The Expression and Development of Teachers' Capacities Within Two Learning Communities: A Participant-Observer Case Study

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Abstract

The learning community model has been an integral component of teacher development in Ontarian schools and beyond. This research was conducted to understand how teachers' personal capacity and professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies are developed and expressed within this context. Nineteen elementary teachers and administrators participated in the study from November through January 2007. A qualitative case study methodology was used to investigate the role of teachers' capacities and competencies in learning communities. Combined data sources from semistructured interviews, research journals, and document review were used to gather data about teachers' capacities and competencies. The study included 3 phases of analysis. In the final phase the analysis provided 3 qualities of the teachers at Jude and Mountain Schools (pseudonyms): identification as professionals, investment in others, and institutional affiliation that may explain how they differed from other educators. The data revealed these three themes, which provided an understanding of educators at Jude and Mountain Schools as dedicated professionals pushing practices to contribute to school life and address student learning needs, and as teachers who reflected on practices to continue expanding their skills. Teachers were heavily invested in creating a caring culture and in students' and team members' learning. Educators actively participated in solving problems and coplanning throughout the school levels and beyond, assumed collective responsibility for all pupils, and focused on generating school-wide consistent practices. These qualities and action patterns revealed teachers who invested time and effort in their colleagues, who committed to develop as professionals, and who affiliated closely with every aspect of school living.

Acknowledgements

The doctoral dissertation journey has been a lifelong dream actualized by the efforts of dedication, deep thought, and sincere perspiration. First I extend my thanks and gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Coral Mitchell, for her guidance and steadfast ability to identify the meaning beneath my quest and to focus my work directly on the path to completion—"A good thesis is a done thesis!" Advisorship is a time-consuming responsibility that Coral accepted, and this document is a testament to her dedication to my success and to her vocation for teaching in the academy. Second, I recognize the input and effort of my committee members, Dr. Renee Kuchapski and Dr. Kara Smith, who both added to the depth and richness of my dissertation through their sage recommendations during the portfolio and proposal stages of the dissertation and beyond. It is my intention to serve my students with similar enthusiasm to promote their future successes to honour the work of these three *women of the academy*.

In my life I have been blessed with many exceptional teachers and colleagues who have joined my community of learners promoting my learning and their own through mutual respect, sharing, and encouragement. I want to acknowledge their role in helping me along my education pathway. I especially want to thank Dr. Kris Kirkwood and Dr. Eric Weisz for their contributions along my education pathway, for their inspiration, dedication, and care as professors, mentors, and friends.

I want to extend my thanks to the many participants of this study with whom I had the privilege of working and interacting. Their input and my observations of their work have helped shape my perspective of the role of teachers' personal capacity and competencies in learning communities, enlightened me, and provided me with excellent

role models. I hope to emulate your important work within my own learning community, and I thank you for sharing your wisdom and for enriching my life.

Finally, I thank my parents, Rosaria and Joseph, for their continual patience and encouragement over my long education career path. They have spent many years supporting, praising, and dedicating their time and energy to facilitate my successes, and for their efforts I am truly grateful. My life goals and interests have motivated me to "read more, to question more, and to learn more" instigating this learning journey many years ago and which continue to motivate and inspire me today. I wish this desire for knowledge and enlightenment for all who follow their life voyage.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study is concerned with the development and role of teachers as competent professionals within schools that operate as learning communities. To develop teachers' skills, school boards are involved in implementing a variety of professional development initiatives. Hord (1997b) states that in schools that function as learning organizations, continuous learning is promoted by using professional development as the vehicle for change. Skytt (2003) supports the learning community as the preferred model for teacher professional development because it is purported to build processes that improve teaching and learning within schools. DuFour (2007) similarly argues that the learning community "provides a powerful, proven conceptual framework for transforming schools at all levels" (p. 8). This model, however, is in the early stages of development in most schools, as well as in the professional development literature. Of particular concern is the lack of knowledge about the role played by school teachers as they learn, grow, and work in learning communities. This qualitative study addresses this knowledge gap by investigating how Ontario elementary teachers use and develop their competencies within a learning community.

