as political agencies and policy initiatives of the past have been instrumental in the development of schools' missions, members of today's school communities must deal with ideas related to the perceived direction and goals of public education. For example, because of disenchantment with the federal government's *No Child Left Behind* Act, some states are questioning the requirements of various populations (e.g., rural schools) and their ability to meet the mandate's goal (Richard, 2003).

These new directives from elected legislative bodies' center upon educational standards and accountability. Many of them (Raywid, 2002), are enacted because of a mistrust of public school efforts. Alvino, (1999)

researched the nature of urban education policy and investigated the trends and key constituencies that influenced legislation.

These external mandates create a new kind of awareness and responsibility for many who work within today's public schools. Thus, the brief history of public schools in the United States has been wrapped in political ideals, shaped by the thought of the elected.

Issues of Standards and Accountability

Educators and others have interpreted recent government policies, such as the United States' government *No Child Left Behind Act*, as increasing accountability among students and educators (Rothstein, 2001). Ideas regarding the purposes of schooling are diverse. For some, the standards-based policies and movements hinder discussions related to other thoughts about the moral purposes of schooling. This study, however, was born as a result of the realizations of the present-day milieu that includes standards-based assessments and accountability, as defined by recent federal and state legislation.

The perceptions of standards and accountability practices, among community members are utilized to gauge the academic progress of students. Legislatures, in attempts to ensure an educated citizenry, have developed such calls for action in recent years (McElhoe, 1995). However, not all citizens agree with these kinds of proceedings (Brabham & Villuame, 2003). In addition, Stevensn (2003) described that politically motivated policies may

limit further funding opportunities for reading programs that do not adhere to particular methodologies.

The complexities, however, of such issues are intertwined with instructional decisions that educators make daily. Much energy could be spent researching the causes of events that led to the current manner in which schools are deemed successful by political agencies. The expectation, of those who work within today's schools, is one that calls upon teachers to ensure that all students are held accountable for achieving specified outcomes put forth by educational agencies. It is within this framework that many teachers spend their professional lives making decisions about practice.

For those who choose to continue working in public schools of today, accountability and standards frame the discussions of educational goals. Panels, composed of policy makers, created some of these accountability measures. Their actions, at times, have bypassed the practitioner's who work in classrooms on a daily basis. Few teachers play roles in these committees. Therefore, they do not have input into policy creation. This omission may affect their perception of their roles as teachers (Palividas, 2001).

Results of a study conducted by Williams (2002), demonstrated that high stakes testing played a central role when teachers planned for student learning. The investigation determined that teachers' feelings were impacted as a result of the external mandates placed upon their teaching environments.

Accountability has been a word that has been used among educators for some time. Patterson (2002) examined perceptions of this term, between 1948 and 2002, and found that the meaning has changed as successive generations assume control of the community's educational aims. Again, specific groups wielded their respective understandings, and contributed to the influence on schools.

As an example, the authority of legislation concerning bilingual and literacy instruction (Stritikus, 2000) seemed to do very little in resolving the instructional decisions among teachers. These educators, held accountable for including certain techniques, were required to change practice as a result of new policy. A voter initiated mandate sought to address specific student populations, by requiring that certain instructional decisions take place. This policy, intent on requiring definite measures, did not appear to assist the participants in putting forth ideas related to teaching practice.

Some schools have found that the required accountability measures reduce the dissonance between assessment and instruction (Stern-Gordon, 2002). By examining the results of school districts that showed dramatic gains between 1994 and 1999, through the use of case study, focused group interviews, document analysis and observations, the study found that curriculum and assessment were aligned. This agreement between these education ventures appeared to demonstrate success, as defined by certain accountability definitions.

Other ideas about the importance of accountability and standards seek to inform those that have vested interests in education. Contributions by researchers and practitioners interested in the areas of school change and teacher practice, have sought to examine the issue of accountability. The awareness and knowledge creation about this topic has helped to provide further insight into these kinds of policies (Falk, 2002).

Reform that includes components of standards could be used to inform the educational community about student achievement. Reeves (2000) suggested that accountability standards might bring about a better measurement of student learning, if approached in particular ways. Rather than the perception that standards produce only test preparation and test-driven teaching, he suggested that standards could be utilized in order to translate theories into practice. This kind of learning by teachers is defined as a reform measure that leads to student academic success (Scribner, 1999). By studying the conditions that foster teacher development in the midst of these kinds of policies, researchers indicated that the results might establish starting points for studying these complex environments (Geijsel et al, 2001).

The kinds of beliefs that support balanced standards among educators and within school sites (Reeves, 2000), could help to produce outcomes of student achievement, demonstrated in alternative ways, to members of the school community. Furthermore, Reeves put forth a balanced approach, when determining how education personnel should be held accountable for

student achievement. Though some individuals might consider the steps to be of reductionist in nature. He concluded that:

> ...there are seven keys to effective educational accountability systems: balance between achievement and improvement, specificity, focus on student performance, frequency, adaptation to individual strengths, rewards for the tough choices, and reflection. (Reeves, 1998, p.6)

Although it may appear that unlocking these keys to accountability is the definitive way to produce student achievement, Reeves (1998) considered that selective and purposeful use of these tools remain primary. Sirotnik (2002) presents an argument for the wise use of accountability procedures by noting:

> There is much more to life in such complex organizations as schools than can be indicated by mandated, point-in-time measurements, and there is much more to a human being than can be assessed by a few tests. The ultimate misuse of current test-driven accountability systems is as a hurdle over which a child must jump in order to move forward in education and in life. (p. 4)

From policy to practice, educators must encounter the mandates put forth by groups who create such directives. Though the formulations of policy take place within the environmental boundaries of political decision-makers, the intents are channeled through local agencies, to communities, and are expected to become operational within current classrooms. Ponder and Ware (2003) commented on the realities and possibilities that reform measures might produce:

> Real reform is not born of 'what works' grails, structural changes and one-shot workshops. Real reform comes from daily practice in different and effective ways of saying and doing until the new ways become ways of being and thinking. Real reform comes from imperfect but persistent records of negotiating the dilemmas of culture,

> pedagogy, and politics. Real reform comes from deep beliefs that 'together we can' and a diagnostic and task focused dialogue among teachers, principals, and families. (p. 203)

Issues Related to Change, Teacher Knowledge/Practice and Cultures within Some Schools

The expectations that appear to wield reform among schools bring about perceptions of change throughout the educational community. From policy makers working from their own understandings, to students experiencing the outcomes of those interpretations, change mandates thought and/or action. Educators who attempt to make meaning of these regulations might encounter instructional dilemmas. As an example, Barker (2001) explored how science teachers negotiate their roles as they interact with science reforms. The instructional decisions that must be made by teachers are cast against the curriculum measures introduced into schools by the reform. In a similar manner, legislative directives that take the form of end-of-course expectation, might produce conflict among those that hold local and social controls of the curriculum (Olsen, 2002).

The cultures that exist among schools play a role when there is deliberation about innovation and reform. Fullan (2000) believed that a re-culturing of the school environment is possible. Transformation (Fullan, 2002) of environments in order to foster growth is a moral imperative for schools. These kinds of transformations include the functional nature of literacy and numeracy. However, the changes should extend beyond the perceived routines and limited perceptions of community members.

In response to change, opportunities for learning are presented. Because of the forces that direct mandates, prospects for capacity building, may actually lead to decentralization of decisions. If schools build cultures of inquiry and deliberation, external decisions can be examined in a more reflective manner.

Influences Within the Classrooms

Thuente (2002) examined factors associated with state level mandates in order to determine the kind of assistance needed for implementation. Among the six factors associated with her study, she found that mandates impact the classroom environment. Thus, the classroom environment becomes the end-point for reform. The mandate can either be accepted or discarded, to a greater or lesser extent, based upon the school's involvement as a learning community.

Conflicts between teacher autonomy, and the expectation of reform measures, may occur within the cultures of classrooms as well. Aguirre (2002) probed the influences of math reform among high school teachers. The teachers' sense of self-direction appeared to influence their acceptance of whether or not to examine the practice. The beliefs that teachers own affect their responses to reform. The kinds of cultures that are established by schools either encourage deliberation about instruction or stifle reflective practice. A study conducted by Johnson (1991), suggested that creating cultures that invite teachers' to share perspectives about their practice prior to initiating reform, might help to increase student learning on particular

assessments. Maxwell-Jolly (2001) found that teachers, who were expected to adhere to certain practices regarding a state bilingual education proposition and were in disagreement with the measure, exited the classroom and/or modified their teaching assignments in order to continue their beliefs about effective teaching practices.

Influences Within the Professional Cultures of Schools

Barth (2002) supports the idea that a culture of inquiry among teachers is necessary to help students gain success on state-mandated assessments. Some researchers suggest, (Fullan, 2002) however, that inquiry and knowledge capacity building among school personnel is rare. Furthermore, education professionals, who comprise these kinds of school learning communities, need to examine the implementation and development of the external mandates in order to further sustainable change. Hargreaves and Fink (2002) wrote, "Deep sustainable and scaled up reform is not achieved by mandate, by shock and copy strategies, or by other quick fixes." (p.33)

Day (2002) commented that government edicts impose performance measurements upon teachers. In his view, this leads to a demise of teacher renewal and may affect teacher motivation. He mentioned that policy makers disregard the learning needs of educators, when enacting reform measures. Professionalism among teachers is reduced when government policy ignores their needs. Hargreaves (2003) and Little (1996) wrote that teachers, when faced with system-wide change, might experience a range of emotions.

Negative feelings, associated with the expectations of the reform occurred among some teachers who worked within schools undergoing reform.

Questions regarding a lack ownership of the reform movement among teachers surround the issues of implementation (Lewis, 2002). Teachers might not demonstrate ownership regarding the directives from outside the school (e.g. administrative, district, state and federal groups). This lack of involvement could lead to a lack of investment when initiating the implementation. Lewis (2002) reported that when school cultures practice inquiry among themselves regarding curriculum, teaching, and student learning, student achievement is shown to improve. The professional development activities that are born from these kinds of practices, sustain reform efforts that are based upon the individual schools' needs and goals.

Liebermann (1995) maintained that schools should be responsible for managing the internal school conflict that is born from studying curriculum, teaching, and learning issues. Educators, who work within these kinds of schools, should practice habits of inquiry. The locus of control occurs within these types of learning environments. Outside influences might be sieved through the framework built upon the practices of a professional learning community. The mandates could be examined in a more comprehensive manner, based upon ongoing professional knowledge.

Authentic Teaching and Learning

One specific practice can be found within schools that participate in the OK-ACTS initiative. This practice concerns the topic of authentic teaching

and learning. This researcher suggests that teachers and student inquiry coincides with the outcomes of authentic teaching practices as well. Without the practice of reflection upon the motives of the instruction, the practice could become an activity that provides very little meaning. King and Newmann (2000) discussed the effectiveness of professional development for teachers. Each teacher's knowledge, skills and dispositions should be considered when providing for staff development. The authenticity of the kinds of instruction and learning that students are asked to do is important when considering provision of staff development to teachers. In addition, the teacher's participative role when guiding the learning for students may stem from his or her own learning disposition. Newmann and Wehlage (1993, p.8) reported two ideas that make instruction inauthentic: "(1) often the work students do, does not allow them to use their minds well; (2) the work has no intrinsic value to students beyond achieving success in school. They provided suggestions regarding the activities that further authentic learning. Higher-order thinking skills, a depth of knowledge, connectedness to the world beyond the classroom, substantive conversation, and social support for student achievement, play critical roles when facilitating authentic learning.

Zemelman et al., (1998) listed 13 components that are important when structuring learning opportunities for students. Although authentic learning is listed among them, all of these factors contribute to authentic pedagogy and deeper learning experiences for students.

Student-Centered. The best starting point for schooling is young people's real interests. All across the curriculum, investigating students' own questions should always take precedence over studying arbitrarily and distantly selected "content."

Experiential. Active, hands on, concrete experience is the most powerful and natural form of learning. Students should be immersed in the most direct possible experience of the content of every subject.

Holistic. Children learn best when they encounter whole ideas, events, and materials in purposeful contexts, not by studying subparts isolated from actual use.

Authentic. Real, rich, complex ideas and materials are at the heart of the curriculum. Lessons or textbooks that water-down, control, or oversimplify content, ultimately disempower students.

Expressive. To fully engage ideas, construct meaning, and remember information, students must regularly employ the whole range of communicative media, including speech, writing, drawing, poetry, dance, drama, music, movement, and visual arts.

Reflective. Balancing the immersion in experience and expression must be opportunities for learners to reflect, debrief, and abstract from their experiences what they have felt, thought, and learned.

Social. Learning is always socially constructed and often interactional. Teachers need to create classroom interactions that 'scaffold' learning.

Collaborative. Cooperative learning activities tap the social power of learning better than competitive and individualistic approaches.

Democratic. The classroom is a model community, so that students learn how to live as citizens of the school.