Background to the Study

Professional development for educators is important because, as Borko (2004, p. 4) argues, evidence now exists that professional development can lead to improvement in instructional practices and student learning. Elmore (2002) suggests that professional development takes place after preservice education in the life world of work, and he describes it as any activity designed to increase educators' knowledge and skill to improve teaching and learning. According to Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon

(2001), the content covered in professional development activities varies along at least four dimensions. In their review of common professional development strategies, they have found some activities designed to enhance teachers' knowledge of subject-matter content for new textbooks and curriculum, others intended to improve general teaching practices, such as lesson planning, some geared to teaching skills specific to particular content domains, and some that examine the ways students learn particular subject matter.

Sparks (2005, p. 2) also acknowledges that, to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools, high-quality professional learning is necessary. According to the results of recent large-scale studies (e.g., Desimone, Garet, Birman, Porter, & Yoon, 2002; Garet et al., 2001), high-quality professional development is characterized by longer contact hours, active learning opportunities, team participation, activities sustained over time, focus on content, and alignment with other reform efforts. Strudler, Archambault, Bendixen, Anderson, and Weiss (2003, p. 44) extend this description by advocating for professional development that ensures ongoing, site-based, content-focused sessions where teachers are active learners.

Garet et al. (2001) state that opportunities for teachers to become actively engaged in professional development through meaningful discussion, planning, and practice are important for the success of the activity. Carey and Frechtling (1997) propose that some examples for active learning include observing expert teachers and being observed teaching, reviewing student work in the topic examined, and planning how new curriculum and teaching methods will be used in the classroom.

Salpeter and Bray (2003) also see teacher collaboration as a characteristic of effective professional development. In order to achieve this goal, they argue, school systems need to organize teachers' work so that they can collaborate with colleagues and develop strong learning communities that will sustain them as they become more accomplished teachers. Salpeter and Bray contend that this kind of organizational structure will yield "anytime, anywhere learning communities where educators can converse, collaborate, and share best practices" (p. 2). They summarize effective professional development as producing changes in teachers' practice because the content is relevant to their work contexts, activities are sustained over time, it takes place with colleagues, and it is job embedded.

Joyce and Showers (2002) propose that ongoing collaborative professional development efforts are successful in changing teaching practices. In this approach, teachers' capacities and needs can be addressed through participation in activities that promote collaboration, sharing of effective practices, and reflection, which are also the activities found in viable learning communities. Sparks (2005) suggests that successful learning communities clearly illustrate what can be achieved if teachers collaborate and learn as part of their daily work within their school. Furthermore, he argues that well-implemented professional learning communities are a powerful means of seamlessly blending teaching and professional learning in ways that produce complex, intelligent behaviour in all teachers (p. 2).

A collaborative approach resonates with the demands of the 21st century postindustrial era. Rost (1991) proposes that change in this era is marked by collaboration, diversity, concern for the common good, participation, and consensus-oriented policy processes. He argues that an emphasis on collaboration can help align overall school improvement and reform goals with teachers' combined efforts (p. 677). During times of reform, an increased focus on standards can shift how school districts deliver professional development (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000), and this can foreshadow a move towards a more context-specific model for professional development.

Many professional development models are available, such as mentoring, one-shot workshops, learning communities, train-the-trainer in-service workshops, action research, curriculum development committees, study groups (Stiles & Loucks-Horsley, 1998), networking, online chat rooms and discussion boards, seminars, and formal college or university courses (Garet, et al., 2001; Haack, 2006; Servage, 2005; Velde, Cooper, & Gerber, 1994). The problem for professional development policies, however, extends beyond selecting models and providing resources and opportunities for teachers to acquire new knowledge and skills. It involves giving teachers opportunities to reflect critically on their practice and to create new beliefs about content, knowledge, pedagogy, and learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This type of professional development and school improvement places a demand on resources and on teachers' time and efforts. While it is important to build teachers' capacity for improvement, it is necessary that the time, effort, and scarce resources are expended on quality programs that teach with and about effective practices.

The learning community model is built on the premise that teachers' voices will be heard, needs expressed, and ideas shared. It is an evolving professional development model that operates from the ground up rather than from the top down (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995). In this model, teachers are encouraged to assume leadership roles and to share ideas about what their professional development questions are for their classroom contexts. When this method is supported by providing time to meet within the school day, teachers can participate in authentic learning activities, share effective practices, and assist one another in the learning process. In this way teachers and administrators engage in job-embedded learning as they walk through their daily activities (Wood & Killian, 1998, p. 52) with colleagues, building upon one another's competencies and supporting one another's learning and professional growth. This process, according to Musgrove (1968), should encourage educators to

> examine subjects both within the school and the nation at large as social systems sustained by communication networks, material endowments and ideologies. Within a school and within a wider society subjects as communities of people, competing and collaborating with one another, defining and defending their boundaries, demanding allegiance from their members and conferring a sense of identity upon them . . . even innovation which appears to be essentially intellectual in character can usefully be examined as the outcome of social interaction. (p. 101)

In this quotation, Musgrove sets the stage for thinking about schools as organizations within a particular social context in which teachers build knowledge through the capacities of groups working together and at times expressing differences to reach innovative curriculum that is accessible to all students and that prepares them for "personal, professional, and civic life" (Huber & Hutchings, 2006, p. 24).

In a complex, knowledge-sharing social context, a way for schools to improve is to become learning communities. Seashore Louis and Miles (1990) linked the ideas of the learning organization, community processes, and bottom-up professional development. Marks and Seashore Louis (1999) argue that education research has focused on teacher empowerment and only in a limited fashion on school capacity for organizational learning. They suggest linking the two research avenues of teacher empowerment and organizational learning to identify those dimensions of capacity for organizational learning (p. 707).

According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), the work of Shirley Hord (1997) crystallized the learning community concept by joining together the three subcomponents of *professional, learning,* and *community.* Hord (1997a) describes professional learning communities as ones "in which the teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals so that students benefit. This arrangement has also been termed *communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*" (¶ 2).

The learning community has been described both as a framework and as a series of characteristics that are evident within a particular school setting. DuFour (2007) identifies the learning community model for professional development as neither a recipe, program, or short cut to school improvement but rather as a "powerful, proven conceptual framework for transforming schools at all levels" (p. 8). The term has also been used to describe a variety of structures like a school committee or a teaching team. Regardless of its use, some overarching principles are associated with the term: (a) ensuring that students learn, (b) a culture of collaboration, and (c) a focus on results that inform and sustain professional learning until it becomes embedded within the school culture

(DuFour, 2004). In an early work, DuFour and Eaker (1998, pp. 25-29) provided characteristics for a learning community: (a) shared mission, vision, and values, (b) collective inquiry, (c) collaborative teams, (d) action orientation and experimentation, (e) continuous improvement, and (f) results orientation. They argue that developing the ability of school people to participate actively in the learning community model promises substantive sustained school improvement and high levels of learning for all students.

Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) model of the learning community is generative and comprehensive. In their model, teachers are positioned as knowledge-rich professionals who build upon their knowledge base to reconstruct their professional narratives. It is a capacity-building model where individuals work closely together, through a process of critical reflection and action research, to identify areas of strength that can be used to build one another's skills and teaching pedagogy. After this active process, educators review their professional narratives and determine what needs to be reframed and what needs to be retained to rebuild their professional narrative. This active learning process enhances the educator's personal professional capacity (pp. 42-43).

The model is fluid because it travels through many cycles of spontaneous and planned learning opportunities supported by ongoing dialogue between and among educators at all levels of the organization, between practice and its effects, and between experience and new learning events (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 43). In this way, Mitchell and Sackney have positioned their model as one of continuous dialogue, innovation, and transformation achieved by educators as they share their competencies with one another. Through sharing their expertise, teachers are able to deconstruct and reconstruct their professional narratives to address the daily exigencies of their life world of work.

Problem Context

That brief glimpse into some of the many configurations of learning communities in the literature demonstrates that the learning community terminology is quickly becoming a "pan" concept and is in danger of losing all meaning through overuse. DuFour (2007) states that he is not surprised that teachers in some schools attempting to implement learning communities are confused and find little potential benefit in the process. In these schools, the focus has been on terminology and not on learning community practices. Faris and Wheeler (2006) have been concerned about the same issues. In a Google internet search, Faris found 100 references for the term *learning community*. The multiple meanings that exist in the literature, he argues, cause a great deal of confusion for researchers and practitioners interested in this particular form of professional development.