Cognitive. The most powerful learning comes when children develop true understanding of concepts through higher-order thinking associated with various fields of inquiry, as well as through self-monitoring of their own thinking strategies.

Developmental. Children grow through a series of definable but not rigid states, and each school should tailor activities to the developmental level of its students.

Constructivist. Children do not just receive content. In a very real sense, they re-create and reinvent every cognitive system they encounter, including language, literacy, and mathematics.

Challenging. Students learn best when faced with genuine challenges, choices, and responsibility in their own learning.(p. 8)

Brawdy and Egan (2001) wrote that the politics of certain kinds of reforms influence the instructional programs that are offered at schools. These instructional practices, at the expense of the authentic self, limit teachers' roles within the institutions. Chapman (1992) wrote about equilibrium and organization within a system, and the various parts that are influenced by factors:

> Each organization is open to environmental influences that modify its various parts, bringing them into conflict with the whole. A

> dominance of the parts over the whole at this point leads to disintegration, and a dominance of the whole over the parts leads to stagnation. (p. 41)

Thus, the roles that are played by the actors of each school initiative, may lead to stagnation, domination, or disintegration. Authentic learning and inquiry may help to further the progress of the school's goals, so that continual renewal may occur. Wiener (2000) suggests that debate about school improvement focuses on subject matter or structural reform, and causes the real issue of reform to stall. Kruse (2000) wrote a review of Clark's work (1999), and made the observation regarding professional development:

> ...teachers know the difference between curriculum as activity and curriculum as knowledge and act accordingly. Gone are the activities for the sake of activity; rather teachers and their pre-service counterparts are able to knowingly create learning experiences for students that are a broad repertoire of teaching strategies...(p.3)

Peterson (1997) refers to authentic pedagogy, as including important components when providing for student instruction. Based upon the work of Newman and Wehlage (1995), authentic learning makes way for learners to construct knowledge, practice inquiry, and to integrate learning beyond the regular classroom. Studies, according to Peterson, prove that students are more engaged in learning tasks, when these aspects are considered.

Newmann and Wehlage (1995,) found that authentic instruction occurred in some, but not all classrooms that they studied. The results indicate that authentic instruction has benefits and may create advantages for all students. When measuring outcomes using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills,

the study reported that gains were made by many of the students who participated in authentic pedagogy.

Authentic instruction provides opportunities for students to make connections beyond the classroom and into other environments. Establishing such practices may not be easy for some teachers. For those who seek to include authentic pedagogy, the firsthand experiences of teachers and their own transformation learning, may help to create classrooms that support the same for students. Understanding their experiences, via self-reflection, may cause authentic instruction and inquiry to be emphasized. Due to the teacher's own authenticity of his or her turning point or powerful learning experience, the content of these occasions may used to promote and provide authentic learning among students.

Constructivist Learning

Authentic pedagogy assumes that learners construct knowledge. Through interaction with the environment, knowledge that is meaningful and purposeful, a student's thinking can be made more efficient by replacing and/or building upon former ways of knowing. Not only can students experience this kind of learning through school reform movements such as the OK-ACTS program, but the educators who work within these settings may experience constructivist learning as well. Without an understanding that learning is constructivist in nature, authentic pedagogy and inquiry may not be valued among the adults who work within public schools.

It is important, therefore, to examine the ways in which learning happens for those educators who have experienced transformational perspectives. Oftentimes, these changes in perceptions may take place within the boundaries of school reform initiatives. On other occasions, a school situation may cause the educator to reflect upon a certain practice. A perspective transformation experience among such educators could ultimately benefit students due to the changes in practice among those educators.

Learners, whether they are students or adults, create new knowledge and transform their own perspectives thereby creating new and personal views of the world. For adults who work in schools, this new knowledge may help to empower their efforts of school reform. This kind of personal meaning making, constructs new knowledge about themselves, their learning capacity and/or goals. In addition, it is believed that by reflecting upon a critical incident or trigger event (Sokol and Cranton, 1998), the learner uses this experience as a point of reference for future changes.

Transformational learning is a theory that is constructivist in nature. When circumstances permit, transformative learners move towards frames of reference that are more inclusive. Mezirow (1997) continued his description of the subject by writing that transformation learning does not accept the:

"...uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure..." (p.5)

The theory helps to change the learner's frame of reference. It appears important that the use of critical reflection to understand the

assumption of others is critical to effective problem solving and collaboration. When this theory of learning is placed in the context of inter- or intrapersonal dynamics within education settings, Robertson (1996) stated that adult educator literature neglects the topic.

With regards to critical reflection, Mezirow (1997) believed that it is necessary and fundamental when transforming perspectives:

> There is an assumption that the acquisition of knowledge or attainment of competence will somehow automatically generate the understanding, skills, and dispositions involved in learning to think autonomously. However, there are different processes of learning involved and different forms of appropriate educational intervention. (p.9)

Cranton (1994) supports the role of reflection by maintaining that it is a key process. It helps learners to become aware of distorted assumptions and meaning perspectives. There is considerable risk involved (Grabov, 1997) when acting upon the process of transformation learning. The learning may not, initially, lead to reward. Other colleagues and educators can foster the courage and authenticity involved when reflecting upon a critical incident.

As schools encounter school reform initiatives, there are a variety of factors that influence their participation. The capacity to draw upon the social lives, expertise, and knowledge of an organization's members begins with individuals who comprise the organization. Not surprisingly, one can draw parallels between the learning process and conditions for learning of individual schools. Issues such as environment, ways in which the organization responds to the reform, and construction and reconstruction of knowledge, is similar to transformational learning as described by Mezirow

(1990). Furthermore, he wrote that problems for the organizations may serve as triggers for enhanced learning.

The process for self-examination and inquiry is one that is personal and relevant. By examining closely these kinds of experiences, transformation and new perspectives may be created. At times, school reform and change occur as an imposition without much thought as to the reason. Without the time to consider and investigate the source of problems or initiatives, they may fail.

Thus, Fullan and Miles (1992) wrote about the need to develop coping strategies:

> We cannot cope better through being exhorted to do so. "Deep coping" - the key to solving difficult problems of reform - appears to be more likely when schools are working on a clear, shared vision of where they are heading and when they create an active coping structure (e.g., a coordinating committee or a steering group) that steadily and actively tracks problems and monitors the results of coping efforts. Such a structure benefits from empowerment, brings more resources to bear on problems, and keeps the energy for change focused. In short, the assertive pursuit of problems in the service of continuous improvement is the kind of accountability that can make a difference. (p.750)

These ways of coping can manifest through social capacity such as committees, leadership teams, or problem solving techniques. Similarly, methods of coping for educational professionals charged with initiating reform, can be developed through the establishment of support groups, time and personal reflection. It is important that educators must be willing to undergo transformational learning, so that perspective taking can occur and coping skills can develop. Without an understanding of utilizing problems or

other critical incidents as a means for productive change, efforts of reform could be delayed or avoided.

Furthermore, Joyce et al (1999) emphasized, "Just as the body grows supple through exercise and fades without it, the growing edges of the mind are sustained by challenge." (p. 16) This metaphor allows school personnel to realize that reform that is initiated and sustained by all members of the school community creates an organization that can respond to environmental conditions. Exercises such as inquiry, investigation, and encounters of differing perspectives, challenge the current status (Pohland and Bova, 2000).

Joyce et al (1999) continue their beliefs about schools that sustain growth by offering hypotheses of effective and inquiry driven schools.

Hypothesis 1: Restructuring the job assignments of educators, so that time for collective inquiry is built into the workplace, will increase school improvement activity.

Hypothesis 2: Active, living democracy, including community members engaged in collective inquiry, creates the structural condition in which the process of school improvement is nested.

Hypothesis 3: An information-rich environment will enhance inquiry. Learning to study the learning environment will increase inquiry into ways of helping students to learn better.

Hypothesis 4: Connecting the Responsible Parties to the knowledge base on teaching and learning, will increase the development of successful initiatives for school improvement.

Hypothesis 5: Staff development, embedded in the workplace, increases inquiry into new practices and the implementation of school improvement initiatives.

Hypothesis 6: Staff development, structured as an inquiry, both fuels energy and results in initiatives that have greater effects.

Hypothesis 7: Building small work groups connected to the larger community, but responsible for one another, will increase the sense of belonging that reduces stress, isolation, and feelings of alienation."

In addition, according to Joyce et al (1999), four conditions must be met in order to enhance a school-wide initiative; reasonable agreement between the staff and parents, staff development, organization of the whole staff to effect the initiative positively, and an emphasis on the learning environment.

Mohr and Dichter (2001) described a learning organization that respects and values teacher inquiry. Their belief that a school must work through predictable problems, in order to emerge into another state, can provide a model for a democracy. A school's mission should be driven by examining power differently, making school more meaningful, and promoting rigor in teacher and learning. Their references regarding adequate time for learning, collegiality, examination of success, and support systems of expertise, align with other researchers' work regarding democratic and school improvement practices. As an example, Wheatley (2002) supports inquiry and wrote, "Curiosity is what we need. We don't have to let go of what we

believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes. We do need to acknowledge that their way of interpreting the world might be essential to our survival." (p. 35)

Successful schools realize that schools must hold one another accountable as a community of learners (Glickman, 2001). Through self-examination, both individually and corporately, authentic learning experiences for educators and students may take place among those who work in schools undergoing change. By structuring the school upon democratic and collaborative practices, students may experience rigor, authenticity, and achievement. The educators, who demonstrate acts of leadership associated with school reform and initiatives, model these kinds of practices (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001).

Chapter Summary

Public schools, within the United States, emerged from communities in response to the political and ideological influences of the time. While this chapter cannot address the complete history of the social and political influences towards public schools, this section demonstrated that schools operate as representations of particular settings. The present society mandates that schools are held accountable for certain measures of student performance.

The individuals who work as members of these school communities, such as teachers and administrators, play vital roles when acting upon external reform measures. This chapter provided evidence of ways in which

members of the school community function in order to address society's educational expectations. It is important to note, however, that school personnel comprise the greater society as well. At times, the reality of the school environment may conflict with external reform measures. In order to reveal how selected schools sort out such complexities, issues and topics were mentioned that relate to the daily actions of teachers and students.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

A phenomenon bears perspectives and experiences that are unique to each individual. Phenomenological study acknowledges that the participants' perspectives contain essentials that are meaningful to them. The dialogue that unfolds among those who engage in conversations, as a result of the phenomenon, contains rich and valuable insight. This study furthers the dialogue by contributing research about teachers' instructional decisions as a result of school initiatives. How do teachers, who practice in learning centered schools, describe the phenomenon, practice, culture, and their professional learning needs related to externally imposed school initiatives? A phenomenological study provided an investigative path that led to further descriptions of those teachers' perspectives.

Qualitative methods, such as phenomenology, encourage the questioner to. "...enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they [participants] function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn." (Stake, 1995, p. 1) Yin (1992) mentioned that qualitative methods allow the study of certain groups and what occurs within the culture of a particular locale. With these definitions in mind, a phenomenological study formed the investigative blueprint for this researcher.

This researcher believes that the participants' responses are abbreviated descriptions of the phenomenon. Not all of their thoughts and/or

ideas related to the specific questions can be contained in this study. Their thoughts, motives, and values evolve over time. For a particular moment, however, the participants' viewpoints provided entry points to their worlds of teaching and learning. As such, the words regarding their experiences are accepted to be true, and hold value for each of them.

Rationale for Method Selection

This study focused upon teachers' perceptions of school- based initiatives. Their stories are accepted as valid. As such, the responses they gave were not controlled by a variable that was manipulated and quantified. Rather, descriptions of the campus-based innovations, and the resulting influences by the teachers themselves, whether through brief statements, lengthy responses, or stories, captured the essence of this researcher's questions. As such, a phenomenological method, due to the nature of the study, guided the process.

Van Maanen's (1990) beliefs and ideas towards phenomenological research methodology provided a framework for understanding. His statement regarding human science research, as opposed to "natural science" undergirds this study:

> It encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives. It makes us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted. (p. 8)

The daily actions among educators, whether unintentional, subtle or purposeful, trigger opportunities for phenomenological study. Furthermore, the type of data gained from a phenomenological method, is needed in order

to examine qualities that are relevant to the teachers' experiences (Langenbach et al, 1994). A phenomenological method explores the richness of the participants' responses, and does not assign a quantifiable definite outcome measure. The qualitative research lens allows participants to describe more fully, the human qualities that are evoked through experience. The organic nature of this kind of methodology, and the substance that constitutes the experience, evolve together (O'Donogue and Punch, 2003).