Davis and Sumara (2001) suggest that individuals mistakenly view learning communities as complicated entities which can be reduced into individual working parts to be measured and understood. Instead, they suggest that learning communities need to be understood as complex bodies that are a nested "collective of dynamic and similarly complex systems" that also "transcend their components" (p. 88). Davis and Sumara argue that a more holistic perspective should be adopted to integrate the particular social context in which the learning community exists and to demonstrate that "its ability to respond creatively to emergent circumstances [is] dependent on its own internal diversity" and "the specific qualities, capacities, and characters of its subsystems" (pp.

88-90). This suggests not only a focus on the larger social context of the learning community, but also a focus on building teachers' capacities. The complex nature of the learning community model may in part be attributed to its use of a variety of strategies for professional development, such as action research or train-the-trainer, which are employed individually or in combination (Pancucci, 2007, 2008a, 2008b).

Some organizations have worked towards developing an implementation framework for the learning community model. In Ontario, for example, the *Standards for Professional Practice* (Ontario College of Teachers [OCT], 2006b) uses the learning community professional development model to inform teachers' professional practice, leadership tasks, and ongoing professional learning. The *Standards for Professional Practice* document and the governing body, the Ontario College of Teachers, expect that teachers will be members of a learning community within their school context to enhance their teaching practice and to improve student learning.

In spite of this expectation, however, the Ministry of Education (MOE) currently does not have an implementation policy in place for Ontario English language schools. In contrast, for French language schools there exists a policy whose objective is to "increase the capacity of learning communities, including school staff, students, and parents, to support students' linguistic, educational, and cultural development throughout their lives" (MOE, 2008, p. 2). The implication is that no Ministry policy, strategy, or implementation directions are available to facilitate the process for Ontario English language schools.

This Ministry expectation for implementation of learning communities provides the impetus for unraveling the mystery of how teachers' capacities and competencies work in the learning community. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) suggest that teachers' capacities are the key to enhancing the practice of teachers, which in turn improves learning for students. The problem, however, is that how these capacities and competencies develop and function within the learning community and thereby produce these benefits is not clear.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the role played by school teachers as they learn, grow, and work in a learning community within an elementary school context. My primary research question was: How do teachers develop professional competencies and function as competent professionals within a learning community?

My subsidiary questions were:

1. How are teachers' professional competencies developed and expressed within a learning community?
2. How are teachers' interpersonal competencies developed and expressed within a learning community?
3. How are teachers' organizational competencies developed and expressed within a learning community?

Conceptual Framework

I positioned the study within Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) theoretical framework for building a community of learners through the mutually influencing and interdependent functioning of personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacities or competencies. Mitchell and Sackney similarly describe a learning community as a school culture where members make sense of the teaching and learning characteristics in their school and use their capacities to improve professional practice. In other words, teachers' efforts are focused on building capacity for enhancing the learning of students as well as for colleagues and themselves. These outcomes are achieved as members collaborate to identify a pathway to success. The generative nature of this model provides spaces for members to develop their own preferred method for creating a learning community. In other words, each staff group must invent itself as a learning community in an open and evolving way.

This framework is constructivist in nature because it assumes that learning community members have a wealth of professional knowledge and information upon which to build. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) use three levels of capacity: personal capacity (characteristics and abilities of the individual teacher), interpersonal capacity (working relationships among colleagues), and organizational capacity (structures and systems put into place to facilitate teacher learning and collaboration).

My conceptual model varies from Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) model by using only one level to view the learning community processes. By selecting the teachers as the singular focus of the capacity building process, I position personal capacity as composed of three competencies: professional competency, which includes any activities involved in building professional practice (e.g., building professional repertoires, knowledge, and skills), interpersonal competency, which is engaging in activities that promote effective work with colleagues (e.g., implementing the norms of collaboration and working well with teams), and organizational competency, which refers to involvement in the structures put in place to facilitate learning and professional improvement (e.g., participating in meetings designed for sharing effective teaching practices). In this way, capacity building is positioned within the individual teachers of the learning community and is focused on building three types of competency for teachers. In the reinterpretation of the model, I tightly focus on personal capacity and its inherent competencies where the three capacities are all expressed as aspects of the individual teacher.