The descriptions that the participants brought forth in this study were examined by the use of qualitative research tools. Therefore, the study not only holds personal stories of teacher change related to instructional methodologies, but also identified common themes through the use of research tools. The study is one example of the processes that educators encounter when change takes place among those who carry out the intentions of a school initiative. The insight gained from visiting, interviewing, and reflecting upon the actions and statements of the participants, is useful to individuals in other schools who begin broad-based transformation. Although Temes (2002) argued against school reform and in favor of good teaching practices, the participants provided personal examples of how initiatives influenced their perspectives. The democratic ideals, included in the school's belief statements, were criteria that helped to locate this campus for study purposes. Such values add credence to the nature of real school reform. Furthermore, this investigation elicits necessary and important teacher insight for those curious about school reform.

One outcome of this study is to present the essence of each participant's perspectives. The phenomenological method guides the researcher to suspend judgement, bracket participants' statements (Moustakes, 1994), and search for emergent ideas. This researcher, intrigued by the acceptance or refusal to act upon the implementation of school initiatives among teachers, has personally experienced such school environments. With this understanding in mind, this researcher was keenly aware of the need to listen for the phenomenon's influence, among those educators who have encountered the dynamics of school initiatives and/or reform.

This researcher's educational work, as teacher and administrator, has provided opportunities to view curriculum and instructional programmatic changes. It is important that the researcher (Spiegelberg, 1965, cited in Merriam 1998) has some understanding and experience with the phenomenon, in order to identify with the participants. Teachers and administrators often harbor various viewpoints regarding school change. Admittedly, as an administrator, the viewpoint held might counter some aspects of the teachers' perspectives. However, opportunities to broaden perspectives, lead to a more democratic community and greater tolerance. The phenomenological method guided this researcher to set aside initial, personal beliefs about the experiences, in order to listen for the participants' understandings (Moustakes, 1994).

Qualitative study acknowledges the participants' views, and accepts their experiences as authentic and unique to them. The experiences of the phenomenon are authenticated through the telling of personal experiences and anecdotes. Thus, the trials of validity are not based upon quantifiable measures. The truths are expressed in qualities shaped by the participants' accounts and must be accepted as such.

Data Source

The school, chosen for this study, was granted access to technology funds and accompanying professional development from the OK-ACTS and Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust groups. After examining a list of schools that were involved in the Grant, this researcher narrowed the list to include only elementary schools. The practices of reading, authentic teaching and learning, specifically intrigued this researcher as means for selecting criteria. Because of this researcher's own experiences with school change related to reading instruction, a school that held similar goals was identified.

School settings that seek improvement, assume intentional and unintentional happenings related to change. With this belief in mind, purposeful sampling was used to locate individuals who had experienced school initiatives and the resulting influences of those specific measures. Merriman (1998) described a purposeful sample, as one that reflects the kinds of usual circumstances that occur in a particular setting. Thus, a particular school was chosen from a list of schools that participated in the grant program.

Prior to meeting with the principal of the selected school, this researcher believed it important to know about the environment in which the participants worked. A campus self-description that was part of the Grant's submission requirements provided additional information.

Campus Beliefs Statements about Teaching and Learning

In order to build background knowledge, and as a means to add to this researcher's understanding, it was necessary to become more informed about the campus, by reviewing the school's Grant submission. The grant proposal (#32.3606.125) to the Oklahoma Educational Technology Trust, provided a closer description of the schools' goals and values related to technology and academic achievement. The grant's purposes are "...to increase technology equipment, training, and integration for the improvement of student achievement." (Grant # 32.3606.125, OETT grant, 2002).

OETT/OK-ACTS, Phase II grant is a funding program for OK/ACTS Phase I Schools and districts, to implement and sustain collaborative professional learning and high-achieving school practices. The grant funds will support learning opportunities through the integration of technology in authentic ways, to ensure students have meaningful learning experiences (Grant #32.3606.125, OETT grant, 2002).

To capture a more complete picture of the school's goals and intent related to authentic teaching and technology, the following descriptions are taken from the school's grant submission (Grant #32.3606.125):

- "Prepare students to successfully contribute and compete In the global community.
- Extensions to their [students] reading and prompting them into levels of higher order thinking skills with reading, synthesis, writing, and collaboration strategies:
    1. focused shared values and common goals toward everyday classroom activities;
    2. establishing trust and effective teacher collaborators.
- Technology and use:
    1. computer laboratory;
    2. [laboratory]used to reinforce literacy and in ways that produce authentic, challenging, and exciting new projects.
- Half of the staff does not know how to use a spreadsheet, create a graph, or use a database;
- Nearly one-half of staff do not know how to use drawing or painting software, video cameras, digital cameras or scanners, or how to use presentation software.
- Eighty-five percent are unable to use multimedia software to create a product, no one can teach others to do this.
- Eighty-five percent lack skills to create a web page.
- Results were lower when it came to using technology to enhance teaching and learning.
- The District, in 1997, aligned curriculum using ABACUS.

- Grade level teachers plan together
- [The grant monies will be used to] purchase software, hypertext, and word processing.
- Use [of] technology to expand communication, projects, and e-mail.
- Project based learning in the new lab will allow teachers to create tasks whose complexity and openness will mimic real problems in real life [and] leads to more motivation.
- Increase student accountability for complex, authentic tasks.

Purchase of a 26-station computer laboratory with teacher workstation."

Further review of documents associated with the school's vision and goals has produced evidence regarding their mission statement. The following statement, forwarded to the research university's community and renewal center (C. Harmon, personal communication, December 10, 2003), is included with the school's grant submission, and aligns with the descriptions of professional learning communities (Grant #32.3606.125):

"...mission of [selected school] is to prepare our students to successfully contribute and compete in our global community. The mission of our school is founded in the belief that every child has an ability to learn. Our school's mission is to provide the maximum opportunity for each student to develop to the fullest of their individual potentials, through a caring, positive, stable, and challenging learning

environment. We strive to promote citizenship, respect for self and others, social awareness, creativity, and an appreciation for the fine arts while achieving the highest academic progress.

We believe the involvement of parents will further aid us in the development and understanding of our students. We believe the home, church, community, and school all play important roles in the education of our children. We believe the physical and emotional needs as well as the academic and social roles of our students must be addressed. Total development of each individual is our ultimate goal. The objectives and goals are:

1. To teach children to think;
2. To enable children to take learning outside the school walls;
3. To encourage children to demonstrate a caring, helpful relationship with their fellow man;
4. To give children expanded opportunities to master competencies;
5. To provide celebrative experiences for children to hone their accomplishments;

To accomplish on or above grade level reading for 90% or more of the students by grade three.

[The school's] teachers and administrator believe in the foundation and principles of a Learning Centered School. We believe that skilled application of these principles results in student learning that is

measurably faster, more complete, more memorable, and more transferable to real life applications.

1. Teachers and administrators are viewed as professional decision makers.
2. Teachers and administrators understand that the quality of learning is variable...and structured for the highest possible levels of quality.

Teachers and administrators base their practice on profound knowledge of teaching and learning."

Descriptions of Systemic Support and Community

The school selected from a list of all schools that had received Phases I and II of the OK-ACTS Technology grant, was one that had engaged in various school initiatives. The reforms' effects have led to dialogue among educators within the school and district. For example, the school's principal received support for the grant from the district's Board of Education, superintendent, and teachers who work within the identified school. Systemic support, as mentioned in the school's action plan and voiced by the school's principal, is instrumental when carrying out the intended goals of the grant. A few years earlier, patrons of the district passed a $200,000 technology bond package. In addition, the technology administrator for the district is included as a resource for technology within the school's action plan.

The elementary school in which the teachers work and carry out the intentions of the initiatives is located approximately 40 miles southwest of a

major metropolitan area of a southwestern state. According to statistics gathered from the school's grant application, on October 1, 2002, the elementary site's self-reported student population is compared with data from the federal and district's enrollment, and is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. Student population data

	Student Ethnic Groups				
	African American	Caucasian	Native American	Asian	Hispanic
Federal	17.2	60.3	1.2	4.2	17.1
State	17.5	63.7	17.5	1.5	6.5
District	13.0	74.0	.07	.01	.05
Campus*	11.0	75.0	13.0	.09	.034
*Denotes October, 2002 report date, all other figures are based upon 2001-2002 data.					

In addition to being in close proximity of a major metropolitan city, the school has forged a relationship with a major research university, located 30 miles east of the community. Because of this alliance with the university's education and community renewal center, educators at the campus have access to professional development and technology opportunities.

A small, state-supported liberal arts college is located within the rural town of approximately 16,000 people, and is near the school's campus. When describing certain aspects of the community in a staff development

activity on November 5, 2003, the teachers mentioned the local college and another school that specializes in serving students who are hearing impaired, as important to the town. It appears as though teachers realize the relevancy of educational institutions that are located within or near their community.

The elementary site consisted of 29 teachers, 1 principal, 1 counselor and a student enrollment of 429 students. The district, as of October 1, 2002, had an enrollment of 2,832 students, employed 206 teachers and served students in 6 schools, pre-kindergarten through high school. A reconfiguration of schools recently took place during the 2002-2003 school year. With the start of the 2003-2004 school year, three schools comprise grades one through five. One school housed the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students, one school served sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, and the high school completed students' schooling by offering courses for ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. The teachers' reports, contained in this study, are from those practitioners who worked within one elementary school of this district.

Data Collection

The perceptions of five teachers who work within the selected school are presented in Chapter Four of this research project. In order to gather the teachers' data it was important to contact the school's principal. A meeting was arranged for an initial interview with her. During a mutually and agreed upon time between this researcher and the administrator, a list of participants was suggested, so that this researcher could gather interview data. The

administrator noted that the teachers were inclined to act upon the recent school initiatives, and would express their perspectives of school reforms. Two future dates were arranged during the meeting in order to gather the participants' data. This researcher explained to the principal that interview data would be collected through tape-recorded interviews and analyzed for the study's purpose. She agreed to the study and communicated to the participants the request from this researcher.

Before this researcher gathered the interviews from the specific participants in this study, notes were taken, by this researcher, during one of the school's staff development meetings. This researcher's goal, during the field experience, was to observe the interactions among the teachers, the kinds of topics addressed, and how the dialogue among the teachers contributed to their considerations of change regarding their own instructional practice. The observation was intended for informational purposes only. The outcomes of the meeting were not applied towards the data collection process. Rather, the meeting provided an opportunity for this researcher to observe other roles that the teachers fulfilled in this particular school.

The staff development session, held after school, lasted approximately one hour. At the beginning of the meeting, the principal introduced the presenter, a technology technician, and this researcher. This researcher did not participate in the dialogue, but observed the happenings among those involved in the meeting.

After a brief presentation by one of the technology integration directors, teacher training became a topic that guided the group's questions. For example, the teachers divided into four groups and reported common topics for future study, to the greater group. Some of the topics that were mentioned by all of the groups included teacher training on specific technology, implementation of technology within the classroom setting, technology resources, and ways to collaborate with each other about their own learning.

Approximately three months after the initial interview with the campus principal and based upon a format attributed to Moustakes (1994), the teachers were interviewed individually in order to gather their observations of the initiative. Moustakes reported, "Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences." (p. 84)

Four teachers were interviewed on one day. The fifth teacher was interviewed on the second day. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed into a written format. Following the taped interviews and using the transcriptions gained from the interviews, this researcher utilized Moustakes's (1994) steps of Phenomenological Reduction:

> *Bracketing*, in which the focus of the research is placed in brackets, everything else is set aside to so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question; *Horizonalizing*, every statement initially is treated as having equal value. Later, statements irrelevant to the topic and question as well as those that are repetitive or overlapping are deleted, leaving only the *Horizons* (the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon); *Clustering the Horizons Into Themes; and Organizing the Horizons and Themes Into a Coherent Textural Description* of the phenomenon. (p. 97)

Dialogue among the participants is important and group facilitation leads to further insight. Therefore, this researcher met with the five teachers in a group setting, as a follow-up to their individual interviews. The session occurred approximately four weeks after the individual sessions. It is important to note that the principal chose to participate in the dialogue as well. Fullan (2003) reports that it is significant for the principal to lead and model self-learning, if other members of the organization are expected to do so. The meeting, held after school, was an additional opportunity for the participants to respond to their initial interviews, and to engage in further considerations and dialogue related to school initiatives.

A webbing exercise was used in order to guide the group's discussion. The group setting aligns with the ways in which staff meetings usually take place at the school. The format, constructivist in nature, allowed an additional opportunity for the group of teachers to respond. This researcher wrote the word, school initiative, in the center of the web. This term allowed teachers to put forth their ideas as to how the recent school initiative affected their school and teaching. As the teachers dialogued, they were encouraged to talk about the OK-ACTS Grant they had received. To further their inquiry, this researcher asked them to respond to the initiative from other perspectives such as student, parent, and teacher.

As a final opportunity to react, the group was asked to respond, in written format and in an individual manner, to the following question; "In what

ways has the school initiative influenced your classroom practice and student learning." This researcher asked the participants to send their responses via mail in self-addressed, stamped envelopes to this researcher's address. They were encouraged to respond by e-mail, should they desire to do so.

This qualitative study is meant to provide background for further studies regarding school reforms, technology, reading, and adult learning. The dialogue, produced from the teachers, adds to the research, and contributes to other studies that are similar, and support the ideas that schools are professional learning communities. As such, this particular study provides information that may lead to other qualitative or quantitative studies. Suggestions for further research will be other outcomes as a result of this proposal, and are reported in Chapter Five of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results of Teachers' Responses and Emerging Themes

The five teachers who contributed to this study demonstrated a willingness to collaborate and describe their experiences related to the phenomenon of school initiatives. The instructional practices associated with the reform, the culture in which they work, and the ways they describe their own learning are important to understand. The descriptions that they provided are accepted as accurate, and shed insight into the nature of their understandings of the phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) stated that the "...meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one dimensional." (p.78)

Through the use of anecdotal descriptions (Van Maanen, 1990) and procedures adapted from Moustake's (1994) phenomenological methods (bracketing, establishing horizons, clustering and organizing into themes), meanings of each of the co-researcher's responses offer opportunities of reflection for other readers of this study.

The following vignettes reflect common themes that were found in each of the participants' responses. The interviews, held approximately three months after this researcher's field experience at the staff meeting, provided a deeper understanding of the questions reflected from those who participated in the faculty meeting.

Camille's Experiences Regarding Significant School Initiatives

Camille, who holds degrees in teaching and computer science, is in her fifth year of teaching in an elementary school. Prior to this year, she taught fourth and fifth grades at another elementary school within the district. This is her first year at this campus. Currently, her class is composed of fifth grade students.

The classroom, void of students at the time of the interview, provided a setting for this researcher to talk with Camille about her experiences regarding school initiatives. This occasion took place during an afternoon planning period, which was a time when her students attended another co-curriculum class. Furthermore, she was previously made aware of the requested interview from the principal. According to the campus administrator, Camille was willing to use the planning time in order to talk with this researcher about her experiences.

After students were walked to the other class, and upon her arrival at the room where this researcher waited, mutual greetings were exchanged. Gratitude was expressed by this researcher for her willingness to talk about her experiences regarding school initiatives. After approximately three minutes, this researcher asked where she would like to sit while the interview took place. Camille chose to sit in a student's desk that was located near her teacher's desk. This researcher sat in a nearby student's desk and was positioned to face Camille.

A recording device was located on a nearby desk. Camille was made aware of the tape recording device, and agreed to the audio taping of the session. This researcher assured her, that after the taping, she would have an opportunity to review the transcribed comments. Furthermore, if she chose not to respond to a particular question, she was informed that she was not obligated to do so. After checking to make certain the tape recorder operated properly, the interview began by asking Camille to talk about her years of teaching experience. After these introductory questions, specific questions regarding school programs and initiatives were posed to her. As she told about her experiences, recent school initiatives were mentioned in her response.

She stated that looping, an instructional practice in which teachers remain with the same group of students for two or more consecutive years occurred at her previous campus. Within her anecdotal record of the looping experience, the theme of student achievement, specifically tied to literacy, appeared.

Evidence of Student Academic Learning Through School Initiatives

> Well, this is my fifth year in the classroom. I've been both a fourth grade teacher and a fifth grade teacher. I was one of the first teachers in one of our first programs [to participate in a program called] looping. I wasn't quite aware at the beginning of that fourth grade year that I was going to loop with them, but at the end of the year, I knew.
>
> [The current school] started [looping] two years ago. There were a group of second grade teachers that wanted to try it. They took their second graders [into] third grade. The third grade teachers then taught second graders. This whole school will be doing that [looping] next year.
>
> There are some good [things] and bad [things]. You know the kids when you go in. For fourth and fifth grade, I don't know if it is real

beneficial-maybe for the younger grades, first and second. They love their teacher. They don't want to have another teacher. They would much rather keep [the same teachers]. By fourth and fifth grade, they are tired of you. [However] it was nice by the end of fifth grade. My kids enjoyed having me for two years. If you had a bad class, like disruptive, or were a young teacher, it's hard. You're learning how to discipline. It was tough on me because I wasn't set in my discipline program. It is hard to take the same group and set a whole new rule for them. So, [for] young teachers, it is not a real good thing.

At the very beginning [of the looping practice], well, probably the second nine weeks, I was thinking that I don't know that this is even [looping] going to help these kids. For one thing, I had never taught fifth grade before and I was really, really stressed out. I mean, they [teachers] were talking about the criterion-referenced tests and getting these kids ready for that. I didn't think I was a very good teacher of writing. I didn't teach writing very much in the fourth grade and I was thinking I have got to get these kids ready for the writing test. So I was thinking that this is just not working. It's just not good. After the criterion referenced tests and I saw that my kids did well on the tests, it made me think that maybe there was some good in that [looping]. For one thing, when I went back to fourth grade the next year, it made me a better fourth grade teacher knowing the curriculum I had to teach in the fifth grade."

The connection between the school initiative of looping and writing was apparent for Camille. The students' literacy development through writing was acknowledged by the teacher. Students' successes were attributed, in part, to the practice. The experiences that she and her students had, during the two years, validated that the initiative provided evidence of literacy achievement. Although other aspects of literacy, such as reading were not mentioned in her recollection, student communication, expressed in the form of writing achievement, was a topic that was confirmed to be evident as a result of the looping practice.

As demonstrated in the responses that Camille gave, student achievement was associated with the looping practice that she had

undertaken over the previous few years. Not only was student achievement important, the opportunity for personal and professional learning was also found through the OK-ACTS technology grant.

Evidence of Personal and Professional Learning Through School Initiatives

> When the principal first talked to us about the grant, they had not yet received it and we were just coming over here from another site. I'm a lover of computers and technology. I have two college degrees. One is in computers and my second one is in teaching. That was my dream when I went back to get my teaching degree. [It was] to be able to become a computer teacher. So, I thought the grant was great. For one thing, I think the kids need to know that kind of information. To be a life long learner, you have to know where to get information because you can't possibly remember or learn everything there is to learn. So, in order to learn information, you have to know where to get it, and the Internet is one of the ways that we can get anything. Type in anything and there are a billion sites to go to. In order to make it in today's society, I think almost every kid has a computer at home.

It appears as though the school initiative of technology appealed to the interest of Camille. A personal connection between the practice and her personal experiences is important to note. As mentioned in her account, her knowledge of computers was a motivating factor towards implementing aspects of the technology.

Evidence of Affecting Relationships Through School Initiatives

Two examples of building and effecting relationships among community members in the school were brought forth during the interview response. An example of how the "looping" practice affected a student in her classroom is evident in Camille's anecdotal record. In another part of the

interview, she talks about the importance of collaboration with other teachers when staff members encounter new programs.

> Then there was this one student that I had. And I say this to everybody that talks to me about looping. He is the one that made my decision. He was a very needy child, probably the worst discipline case I've ever had in my life. We had grown with this relationship where he would do anything I asked him to do, but outside my classroom he was still the worst discipline case we had in the building- and he was probably on the verge of suspension. He went to the office probably every other day at the first of the fourth grade year. By the end of the fourth grade, he was doing better in the classroom. I thought, 'What teacher would I want to put him with in fifth grade? What teacher would mesh with him? I decided it was probably best for him that I stay his teacher for the next year. Other teachers' influence and this particular child is probably what led to me looping.
>
> A lot of us [teachers] collaborate together, we're supposed to and I think a lot of it is just natural. As a teacher, you naturally get ideas from each other and talk. We are supposed to have team meetings in the sense that you sit and talk. But at our lunch times together, we begin to plan together.
>
> My fellow teacher is an excellent teacher. She has a lot of ideas. She has taught 15-20 years. She has tried things, and they have worked. She has seen things that do not work, and she constantly adds new things. I get a lot of ideas from her. I think it is really important. Even the more experienced teachers probably need to listen to some of the younger teachers because they are fresh out of school. They've got ideas too. Sometimes you just get in a rut. When teachers get in a rut, they just stay there. They don't want to change. They don't want to vary, and that's, hurtful, I think, to some of the kids.

Camille, through her recollection of the initiative, spoke of personal relationships that were encountered throughout the strategy. For example, a connection was made with a particular student through the looping practice. As another example, relationships with other adults, that took the form of collaborative exchanges, were also found to be of significance to her. Although the intended outcomes regarding the importance of relationships might not have been initially stated, relationship building, and the need to

sustain significant partnerships, is evident. Whether or not these relationships were academically and behaviorally based, as demonstrated between teacher and student or teacher-to-teacher, aspects of the associations were deemed important to Camille.

Anne's Experiences Regarding Significant School Initiatives

When asked whether or not she is a "risk taker" regarding educational innovations and programs, Anne, who is in her seventeenth year of teaching, described herself in the following manner:

> Oh, I'm pretty conservative, I'm pretty conservative. I don't really see myself as a risk taker. And I am not one to completely jump on every little thing that comes along. I'm more cautious. I have to try it...wait. Well, I don't know, analyze and think, which is not so good. Sometimes I talk myself out of something.

Despite the self-description of being somewhat reluctant, Anne indicated that she had tried several innovations recently, and had experienced success after acting upon the methods. An example of her willingness to try a new teaching method occurred when the school's principal approached her about a practice called "looping":

> Our principal approached us that she wanted to try this and would we cooperate. And so you know it was really kind of an a volunteer basis. So we all decided that we would.

Throughout the interview with this researcher, she reported on some of the school's recent initiatives and the successes of these measures. The results of the classroom practices had come about after spending several

years in the classroom teaching second and third grade students. Anne has spent all of her teaching career with students this age.

Anne mentioned that she was a "late bloomer." She decided to enter the teaching field and fulfill her "dream" after her children were older. She stated that she was fortunate to stay home with her children while they were younger, and attended college classes at that time. Anne reported that she finished the coursework in "record time" because "once she got into it, [she] knew she had to finish it [coursework]." The college courses were completed during the early 1980's.

Throughout that period, according to Anne, teaching jobs were difficult to obtain. Because of the state's economic conditions, teachers were encouraged to accept early retirement or were "riffed". She stated that she felt fortunate to secure a teaching position due to there being very few openings. Prior to her accepting this particular teaching position, she substitute taught for approximately two years, and reported that she gained valuable experience as a substitute.

At the beginning of her second year of substitute teaching, she learned that a teacher at the school, where she currently teaches, accepted early retirement. Anne was recommended for the position and began teaching in November, soon after the previous teacher retired. She stated that she felt somewhat apprehensive, as the previous teacher was a veteran with many years experience. In addition, many of the community's parents were looking forward to having their children placed in the veteran's teacher's classroom.

She shared this personal information with this researcher as a means to acquaint this researcher with her early teaching career.

The information that Anne provided was obtained during an interview that was tape-recorded and later transcribed. Prior to beginning the interview, the campus principal directed this researcher to Anne's classroom, which was empty of students at the time. Upon arriving in the classroom, this researcher waited for Anne to return. Anne's students were out of the room and were attending a co-curriculum class at the time. After a few minutes, Anne returned to her room, greetings were exchanged between this researcher and the participant, and a brief description of the project's goals was provided. She agreed to proceed with the interview, which took place early in the day, and occurred during one of her planning periods.

Anne suggested a table near the back of the classroom for the collection of interview data. The tape recorder, used to record the dialogue, was placed between the researcher and Anne. On two different occasions, a receptionist through the school's intercom system interrupted the conversation. The school secretary needed to ask Anne questions about a student. She was able to respond to the secretary via the intercom and did not need to leave the room. Despite the brief interruptions, the data collection continued. Furthermore, the one-to-two minute delays did not appear to affect the collection process.

Evidence of Student Academic Learning Through School Initiatives

According to Anne, the technology initiative provided opportunities for students' academic growth. She mentioned that the school's new computer lab would allow students to develop their knowledge regarding technology. An evidence of her belief in the prospects of technology can be found in her comments:

> I just think it is a wonderful opportunity, especially for the kids. I just think it is exciting. My kids today, it will be their first visit to the new computer lab. And they are thrilled. They just can't wait. And I just think that anything that has to do with technology is going to benefit the children. You know, it's just great.

One other initiative that the school emphasized was "looping". This practice also influenced Anne's thoughts about student achievement. In addition, the practice seemed to provide an incentive for her to risk something new. Anne, after considering this practice, reflected upon this strategy by offering this statement:

> You know, I just got to thinking; I've been here a long time. I might really enjoy it. I might really see the benefits. It might be good for the children, and we don't know until we try something. Based on what they told us, there was a lot of positive feedback. And you know, you have to consider what kind of class you have. And I kept thinking; you know, you just don't know and it did turn out to be a good experience for me.

Anne, after recalling other recent practices that the school has introduced, commented about the use of a particular technology tool that measures reading comprehension. As she talked about this tool and other new methods, she described how that some of these practices encouraged student academic growth. The experiences were viewed as "seeing the light

bulb come on" among students when they understand a new concept or objective:

> I have seen the results, and I think, this really does work. So I can remember a lot of times with new things, new initiatives, it's like the light bulb came on, just like I have seen with the kids in my class. And I think this really does work...seeing their progress. And I realize how individual so many of these things are. You can take each child into consideration and see their improvement...it's amazing.