Rationale for the Study

For more than 100 years, schooling has followed the industrial production model initiated by the Ford assembly line. According to Steel and Craig (2006, p. 676), this production model, as applied to students, teachers, and administrators, positions the teacher as an assembly-line worker who adds some required educational "parts" to each student to produce a standardized product. In the industrial model of education, teachers lived in a context where technical work thrived and where a teacher could go to someone to get any education problem fixed. However, this mechanistic approach to teaching led to isolation and an "extraordinary level of attrition" (Steel & Craig, p. 676). Steel and Craig (p. 677) contend that defining teachers' roles as technical competencies will no longer suffice. Instead, they argue for a new description of teachers as collaborative partners who build one another's capacities through a process of dialogue and critical reflection to enhance their professional practice.

Some government bodies have begun to look at methods for framing teachers' work and professional development. One of these entities, the Ontario College of Teachers (2006a), has presented *The Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession* for teachers, which suggests that professional learning is enhanced through the use of the learning community model. The framework encourages collaboration that supports ongoing commitment to the improvement and currency of teaching practice as an individual and collective responsibility (OCT, 2006a, p. 23). Another aspect of this process is the development of standards for teaching practice in Ontario. The document that captures those teaching standards, the *Standards for Professional Practice* (OCT, 2006b), employs the learning community professional development model as a means to inform teachers' professional practice, leadership tasks, and commitment to students and ongoing professional learning. The OCT (2006a, p. 25) proposes that teachers continue to extend their skills and knowledge in an evolving educational landscape through a variety of strategies: formal academic programs, research activities, professional networks, professional contributions, mentoring and networking, professional activities, learning through practice, and technology and learning. My study contributes to their agenda by attempting to discover how teachers develop one another's capacities to enhance their teaching practice.

The learning community model assumes that collaborative teams in a learning community can improve student learning and enhance teacher pedagogy. The opportunity to reflect critically on teaching practices with colleagues to improve and enhance personal capacity provides staff with the opportunity to grow professionally. Consequently, understanding how learning community professional development is put into practice by teachers at the school level can provide insight into this process.

Darling-Hammond (1995) cites the ability of learning communities to build schools' capacity for learning. Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, and Sebring (1994) propose that it is teachers' capacity for teaching and learning that provides the key to successful school improvement and therefore overall school capacity for learning. They add that teachers' learning capacity is the key because educators are a means for transforming school culture and for fostering democratic practices needed to implement and sustain systemic change. Learning community development and the ensuing development of teacher practices are also linked to teachers' willingness to commit and to persist in following through with initiated changes (DuFour, 2007). This study can contribute to understanding how the development and expression of teachers' professional competencies prepare them to implement systemic changes aimed at school improvement.

Importance of the Study

The literature is filled with descriptions of the benefits of the learning community model of professional development (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lambert, 2003b; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), but few researchers discuss the obstacles and barriers to success. In my professional practice, I have found that different school cultures and administration styles shape learning community implementation differently (Pancucci, 2008a). In the autocratic top-down imposition model, I observed a great deal of resistance, and yet success was achieved because of teachers' commitment to and belief in doing what was best for students. In a collaborative implementation model, I observed little resistance, and I noted that success was obtained despite the presence of a volatile and negative parent culture. These two experiences suggest that multiple factors influence learning community implementation in elementary schools and that it is important to understand them in order for successful implementation to occur. This work is important because it will expand the knowledge base around teacher factors that affect learning community implementation and sustainability.

By studying an established learning community, I was able to observe how teachers' capacities informed the implementation process for this professional development model and what teachers' personal, interpersonal, and organizational competencies looked like in practice. A description of their competencies in the school setting can make Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) framework for learning communities more accessible to implementation at the school level. In this way, I am linking the theory to school practice, and I am working to create a framework for learning community implementation.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

In Chapter Two, the education literature is examined in detail to provide insight into and understanding of teacher professional development, first through a general discussion of professional development and then with a more specific exploration of the learning community model. The literature review then moves to a detailed explication of teachers' professional competencies and the factors that influence the development of these competencies.

Chapter Three presents the methodological theory and the philosophical underpinnings that provided the lens through which the research work was conducted. In this chapter, the steps followed from beginning to end of the study are described, with reference to site and participant selection, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations.

In Chapter Four, the context for the study and the descriptive results are presented. This chapter builds on a deductive analysis of data to provide a picture of what the schools looked like, who the participants were, and how teachers' professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies were expressed in each school.

In the second and third phases of analysis, inductive analyses were conducted to categorize the data according to the external and internal influences on the development and expression of teachers' professional competencies. Chapter Five presents these results.