Evidence of Personal and Professional Learning Through School Initiatives

The benefit of student academic growth was not the only productive outcome of the school's initiatives. Like Camille, the new programs brought new learning experiences for Anne. Anne repeated the opportunity for personal learning as she described the "looping" practice:

> My initial thoughts were negative. I'll be honest. They were. And I didn't hide it from her [campus principal]. We talked about it. And there were others that felt the same way. You know, we get in our little box and here we want to stay. But I must admit it has been a great experience for me.
>
> By the end of last year [I began changing my thoughts about the practice]. Really, it took me most of the year because you know after teaching third grade so long they were first graders that came to me last year. As second graders, I mean just, they seemed very, very young. I had to realize they took me literally with everything I said and did. If is just amazing the difference. But then, as the year went on you know, I just, I thought this is really, really neat to watch them grow. And then when they came back, I think when they came back this year as third graders, that's when I was amazed. We started school the first day of school. I knew them, [and] I knew their parents.

Cooperative learning (Kagan, 1992), a practice that Anne appeared to like extremely well, was mentioned as one that has led to her own professional growth. Like the looping strategy, she has seen the benefits of

this particular practice. The method not only spurs students' growth according to Anne, but leads to the development of her personal practices:

> I think that all these things add to your classroom. And some of them that come along are things, practices, that we have done for a long time but they have a different name or a little bit of different language. Another thing that we have been involved with is Kagan. We have had a lot of training on that and their structures. I have all the posters. You know, I have done cooperative learning for years, but the structure of Kagan has helped me. I have a name for some of the things that I use. It helps me to become more organized, but I think some of it is things that we have done for a long time.
>
> My favorite? I really do like Kagan. I really enjoy that. I enjoy using that in my classroom. I think it gives kids a chance to move and talk. And as sometimes as teachers, we forget they are little kids.

Evidence of Affecting Relationships Through School Initiatives

Throughout her 17 years at the school, Anne mentioned that she has seen a lot of initiatives take place on the campus. She had a positive and honest working relationship with the campus principal, and other colleagues, and was willing to express her thoughts and doubts about certain initiatives. She stated that the initiatives provide opportunities for teachers to talk with one another, and collaborate. During the after-school meetings, dialogue about some of the practices have contributed to professional relationships:

> Well, we learn a lot from each other. The teachers in our building are wonderful to share knowledge and we really work together as a team. And I guess that is one reason that I have been here for 17 years, but we do get along so well. And you know if someone has a problem, you know you can go to another teacher. There is always someone that is willing to help you, share something with you. And so many times, they go to different workshops and then come back and have a meeting, a faculty meeting and they will share.

Jayne's Experiences Regarding Significant School Initiatives

Similar to the other interviews that took place for this project, this researcher met with Jayne during one of her scheduled planning periods. The meeting, held in her classroom, provided an opportunity for Jayne to describe her experiences regarding the school initiatives. Although the meeting occurred during the school day, her students were attending a co-curriculum class at the time of the session. This arrangement allowed for communication between Jayne and this researcher, to take place with minimal interruptions.

After this researcher arrived in the classroom, Jayne suggested two desks as places for the interview to occur. This researcher sat in one desk opposite the participant and faced her in order to facilitate discussion. Prior to the taped recording, a brief reminder of the purpose of the project was provided to Jayne. In addition, she was assured that she had the right to not participate. She agreed to continue with the interview.

A tape recorder was placed between the participant and this researcher in order to record the interview data. She did not express hesitation regarding the use of this device. Jayne, who is in her first year at the campus, but has previous experience at another district elementary campus, began responding to the first question and provided a brief description of her teaching experience:

> I currently teach fourth grade. I've been teaching for six years, fourth and fifth grades. I've looped with my students for the past four years. Going up with them from fourth to fifth grade and then I start back over every other year.

Evidence of Student Academic Learning Through School Initiatives

As noted, during the interview, Jayne brought up the topic of looping, whereby students move from one grade to the next with the teacher remaining with the same group of students. Her comments, reported in the transcribed report following, provided a perspective as to how she viewed the practice. This topic elicited other examples of the school's recent programs, and her interactions with other programs.

Throughout her interview, she talked about frequently about three recent school initiatives. As means for encouraging student growth, Jayne referenced looping, cooperative learning, and technology. For example, she made the following statement regarding looping:

> It has been a good experience for me so far [looping]. Getting to go into that second year, we don't have to get to know each other. They don't have to come to terms with my policies and procedures. They [students] know exactly what I expect of them. They know how my classroom operates. They come right in and we start right to work the second year. So it saves a lot of get to know you time.
>
> [The] most important thing about looping is getting your procedures established at the beginning because if you don't get your procedures established at the beginning of fourth grade, or whatever year you start with, then it is not going to help you move right ahead in fifth grade, just to start right into the curriculum. If you have to back up and re-teach your procedures in fifth grade...I think...just following your procedures and staying on top of this and being consistent with not only discipline, with the way they turn their papers everyday, with the way your classroom runs, just sets your looping up where you can't go wrong.

Cooperative learning (Kagan, 1992) described by Jayne as a means to promote student learning, illustrated the ways in which students can learn from one another:

I do a lot more group work, a lot more hands on work then I probably did my first year. As a first year teacher, you come in, you're a little nervous. You don't know the curriculum as well.

Furthermore, she mentioned that technology provided avenues for students to develop their knowledge and skills:

Social Studies is my area. I guess you would say that I really like. I think that is really going to be, with this next year being an election year, I am really looking forward to the next year. We've already started working in the social studies areas a lot with research wise, even looking for the presidential candidacy for next year for the elections. And I do a lot of research papers, a lot of research work and we've already used that for rivers. So I am excited about that. I think it is going to really compliment my social studies program a lot. We do a lot with creative writing, poetry, stories. So, I am looking forward to using it in those areas.

Evidence of Personal and Professional Learning Through School Initiatives

Jayne described some of the initiative's impact upon her own personal and professional learning. Each one of the programs offered opportunities for her to develop classroom practices. She described herself by stating:

I think I'm just an all around learner. I am better...I have to see it, hear it, do it, but more of a visual learner I think than anything else. I think I am very open-minded. I am willing to try just about anything.

My biggest thing about new things that we get thrown at us is organization. That it [the initiative] is organized, that there is a plan, that we can see that if we start here, this is where we are going to end up, why we need it, how it is going to benefit the kids. As a whole for teachers, I think seeing that it is not going to be a lot more paperwork for them is a big key. That we have all these new programs plus all this new paperwork on top of implementing into our classroom. So, I think they want to see something that is organized, that has a good flow to it. That, if we have to step in and this has to become a part of our daily lesson, our daily routine, that it is something easy that we can have an organized procedure to get to.

I think they [the initiatives] have made me a better teacher by making me do more of the hands-on. I think you are afraid of that, like I said earlier at first. I think with the new ideas, the new programs, the

> group learning, the technology we have now to use, it makes you branch out a little more and maybe do a little different things than what your normal classroom would be doing.

The kinds of professional learning that Jayne encountered had common aspects. She acknowledged those parts of the programs that led to student achievement, as important. During her interview, she indicated that there were key ideas among the school initiatives. She found it useful to apply essentials of the initiatives in order to relate learning to students' everyday life situations, thus utilizing the tools as means for authentic learning experiences.

Evidence of Affecting Relationships Through School Initiatives

Jayne expressed her beliefs that these practices positively impacted on the relationships that she had with students. She did not refer to collaboration among her peers, but mentioned that she saw the benefits of the programs among her students. She felt as though the initiatives led to a productive environment.

> My first set of kids that I see that are sixth graders, I'll see at the ball games and they'll come up and hug me and say, 'Remember when [participant] did that in social studies? Or, remember when [participant] did that in math. So yeah [an initiative] works.
>
> I think they [initiatives] have made me a better teacher by making me do more of the hands-on programs, the group learning, the technology we have now to use. It makes you branch out a little more and maybe do a little different things than what your normal classroom would be doing.

Lisa's Experiences Regarding Significant School Initiatives

Prior to meeting Lisa, this researcher had made arrangements via the principal, to talk with her during her one of her planning periods. On the day

of the interview and prior to this particular interview, another person, who was interested in viewing the results of another program that the school had recently undertaken, visited Lisa's classroom. While waiting for the visitor to conclude his visit, this researcher sat outside the classroom and noted that a parent came to her classroom and knocked on the door. A student answered the door and summoned Lisa to the doorway. Lisa and the parent engaged in a conversation that lasted approximately two minutes. The parent provided Lisa with items for her classroom use. Lisa was courteous, thanked the parent for the items, and returned to teaching her students. After approximately 20 minutes, Lisa walked her students to another co-curriculum class. The visitor ended his observation at this time and left her classroom as well.

As Lisa escorted her students from the classroom, she noticed that this researcher was waiting outside the room. She invited this researcher into the classroom and mentioned that she would return within a few minutes. While she was gone, this researcher chose to sit at a table located near a corner of the room. The tape recording device was prepared and arranged so that it would be able to record the conversation between the participant and this researcher.

When Lisa returned, she agreed that this particular location would be an appropriate place to conduct the interview. In addition, she was made aware of the recording device and gave her permission to be recorded. This researcher assured her that the data would be attributed to her in a manner

that ensured confidentiality. She was made aware, by this researcher, that she would be able to review the transcribed conversation.

Lisa, during the taped interview, began by describing her teaching experience. She has 15 years of experience and has taught for 14 years at this particular location. She began immediately talking about a teaching strategy called looping.

Evidence of Student Academic Learning Through School Initiatives

These comments, by Lisa, demonstrated that she felt as though academic achievement occurred among students by utilizing the "looping" arrangement:

> First of all, I would just like to say that I think it [looping] is a positive experience as far as I am concerned. My experiences through two years that I have completed the whole process has been positive. I guess it started- we've had a couple of teachers that expressed interest and it was a positive thing for them and for the test scores. And...I just went to Ms. Hartman and I just asked is there any way I can stay with this group of children and follow them through to third grade. And she was excited about the idea and she said ...I have to talk another teacher into switching...So I did and I ...went to third grade and loved it. So, when I came back down they were looking at all the test scores of the teachers that have been in the looping and I think there were three of us and it was a significant growth there that they noticed. She decided that that was something that she wanted to see more of so she [principal] made it to where this year, no I believe it was last year that we all took it up as a grade level.
>
> ...you realize they [students] really lose a lot in the summer and it really hits you home when you get the same group of kids and you know what material they have worked on in second grade. And I saw what was happening and I also know that I was going to have them for two years and it was my responsibility. I went at my pace and I didn't worry about anyone else's pace, the curriculum, the school. When my kids were ready for cursive. It wasn't because it wasn't in my curriculum. I did it because the kids were ready. The first week of school, we were already engaged in activities that were probably, usually doesn't happen because you spend so much of your time with procedures. In third grade, we picked up and were engaging in

curriculum and activities and the pace just seems to be quick, and [I] mean you just advance quickly because they already know so much. I knew where the kids' reading levels were. I didn't have to sit there and wait for a [results of a reading comprehension assessment]. I am not one of those teachers that looked into a folder to find out where. I want to access that myself and kid of get a fell for them when they come to me.

Lisa referred to the campus initiative regarding technology and the potential for its use to increase student learning. Her enthusiasm for this new initiative provided a model of acceptance for her students:

> You know, technology is moving so quickly and sometimes the children know more than we do on the computer and I think most of us, as teachers, know that technology is moving to the forefront of our business. This...is some new technology we can get our hands on. Our kids can get their hands on. [Principal] has just been sharing with us that we would be spending time in the computer lab. My first thought was [that this] was great. I thought this is the way for me to be more knowledgeable and for the kids to be more aware of the technology and where it is going.
>
> My first thought was fear. The little that I have been in there, I have been in there and I'm getting so excited and the kids are excited. We are looking at all the neat activities that we can do with the computer. One thing that really excites me is the creative writing process. I can go through the steps, you know the first steps here in my room, and then when it is our turn to go to the computer lab, we can take it to [for] publishing [purposes].

Evidence of Personal and Professional Learning Through School Initiatives

Lisa described her learning style as one that required hands-on methods. She mentioned her need to experience learning in this manner and provide similar experiences for her students. She stated that she tends to teach the way that she learns, and includes chants, songs, and visuals as ways to help students understand a teaching concept. Although she referred to herself as being a "slow learner", she stated that she was not afraid to "take

risks" when it came to introducing a new concept or participating in a new initiative. When this researcher asked if she was a "risk taker" regarding teaching, she made the following comments:

> I think I am. I think I am a risk taker. I think I do and I like adventure; I like the challenges and I am that type of adult as I was as a child...don't dare me. You know, I tend to be the one that will jump and I tend to be that way as a colleague too. [Others] will come to me about [an initiative]; and I [tell them] to be open-minded and a risk taker.
>
> I believe that [an initiative] will help student achievement because it is helping me to be more of an effective teacher. You may fail the first time. You go in and try. It may help one or two, you may try something else and it's going to help another one or two [students]. If you keep doing the same thing, you are not hearing those new ideas and it becomes so routine that you just pull out the book, give them the sheet and it's just [a continuation of the same thing].

When asked about the kind of advice she would give to colleagues who were not as enthused about a new initiative, Lisa said that they should:

> ...watch and listen, look to see what is happening. If you are hesitant and there is a [colleague] that is near you that is doing something new, that is initiating something, watch the children, listen to them...

Evidence of Affecting Relationships Through School Initiatives

Lisa talked primarily about learning and student achievement throughout her interview. However, because of her strong beliefs about the looping practices, mentioned by the other participants as well, she expressed the view that this type of student arrangement enhanced and affected relationships:

> The relationship was there [with looping]. There was a connection with the kids from day one. You anticipate that first day. It was exciting; the kids didn't have any anxiety at all. They just came in

> laughing. I could ask, 'Hey, how was your summer and it was just a positive experience for them and me.
>
> I think the bottom line is how is it [an initiative] going to affect my children. How is this going to help them? There may be pieces of one program and the whole of another. That is how I feel. How is this going to help them learn.

Karen's Experiences Regarding Significant School Initiatives

Teaching is a second career for Karen. She has taught for three years. Prior to working as a technology teacher for the campus, she began her professional work experience 15 years ago, as a data entry clerk with a local company. She was able to use her computer science degree as a way to obtain a job with this particular organization. She stated that the computer skills that she learned in college were not used in this entry-level job. However, the job provided her with opportunities to learn how to interact with computers and use them to complete job assignments. After some time she gained more responsibilities, but soon realized that this particular kind of work was a "dead-end" job. She sought and obtained employment with a different local company.

At this new job, she mentioned that she began working as a part-time data entry person. Soon, her skills and previous work experiences led to more responsibilities within the company. Karen became a technical writer for the business and described the experience as a positive opportunity for her. She described this organization as one that designed and marketed software for oil and gas companies, and was a "leader in their market."

Evidence of Student Academic Learning Through School Initiatives

Although Karen has not been a classroom teacher like the other participants of this research project, her responsibilities include teaching students computer skills. She also assisted teachers with computer knowledge and described technology as a means to enhance academic learning among students. She talked about the need to use technology for purposeful and authentic learning:

> As far as a technology program, I would say just make sure that the machines are not just being machines that are going to sit in the back of the class-room somewhere. You find authentic uses for them, valid things to do and you are going to have to have some time to make it your business to find out, to learn new things and find out what they can do and be willing to talk with your fellow teachers.
>
> We [teachers] have spent a long time talking about [student achievement]. How can you say, that this new technology initiative, in a year, has impacted our test scores? It's hard to draw the line. How can you really say it was that factor and not something else? We spent a long time talking about how do you quantify that? The teacher that was with us said, "Well, as a teacher, you just know when our kids are getting it and you know when they are engaged. There are things that are not just reflected on a standardized test score but you know that you
> provided a quality experience and engaging experiences for the kids.
>
> We know, in general, that we want it [technology] to impact our students in a positive way and affect their learning positively. But actually saying this is going to raise our standardized reading scores by X percent over the next five years, there is nobody promising that.
>
> We know that we want to impact our students and give them authentic experiences but we don't know exactly that [technology] is going to...I think it is just going to take time and I think that if our student achievement does seem to increase, and increase, and increase, I think that there are going to be plenty of people that say, well, you know this might be one of the reasons. It certainly can't hurt anything.

Evidence of Personal and Professional Learning Through School Initiatives

The technology initiative provided opportunities for Karen and her colleagues to dialogue about the potential for personal and professional learning. According to Karen, the principal encouraged the staff to research the effectiveness and potential resources that technology provided. As she responded to this researcher's questions about her own personal way of learning, Karen provided the following response:

> She [principal] had us read and we had meetings and then we would proof read [the grant] and give her feedback and so it started like that, but still it was a process because we couldn't really imagine that we would really obtain the grant].
>
> This [technology] has really allowed teachers to take more responsibility and be more involved just with technology in general. It gives them a whole other opportunity to be responsible and for them to grow. Instead of pushing [technology learning] off on someone else or depending on them, the teachers are asking me how to do it. Or if a person knows how to do a mail merge, they say, 'Look what you can do and here is how you do it.' I think it [technology learning] is kind of shifting and changing.
>
> I think, in education, just my personal view, we seem like we go in twenty different directions at once. This is the fad of the day and if you really get behind something full force right away, you're going to eventually look like a fool in a year or two when everyone says, 'Remember when we did this and that it was a big deal?' Now with technology, that's different because it's here.
>
> I would just advise [others] to just keep a positive and open attitude and not be afraid to take just a step at a time and reach out for help. I think not expecting too much right away and not every group is going to go in there and do research and produce a power point presentation the first week the lab is open. It is just going to take a little bit of getting use to.

Evidence of Affecting Relationships Through School Initiatives

Karen offered an example of how a recent initiative led to affecting relationships between adults and students. She mentioned that a community-based program, where members of the community volunteered at the campus for one hour per day, allowed for opportunities to create positive relationships among the students, community members, and teachers:

> Before, when we would have volunteers or tutors come in, they would just take a first or second grade student that needed reading help at that [particular] moment. This is going to be different. Each volunteer will have one first grader that he will work with, for one full hour every week and they will have a tub of materials and a lesson plan that the have adopted for that first grader. They can really build a relationship. We are really excited about that.

Regarding the development of relationships among teachers, Karen stated that the initiatives would serve as means to help each other talk about the effectiveness of the program, teaching, and learning. According to her, it could help to develop collegiality among the staff. An example that Karen gave, presented a forum for teacher input and collaboration:

> We are not really where we want to be by far, yet. Over the summer, have a 'lunch bunch' that meets every Friday. They have lunch and sometimes go swimming afterwards. We're talking about having the lunch bunch meet at 10:30 AM or 11:00 AM in the morning first [at the campus] and having an informal time of sharing about [computers] and learning.

Participants' Group Dialogue Regarding School Initiatives

In the course of this particular phenomenological research project, and as a follow-up to the participants' individual interviews, each teacher agreed to meet as a group after school, in order to talk further about school initiatives

and technology. This session, held at the campus, occurred after all of the individual meetings with the study's participants had concluded. With the exception of one interview that occurred on the same day, the other individual interviews occurred approximately four weeks prior to this meeting. Furthermore, during the previous individual interviews, this researcher had informed each one, that this specific format would take place. All of the participants, at the time of their individual interviews, indicated they would meet with this researcher and the other participants.

The meeting, held in the school's teacher's lounge, provided another opportunity for the participants to reflect upon the topics of school initiatives and technology. Moreover, the collective format allowed the teachers to reflect upon the other participants' statements that were not expressed during the individual interviews. This occasion allowed the members to contribute additional ideas that were not mentioned in the prior, individual meetings.

After the teachers had ended their after-school responsibilities and arrived in the lounge, they were invited to participate in the group dialogue. The school's teacher's lounge had no other teachers in the room at this time. Therefore, the lounge, empty of all other staff members except for the participants, principal and researcher, allowed the group to focus upon the purpose of the session. By limiting potential distractions, this researcher expected that the participants' dialogue and communication with others would convey their honest and authentic experiences.

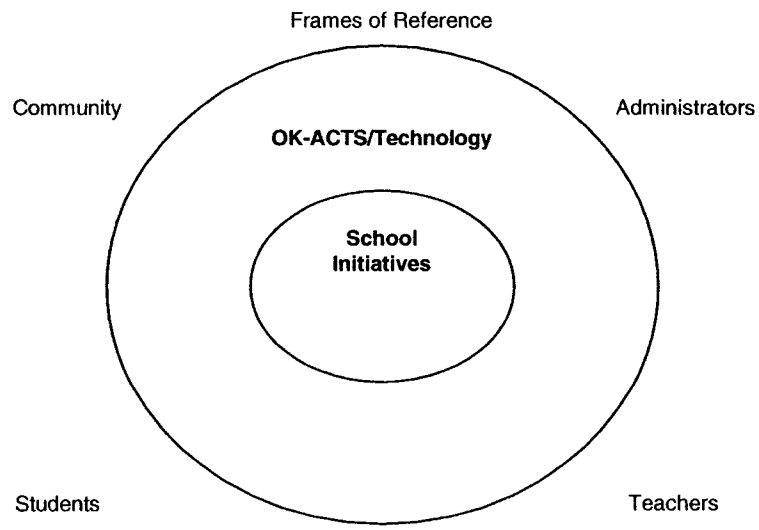
Prior to beginning the session, and after all group members arrived, a round table was located in the room. The members agreed to sit at this location. Once everyone had found a seat around the table, this researcher recalled the topic for study, acknowledged their importance to the study's outcome, and asked if further clarifications were needed concerning the meeting. None of the participants indicated that they needed additional information regarding the procedures or protocol. This component, communicated to the group by this researcher, added pertinent information. In addition, this researcher informed the participants that there was "no wrong or right answer", and that the intent of the conversation was to further teachers' understandings about school initiatives. The group learned that their comments could be used to benefit other teachers, educators, and/or community members, who were involved in school change initiatives.

Utilizing the framework of a word web and with the group's permission, this researcher unveiled a large sheet of paper and with a marker, wrote the words "School Initiative" in the center. A circle was drawn around these words in order to help the participants focus on the topic. At this time, the teachers were encouraged to verbalize their feelings and/or thoughts pertaining to these words. This researcher wrote their words, comments, and/or phrases on the paper outside the circle. If there was a need to clarify or provide additional knowledge about the statements, this researcher encouraged the group to talk or ask questions. After the group expressed thoughts about the two words written in the center circle, and this researcher

recorded comments, the words 'OK-ACTS/Technology' were written in a concentric circle. This researcher invited members of the group to talk about the meanings of the words and how the initiatives impacted their own selves, classrooms, and community. This researcher asked the group to respond to the topics through the perspectives of students, teachers, and other community members. Once the group had concluded the activity, this researcher asked if any of the ideas needed further clarification, or if additional thoughts needed to be added to the graphic organizer. The group agreed that the word-webbing activity accurately portrayed their thoughts.

During the approximate one and one-half hour session, members of the group expressed thoughts that clustered into several themes (Table 2):

Table 2: Word web diagram



A few days after the session, this researcher examined the results of the word-webbing activity and began searching for common themes. In order to verify the themes, other statements and/or words written on the visual web that corresponded to the themes, were used to substantiate the thematic concepts. The following topics emerged as a result of the activity; freedom, student productivity, teacher learning, and curriculum.

A Theme of Freedom

As the group expressed their thoughts about school initiatives the campus had undertaken during the previous years, the members indicated that the campus principal allowed them a certain amount of freedom regarding the implementation of each initiative. They commented that particular aspects of each program were useful to the teachers. For example, the principal encouraged the staff to utilize components of each program in order to suit their students' needs. Members of the group mentioned that teachers were allowed to take elements of the programs and integrate them into their current teaching practices. Conversations between teachers and the principal throughout the initiatives were ongoing, beneficial, and supportive.

A Theme of Student Productivity Through Technology

The participants voiced the opportunity for students to become more efficient and productive through the use of technology. A few of the members commented that students were more likely to know more about technology,

than some adults. In addition, others in the group stated that students had access to technology at home and other settings, and were capable of utilizing the tools that this technology provided, for learning and entertainment purposes. According to the group members, the benefits of technology and potential for use among students maximized learning opportunities for students.

For those students who frequently used the technology, the teachers commented that authentic instruction occurred more frequently. For example, some forms of student learning were characterized by a deeper understanding, as a result of using technology for research and production purposes. Some students chose to demonstrate their knowledge by expanding the ways in which they demonstrated their knowledge. Documents, Internet searches, and presentations, were forms that were utilized by students in order to communicate their ideas. The participants agreed that the use of technology for instructional purposes could be student-centered and authentic.

A Theme of Teacher Learning

The group acknowledged that teacher learning was affected by school initiatives. For example, learning the functional uses of technology, and how it could affect teacher practice, was significant. Because of technology's role, and the corresponding professional development that accompanied the technology grant, the initiative helped to broaden their experiences and to characterize themselves as "life-long learners". They were quick to mention

that it was important for them to talk, plan, and collaborate, in order to support each other's efforts. In addition, the teachers at this school have become more proficient with the technology. They believed this learning was a result of receiving the grant. One of the members of the group commented that it was evident that the teachers' actions, not a particular program or initiative, contributed to greater understanding.