Chapter Six provides a summary of the study and a discussion of some of the key contributions to the knowledge base concerning the implementation of the learning community model. It builds upon the results to develop a new framework for professional development, and it considers the implications of this framework for enhancing teaching and learning for teachers and for students.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature that was fundamental to the completion of the study. It begins with a review of the literature dealing with professional development as a general concern, a variety of types commonly in use, and learning communities as a specific example of a professional development model. For all the models, both the benefits and limitations are discussed to provide a balanced representation. Next, literature concerning the development of teacher competency is reviewed. The chapter concludes with a review of literature that examines influences on the development of teachers' competencies.

Professional Development

Fenstermacher and Berliner (1983) propose that professional development has traditionally been defined as "the provision of activities designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and understandings of teachers in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and classroom behaviour" (p. 4). Laferrière, Breuleux, Baker, and Fitzsimons (1999) posit that what teachers learn at staff development initiatives is based on their existing knowledge and beliefs. It is just these understandings that teachers build upon to construct new knowledge and skills for use and applications within their classrooms and their school settings.

According to Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, and Soloway (1998, p. 33), in order to promote innovation for student learning and instruction, teachers need to be active consumers of knowledge and to examine their understandings and beliefs rather than to be passive receivers of the information delivered to them through professional development efforts. This approach to professional development is reflected in Tafel and

Bertani's (1992) definition of professional development as a means for teachers to approach and change their "own carefully articulated goals to improve their schools, their relationships with each other and the teaching processes for students" (p. 12). Garet et al. (2001) state that many professional development models are available, such as mentoring, train-the-trainer in-service workshops, action research, and one-shot workshops. Added to this list are learning communities, curriculum development committees, study groups, networking, online chat rooms and discussion boards, seminars, and formal college or university courses (Haack, 2006; Servage, 2005; Stiles and Loucks-Horsley, 1998; Velde et al., 1994).

One of the simplest and cheapest strategies for professional development is the one-shot workshop. Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, and Polovsky (2005) describe these professional development opportunities as being designed and delivered by district leaders who contract external experts to offer workshops and to provide content area specialists to work with teachers. Borman and Rachuba (1999) contend that one-shot workshops are the predominant mode of professional development offered traditionally to the majority of teachers. Their dominance is a concern for Garet et al. (2001) because the workshops are often not focused on relevant subject-matter content. Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) add that this approach, which expects implementation of a curriculum package, ignores teachers' experiences and understanding of the applicability of content for their students. It also does not build a culture of professional learning, and it does not facilitate teachers' learning from and with colleagues. Instead, they argue, it builds a "culture of compliance" (p. 227) to a forced implementation of a narrow curriculum that may not fit student needs. This type of professional development, Firestone, Schorr, and Monfils (2004) argue, is "delivered to" teachers and is not a shared collaborative process.

Lewis (2002) states that effective professional development occurs when teachers have the opportunity to collaborate, observe, learn from, reflect, and network with each other. Similarly Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) propose that the simplest way to reduce professional isolation to build professional community and deepen teachers' knowledge, build skills, and improve instruction "is for teachers to observe each other's teaching and to provide constructive feedback" (p. 11). Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) believe that another aspect of effective professional development is when teachers have a vision to work towards in their particular political, social, and historical culture. Mentoring is an approach that captures both of these authors' recommendations. It is a reciprocal learning process for both the mentor and the mentee, a symbiotic relationship where both parties generally benefit from the interaction, and a kind of learning that is embedded in the culture of the participants. However, at times this model breaks down because of obstacles such as personality conflicts between participants, lack of time to meet, forced compliance, and other issues.

The train-the-trainer model of in-service education is described as an economical method of teacher professional development. Over the years, the train-the-trainer model of professional development has become a common feature of the education training landscape. Orfaly et al. (2005) argue that it is a widely acknowledged educational model across a number of disciplines, including public health preparedness. It focuses on training one lead teacher, who subsequently trains staff at the home school in the demonstrated skills (Rolheiser, Ross, & Hogaboam-Gray, 1999). This model is cost effective, since one teacher is trained rather than all staff members. It is a quick solution to professional development needs because a workshop for a small group of trainers can be easily prepared, resources and materials gathered, and training directed to a limited target population.