A Theme of Curriculum Enhancement

Members of the group mentioned that initiatives, such as the one associated with technology, provided other resources that were used to enhance the school's curriculum. For example, instead of students being limited to information found only in textbooks or other sources bound by the confines of the regular school environment, they were able to further their curiosities, by accessing other places via the Internet. In particular, because the technology lab was funded by the grant proposal, teachers noted that students were proud of its capacity and the potential for greater use. In addition, the teachers noted that students' behaviors were better, and that they demonstrated greater interest when studying a topic. One of the teachers expressed excitement about using the technology resources to locate a website, that connected to the curriculum and allowed her students to extend beyond the walls of the classroom. Another member of the group used the term "revolutionary" to describe her experiences with regard to the initiatives associated with technology.

Providing An Additional Means for Communication

After the session concluded, this researcher invited the participants to respond in one other format. The members of the group were asked to respond in written format, either by a self-addressed letter to this researcher or by e-mail, regarding school initiatives and their effects upon teacher practice.

Approximately three weeks after the group session, two members of the group responded. One of the participants responded through the self-addressed method and the other through e-mail. However, because only two of the interviewees followed up in this manner, their comments were not included in this particular study.

This researcher chose not to contact the other three members. As the final communication method was voluntary, as were the other methods (individual interviews and group processing), this researcher accepted the idea that the three participants had expressed their thoughts thoroughly, during the previous meetings.

With the exception of the theme of "Freedom", the themes that emerged from the focus group were similar to the ones gathered from the interviews. For example, the focus group listed curriculum enhancement as important;this theme (curriculum enhancement) relates to student academic achievement and professional learning. Teacher learning, mentioned in the focus group, connects with professional learning. Student productivity, as described by the group relates to student academic learning.

Chapter Five

Interpretation of Findings, Implications, and Recommendations for Further Studies

This study sought to examine the perspectives of five elementary teachers whose school engaged and acted upon educational reform initiatives. As a result of the interview data, this researcher noted that participants clearly described experiences associated with reform proposals. These external initiatives, which originated from outside the classroom environment, affected their teaching practices. In addition, the participants expressed, through the data collection process, the phenomenon of change, school culture, and the acknowledged learning associated with the initiatives. Specifically, technology integration, cooperative learning, character education, and a grouping strategy called looping, a practice whereby a teacher remains with his or her students from one year and into the next successive school year were mentioned as instrumental to their teaching experiences.

The descriptions of the externally imposed initiatives' influences were used to illustrate the impact upon the professional lives of these specific teachers. Whether the programs' originations occurred at the campus, district, state or federal levels, the knowledge that these teachers provided, as a result of this study, is beneficial to educational practitioners who work in publicly supported schools. Community members, who work outside the

school setting, should recognize these teachers' perspectives. In addition, the study indicates that the teachers' implementation of reform measures determines the success of educational initiatives.

The teachers' viewpoints, gathered through the interview process, offered opportunities for further reflection by this researcher. This study's main purpose was to elicit the participants' portrayals, through participant self-disclosure, of the phenomenon of school reform initiatives. The origins of acceptance towards the strategies were not plainly identified by the teachers through the course of their interviews. However, they clearly put forth glimpses of their evolutionary journeys as a result of specific educational initiatives. The words and thoughts, conveyed through their interviews, substantiated the implementation of specific teaching practices within their classrooms.

Review of the Study

When selecting the most appropriate research design for this study, this researcher deemed it significant to choose qualitative. The explorations of the teachers' perspectives were associated with their experiences regarding their acceptance and implementation of particular school initiatives. For this reason, this researcher believed that a qualitative method design provided an appropriate framework. Based upon the work of Moustakes (1994), this researcher relied upon his phenomenological research methods when examining the perspectives of the participants.

During the interview process, questions about the school's specific initiatives were posed to the participants in order to help uncover their experiences and perspectives. In addition, the study's questions were utilized to direct the course of the dialogue and to solicit further information about the initiatives. Specific procedures were utilized so that the researchers' questions could be communicated in a manner that was clear, sought authentic data from each participant, and provided pertinent information about the subject matter.

Procedures

The purposeful sample consisted of five elementary teachers who worked at an elementary campus in a small town of a southwestern state. In addition, the school's principal participated in the group dialogue session. Because of the grant's emphasis upon reading achievement, technology, and the campus's self-description as a learning community (DuFour, 2004, Hord, 1997, Joyce et al, 1999, O'Hair et al, 2000), this particular site was selected. Furthermore, due to this researcher's previous experiences as an elementary principal whose school was involved in reading initiatives, it was believed that the study's outcome produced relevant knowledge for educational practitioners. Through the use of a personal interview data collection process, the resulting outcomes, gleaned from the participants, added valuable knowledge.

Permission forms for the interviews were obtained and consent forms provided for participants' signatures. After an initial meeting between this

researcher and the campus principal, five teachers were selected for the study. The data collection took the form of personal interviews with each of the five subjects. Interviews occurred in the late winter of 2004 and consisted of approximately 30 minutes for each session. The interviews, using a constructivist (Lambert, 2002) framework, were guided by the participants' responses.

The interview data was audio-recorded and transcribed. Notes were made about the participants' responses and the transcriptions were used to identify meaning units. Coding of these meaning units occurred after the interview data was transcribed. This researcher reviewed the data, in order to capture additional ideas that were not initially noticed. It is important to observe that no additional data was collected from the notes after the re-viewing process had concluded.

In addition to the data collected through the interview process, the participants participated in a word-webbing activity associated with the topics of school initiatives and technology. They were also offered the opportunity to provide additional data through individual written responses. Each of the communicative means allowed the teachers to put forth additional ideas not mentioned in their earlier interviews. During the word-webbing activity, this researcher recorded the comments onto chart paper. At the closure of the session, each participant agreed that the webbing activity accurately described the group's ideas. In addition, each teacher was encouraged, at the conclusion of the dialogue session, to respond to the topic via the postal

mail system or e-mail. They were responsible for returning their written comments through these two delivery systems in pre-addressed and stamped envelopes.

Demographics

The teacher participants worked as second, third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers. In addition, one of the participants worked as a technology teacher at the selected site. The subjects' teaching experiences ranged from three years to approximately 23 years. Although four participants had previous teaching experiences at other schools and one had never taught at another campus, none of the teachers had worked in other school districts. All of the participants had worked at the elementary school level only.

Interpretation of Findings

Transformation learning theory (Mezirow, 1992) spurred this researcher's initial interest and provided a framework for exploration. This researcher sought to investigate whether or not teachers' descriptions of phenomenon related to school reform initiatives contained specific turning points in their personal or professional lives. This researcher was curious to determine if these kinds of occasions led to the implementation of particular initiatives associated with school reform. Although the data did not produce examples of such turning points among the participants, the findings indicated that these teachers possessed a spirit of inquiry and desire to create conditions for student success.

The teachers in this study are characterized by their willingness to consider alternate means for attending to students' instructional needs. Although each one encountered initiatives at her own pace, they all indicated that they had acted upon some or all elements of various reform measures that had taken place at their campus. Their practice took on a reflective nature (Schon, 1983) as they manipulated the workings and integration of the various reform measures into their classroom practice.

In order to sustain the success of these initiatives, the teachers reported that they were free to dialogue with other teachers and/or principal about the measures. Often, the principal met informally during and after school (Harmon, 2003) and practiced an open-door policy as teachers questioned their knowledge and implementation of the initiative. The rapport with the campus principal contributed to the teachers' adoptions of the various practices. In addition, the principal, who held high expectations for student and school success (DuFour, 2004), supported the opportunity and time to reflect upon the initiatives' outcomes by establishing common planning times and encouraging teachers to develop professional relationships.

Further interpretations of this study indicate, that for these five participants, specific instructional strategies merit attention. These practices were meaningful and were originally introduced as school initiatives from either the principal or district level. Their ownership and elaboration of the strategies, and the manner in which the teachers developed their craft-knowledge, is meaningful and unique to each of them. At the time of the

interviews and based upon the participants' reports, the specific initiatives that primarily affected classroom practices included technology, cooperative learning, and looping with students from one grade to the next.

Implications:

Encouraging Instructional Practices within a Professional Learning Community

Educators, who serve within schools that have adopted the characteristics of professional learning communities, trace their organization's roots to Senge's (1990) work about learning organizations. Within these kinds of school environments, teachers and administrators work collaboratively in order to promote student learning. In many ways, the ideas that emerge from dialogue are organic to the school and develop from the uniqueness of the community's surroundings. One factor, however, that guides the conversations among all school community members is the expectation of student learning and teachers' professional knowledge. For schools that label themselves as professional learning communities, this high expectation is planted firmly in their vision.

Other educational practitioners (DuFour, 2004) have adopted the learning organizational framework and applied it to elementary and secondary schools as well. For example, Hord (1997) identified several aspects of professional learning communities that frame the kinds of work that is conducted. Those practices (SEDL, 2000) include, "... shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and the application of

that learning, supportive conditions (both structural and relational) and shared personal practice." (p. 2)

Other recent studies have sought to examine professional learning communities in schools (Bergeron, 2003, Leonard, 2002, Lodico, 2003, Tanner, 2003, Snow-Gerono, 2003). These particular inquiries examined the aspects of professional development, teacher efficacy, whole school change, and teacher research. Descriptions and explanations of each study point to the importance of a learning community. This researcher's interest, however, relies upon the framework and practices identified by O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug (2000).

Within this model, the professional learning community is examined through five different lenses. Framing a learning community through the tools of inquiry, discourse, equity, authenticity, leadership and service precipitates certain practices. Authentic achievement is one such practice and is not only defined in terms of student achievement (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995) but can be applied to the practices of authentic and meaningful teaching practices. The participants, through their own teaching experiences and based upon this study's data, authenticated three instructional practices that were meaningful for them and led to student achievement (as defined by students' grades, assessments, etc.) The professional learning community, in which they worked, helped to cultivate their ideas of implementation and considerations of the initiatives. Furthermore, the results of this study demonstrate that certain instructional practices, technology, multiyear

placement (looping) strategies, and cooperative learning led to academic achievement, relationship building, and professional learning.

The school's grant, through the OK-ACTS partnership helped to promote the teachers' journeys as they examined their professional practices. Because of the role that technology played in the grant, the teachers were able to expand upon their expertise of instructional practices. By learning about the potential for technology's use in their classrooms, the teachers brought about additional understandings through dialogue with one another, their shared planning times with one another, and access to technology tools.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' descriptions regarding their experiences towards external school reform initiatives. While the study determined that specific instructional practices were beneficial, the outcome of this study exposed characteristics of a learning community. These teachers, who practiced learning centered principles, were able to demonstrate a sense of freedom, time for collaboration, and inquiry as they came to terms with the proposals. O'Hair et al (2000) work regarding democratic schooling included characteristics of learners whose community practiced inquiry, discourse, equity, authentic teaching, leadership (shared) and service. Thus, evidence, drawn from this study and supported by the participants' interview data can be demonstrated in the following summarizations found in Table 3:

Table 3. Evidence of Participants' Responses Expressed Through

Evidence of Themes That Are Evident Within This Professional Learning Community:

- Affecting Relationships
- Professional/Teacher Learning
- Student Academic Achievement/Curriculum Enhancement/Productivity Through Technology

Inquiry: The participants' inquiries and experimentation with certain initiatives was evident. Whether the practice was looping, cooperative learning, or technology, the conditions of the work environment brought about by the external initiatives allowed these teachers to practice aspects of the initiative.
Discourse: The principal recognized the importance of discourse among the teachers and facilitated their efforts by scheduling common planning times during the day. These times proved to benefit the participants and supported each other's learning developments.
Equity: During the group dialogue session, the principal chose to participate. The interview data, gathered individually, did not conflict with the collective nature of the group despite the principal's presence in the session. The group members confirmed the importance of working in a school that followed learning centered principles.
Authentic Teaching and Learning: The initiatives that the teachers adopted became meaningful to them due to the proposal's associations with student achievement and the capacity to promote positive relationships among members of the school community.
Leadership: Teachers demonstrated acts of leadership by initiating aspects of the reform measures based upon their own readiness levels. Teachers demonstrated and dialogued with others regarding their experiences of the initiatives.
Service: The participants' encounters with the initiatives were viewed as promoting student achievement. Thus, it is interpreted that the teachers' beliefs about student achievement leads to service to their community.

Earlier in the project, this researcher made reference to Joyce et al., (1999) study concerning schools that practice learning centered principles. In addition to the model provided by O'Hair et al (2000), the hypotheses of effective and inquiry driven schools connects with the results of this study. Outcomes of this study can be applied to the seven hypotheses and evidence that verify one or more of the hypotheses can be supported.

Another Potential Model for Examining Teacher Learning

Throughout this course of study, this researcher's interest regarding how teachers describe, construct, change, and/or implement their instructional practices provided a direction for study. This investigation

examined teachers' descriptions of the phenomenon of externally imposed school initiatives, their practice, culture, and their own learning. Furthermore, a theory of learning, offered by Mezirow (1990), provided a structural framework for understanding. In addition, it is acknowledged that the environment in which these teachers worked provided a rich locale due to their involvement in professional development opportunities such as those put forth by the OK-ACTS project. The teachers associated such initiatives as technology, cooperative learning, and looping with student achievement, professional collaboration, and productive school community relationships. The study emphasized a vertical learning and reflective (Schon, 1983) relationship between the teacher and the initiative as well. This type of study, while productive, examined the connections between the participant and instructional tool known as a school initiative.

Another investigation of the complexities that affect teachers and their teaching practices could provide deeper knowledge as to how the initiatives affect the learning organization as a whole. Within the unique cultures of schools, instructional decisions, based upon initiatives, are mediated for understanding in order to produce actions. One such theoretical model that offers a naturalistic setting for examining workplace learning is based upon the work of Vygotsky (1978). Researchers, such as Engestrom (2001) have elaborated upon Vygotsky's work, and referred to the development of action theory in order to gain perspectives of the many relationships that interact within systems:

> The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individual who use and produce artifacts. This meant that objects ceased to be just raw material for the formation of logical operations in the subject as they were for Piaget. Objects became cultural entities and the object-orientedness of action became the key to understanding human psyche. (p. 134)

Utilizing an Expansive Learning Model for Further Research

As a means to apply action theory towards analyzing teacher professional development Osuna (2003) found that inner contradictions produced resolutions that led to transformational learning. The interrelationships of the system in which the study took place contributed to the participants' knowledge. In addition, research studies (Cumaranatunge, 2001;Wu, 2003;Yamagata-Lynch, 2001; Zapata, 2002) have applied the expansive learning theory model within educational environments in order to understand technology initiatives.

Engestrom(2001) applied the expansive learning theory model to the workplace of the hospital setting. His research provided another framework for understanding how learning develops within a system. Using a matrix to form a structure, the participants' responses are framed within each partition of the organizer. As a result of the multiple descriptions the participants and the social influences that act upon each element of the study, transformational learning is deemed more powerful because of the recursive nature of the participants, their actions, and objects used to mediate their knowledge.

By moving from an individual learning model (Mezirow, 1990) to a systemic one (Engestrom, 2001), a type of knowledge that is based upon the collective nature of the organization will put forth information that is situated in the community's cultural environment. Young (2001) wrote, "Expansive learning theory begins with contradictions, but assumes a common goal, it is primarily concerned with learning as a means." (pp 159-160)

This kind of learning model, when applied to schools that undergo systemic reform, will add research from a broadened perspective (Harris, 2003). The influences that act upon each participant, the community members, and instructional tools such as the external reform measures provide layers of understanding that moves beyond the self. The following table illustrates an organizer designed for such research:

Table 4. Engestrom's (2001, p.138) Expansive Learning Theory Matrix

	Activity System as unit of analysis	Multi-voicedness	Historicity	Contradictions	Expansive Cycles
Who are learning?					
Why do they learn?					
What do they learn?					
How do they learn?					

If this particular model were applied to schools that undergo systemic change, such as the one researched in this study, learning that is more inclusive of all segments of the school community could be used to make additional informed decisions. This comprehensive model, based upon the multiple perspectives of those who act upon school initiatives, provides another framework for understanding organizational change.

Recommendations:

Conduct Additional Quantitative and/or Qualitative Research Within Schools That Practice Learning-Centered Principles

This qualitative study provided inquiry into a school setting characterized as a professional learning community. The school's grant proposal, through the OK-ACTS partnership, described evidence of those kinds of schools that are committed to learning centered principles. In addition, the research study provided examples as to how this school enacts learning centered principles. The outcomes of this study put forth interview data of selected individuals who were characterized, by the principal, as teacher/leaders within this community.

Efforts such as gathering qualitative and quantitative data from teachers and principals who work in professional learning communities add to the knowledge of schools that practice learning centered principles. By replicating the process of phenomenological methods, as demonstrated in this investigation to other schools in the OK-ACTS project, will provide additional data and bring knowledge to communities and policy writers about

the experiences of practitioners who encounter such reforms. In addition, quantitative research methodology, applied to a school such as this, will provide a different kind of data to the complex relationship among practitioners, community members, and authors of educational policies.

Finally, this study, grounded in phenomenological methods, produced data from a purposeful sample. It is necessary to locate schools that demonstrate learning centered principles for future studies. For example, additional data could be obtained from randomly selected participants whose schools have met specific criteria of operating by the principles of a professional learning community. Other sites, selected from another geographical area or from a national perspective, will provide data that some might consider more quantifiable.

Conduct Research Pertaining to Parents' Descriptions of Schools That Practice Learning Centered Principles

This study emphasized the roles and perspectives that teachers and principals own within a professional learning community. In order to gauge the understanding of parents, whose children attend schools such as this, qualitative and/or quantitative studies need to be undertaken. School environments, such as those involved in the OK-ACTS programs, could provide data from those who are not employed within the school. Furthermore, their perspectives regarding external school reforms and the influences they play upon classroom practice would benefit educational policy writers.

Pre-Service Educational Leadership Programs

Research institutions that promote educational leadership preparation programs, such as universities, can use studies, such as this one, to assist individuals who are interested in serving as educational administrators or teacher leaders. The roles that principals and teacher/leaders play can encourage the construction and success of professional learning communities whose intent is to build collective leadership. According to Chirichello (2004),

> Collective leadership supports interrelationships and shapes cultures that believe in empowerment and risk taking. Followers become leaders, and leaders step out of their way to become followers. Collective leadership goes beyond delegation; it creates a culture that believes in self-empowerment. (p. 1)

One idea, as a means to add relevant content related to administrator-teacher leadership programs, concerns the provision of coursework, seminars, and/or experiences that address adult and organizational learning theory (National Research Council, 1999). It is assumed, since schools provide learning opportunities for students, that many educators and community members have an in-depth knowledge of how learning occurs among students and adults. It is important, however, to continue investigations of how learning takes place among children and adults. Thus, those who demonstrate acts of leadership within school communities can facilitate optimal conditions.

Another recommendation, for those universities that offer educational leadership programs, is to provide more content knowledge for those who assume leadership roles, regarding hiring practices. The dispositions of

those who work within the educational community should reflect understandings of tolerance, conditions of change, and the importance of inquiry. Some readers of this study might consider this recommendation controversial. This researcher realizes the complex nature when inviting personnel to become part of an educational institution. It is imperative, however, that personnel view themselves as researcher practitioners. Such individuals are interested in building collaboration and relationships among school community members. In addition, they must demonstrate a commitment to enhancing teaching and learning.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated that professional learning is important to those teachers who enacted elements of the reform initiative. Other investigations regarding the connection(s) of student achievement, positive relationships, and adult learning theory with professional learning relationships that originate at the campus level need to take place. This emergent learning, constructivist in nature, will add richness to similar research. The resulting information, specifically tied to externally motivated school reform measures will provide important data to teacher/leaders and school administrators.

Concluding Commentary

The intent of this study was to examine how teachers describe their experiences regarding the phenomenon of school initiatives, their practice, the school culture, and their own professional learning. As a result of school initiatives imposed upon them externally, the study sought to examine the

influences to their classrooms and school. These impositions came from sources such as local, district, state, and/or federal agencies.

Because of this researcher's experiences as a campus administrator, the knowledge produced from this study contributed a more informed understanding as to how teachers viewed initiatives. Additional research, regarding teachers' acceptance and implementation of externally imposed instructional practices needs to occur. The ultimate responsibility for the implementation of various practices, born from reform measures, is placed upon teachers through their daily practice. Therefore, it is important to examine, further, the conditions and environments of schools that practice learning centered principles.

Schools that practice learning centered principles use the tools of inquiry, discourse, equity, shared leadership, and service (O'Hair et al., 2000) to promote the well being of the organization. Schools, of this nature, search for ways to develop their own internal expertise. In addition, they do not seek to add external programs as a means to an end. Therefore, learning centered principles help to enact their professional learning goals. These tools assist the teachers' efforts as they construct a professional culture that emphasizes knowledge as well.

Generalizations from this study are not appropriate. However, this research adds other perspectives to the research fields of teacher change, professional learning communities, and transformative learning. This investigation offers examples of selected participants who work within a

school that practices learning centered principles. Because of the limits to the study, one should not assume that the experiences mentioned by the participants are indicative of all teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to explore other professional learning communities that practice authentic teaching practices. It can be assumed, however, that one of the primary tasks of schools is to promote learning for students and community members. Teachers' opportunities to develop their own learning is vital. The conditions that support such learning must be made known.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PURPOSE OF STUDY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH: INFORMATION FOR THE INTERVIEWEE

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROTECTION

April 14, 2004

Dr. Mary John O'Hair
Center for Educational & Community Renewal
SCI 308
CAMPUS MAIL

SUBJECT: "OETT and OK-ACTS: Partnering for Professional Learning Communities (PLC)"

Dear Dr. O'Hair:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved the requested revision(s) to the subject protocol.

Please note that this approval is for the protocol and informed consent form initially approved by the Board on June 27, 2003, and the revisions included in your request dated 12/08/03 to add the following persons to this project:

Mark A. Nanny	Jo Ann Pierce
Randy S. Averso	Ron Myers
Jean Cate	Dan Allen
Dennis Gentry	Jesica Turner
Leslie A. Williams	Craig Stevens
Linda Atkinson	Robert H. Kinsey

If you wish to make other changes, you will need to submit a request for revision to this office for review.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 325-8110.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair
Institutional Review Board - Norman Campus (FWA #00003191)

FY2002-443

cc: Dr. Mark Nanny, Engineering / Randy S. Averso, Education / Jean Cate, Education / Dennis Gentry, EACS / Leslie A. Williams, EACS / Linda Atkinson, Education / Jo Ann Pierce, EACS / Ron Myers, Education / Dan Allen, EACS / Jesica Turner, EACS / Craig Stevens, EACS / Robert H. Kinsey, EACS

660 Parrington Oval, Suite 316, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-3085 PHONE: (405) 325-8110 FAX: (405) 325-2373

Individual Informed Consent Form for Research
University of Oklahoma, Norman

This survey is part of research being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This document is intended to provide information so survey and interview respondents can acknowledge informed consent for participation in a research project.

Title: OETT and OK-ACTS: Partnering for Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
Principal Investigator: Mary John O'Hair, Ed.D., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal
Co-Principal investigators: Mark Nanny, Ph.D., Civil Engineering and Environmental Sciences
Randy Averso, M.Ed., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal
Jean Cate, M.Ed., K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal

This research is designed to understand perceptions and change processes that are involved within a school community following their one to three-year engagement in 10 practices designed to increase student learning and foster democratic citizenship. Participants agree to complete the Rubric for High Achieving Schools. The Rubric consists of the 10 practices linked directly to improved student achievement and involves the participant to give examples of each practice, describe obstacles to each practice, and develop an action plan to overcome obstacles. Practices focus on the following: core learning principles; authentic teaching and learning; shared leadership and decision-making; teacher collaboration and learning; inquiry and discourse; supportive administrative leadership; caring and collective responsibility for students; connection to home and community; concern for equity; and access to external expertise. Time required to complete the Rubric will vary by school. Most schools connect the Rubric to school and district goals and devote professional development days (approximately 4-8 days per year) to identifying, analyzing, and implementing the Rubric's 10 practices. In addition to completion of the Rubric, selected participants from OK-ACTS Phase II schools and districts agree to a follow-up interview (approximately 1-2 hour) based on practices described in the Rubric. Participants will be asked to describe the process involved in developing the practice, the obstacles encountered, and how they plan to or have overcome obstacles.

Please read the statements below:

1. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty.
2. I understand I am entitled to no benefits for participation.
3. I may terminate my participation at any time prior to the completion of this study without penalty.
4. Any information I may give during my participation will be used for research purposes only. Responses will not be shared with persons who are not directly involved with this study.
5. All information I give will be kept confidential.
6. I understand that there are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

The investigators, Drs. Mary John O'Hair, Mark Nanny, Randy Averso, and Jean Cate or other key personnel are available to answer any questions regarding this research study and may be reached by phone at (405) 325-1267, by internet at www.k20center.org, or by contacting the Center for Educational and Community Renewal, 640 Parrington Oval, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, 73019.
For inquires about rights as a research participant, contact the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405/325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

I have read and understand the terms and conditions of this study and I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.
If selected to be interviewed, I consent to being audio taped. (Please check: yes ___ no ___)

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____ Researcher Signature _____

APPROVED
APR 14 2004
OU-NC IRB

APPROVAL
JUN 26 2004
EXPIRES

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

- Please tell me about your teaching experiences and educational work background.

- What recent initiatives, imposed from outside the classroom, have influenced your practice?

- How do you go about learning about instructional practices?

- How do you go about finding out more about the practices?

- What role do other teachers or administrators play?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

- Thank you.

Note: These questions provided only a guide for the data collection. Based upon the interviewee's response and elaboration of topics, the conversation between this researcher and the interviewee was built as a result of the dialogue that occurred. Therefore, the nature of each conversation differed in content. (Interviews were recorded and transcribed.)