Orfaly et al. (2005) argue, however, that proper use, efficacy, and the optimal role of the model in education for public health practitioners raises many questions. More specifically, Elmore (2002) suggests that this format of training does not usually consider the learners' work in their school context and provides what Crowther (2002) would call a "one-size-fits-all training" (p. 61). Within the train-the-trainer model, the time constraints associated with the presentation of one or two workshops and limited follow-up further affects the usefulness of the training because it does not allow for the ongoing support necessary for successful implementation of a change initiative. Consequently, teachers operate at a superficial or surface level, emulating techniques and skills without understanding the change rationale or the underlying techniques (Bussis, Chittenden, & Amarel, 1976). In essence, a higher order in-depth application of the concepts and skills is not learned through the training but is expected to develop through subsequent experience. It is possible, therefore, that the school-based trainers are not prepared to deliver the training to fellow staff members or that they are unable to understand the needs of their team because they do not have a deep understanding of the material themselves.

Action research projects are a flexible form of professional development that examines a particular issue identified within a school or classroom and modifies strategies according to needs observed. Stiles and Loucks-Horsley (1998) propose that it encourages teachers to reflect on their teaching practice and on their students' learning. Tomlinson (1995) summarizes action research as important in teachers' professional development because teachers "grow naturally as professionals by looking at a classroom situation, developing a practice response, trying out the practice, observing what happens, and revising the practice as necessary" (p. 470). Action research, with its focus on problem-solving and sharing outcomes with colleagues, takes what is a seemingly natural or intuitive process and makes it more explicit and systematic.

Some of these action research professional development activities are simple discrete events or activities, such as a study group or any other group of people who work together on a particular function or purpose. Other activities are more complicated because they are ongoing and change as the context changes. In all cases, however, Creswell (1998) considers action research to be effective because it provides empirical data based on behavioural observations from on-the-ground research of real learning situations. Smith and Doyle (2007) similarly position action research as an inquiry process that is oriented towards improving direct teaching practices. Problems, however, can arise if teacher participants perceive a power differential between the action researcher and other team members or when they feel that they are the objects of research and the research is being done to them rather than being done by them.

One of the more complex models of professional development is that of the learning community, which has, in recent years, become the model of choice for many school boards in Canada (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001) and is also in vogue in the United States (DuFour, 2004). The newness and complexity of this model make it somewhat difficult to define clearly, although some elements of the learning community are commonly agreed upon. In brief, a learning community is a group of individuals engaged actively in learning from one another following some semblance of these characteristics: collaborative mindset, focus on learning, focus on results, orientation toward action, collective inquiry, timely relevant information, and commitment to continuous improvement (Hulley & Dier, 2005, p. 107).

Learning Community Approach

The learning community model assumes that teachers learn best by taking charge of their own learning. The literature provides numerous formats that teachers can use to support their learning, and Stiles and Loucks-Horsley (1998, p. 49) suggest that all of the strategies and their various combinations offer ways of complementing and expanding learning opportunities beyond those offered through workshops and institutes. It is important to note that these strategies vary in their levels of complexity and in their applicability or utility in different contexts. Today, combinations of all of these strategies for professional development are commonly seen within the learning community.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) argue that the learning community model signifies that professional development policies need to extend beyond providing new resources, information, and skills for teachers. It also involves giving them opportunities to reflect critically on their practice and to create new beliefs about content, knowledge, pedagogy, and learners. This type of professional development places a demand on resources and on teachers' time and effort in an already overburdened schedule. To build teachers' competency, therefore, it is necessary that the time, effort, and scarce resources are expended on high-quality programs that teach with and about effective practices. M. K. Smith (2000, 2009) sees this process as taking place within a school community that contains special people: people who are builders, who are the active centre living a life filled with dialogue and interaction. Builders, M. K. Smith argues, animate community as they express and symbolize relationships within their local networks.

To build knowledge, skills, and understandings, members of the learning community construct knowledge within their particular school context. This construction of knowledge bases the learning community model on a social constructivist view of human development founded on postmodern and critical theory ideologies (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 130). Social constructivism refers to "how students [and teachers] learn to work together to reconstruct their current knowledge and, basically, to learn to be inquirers and build their learning capacity" (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2004, p. 12). Social constructivism, Joyce et al. further suggest, is a means of teaching students to "improve their capacity both to generate knowledge and to work together with their peers to create productive social and intellectual relationships – constructing knowledge in the academic, social, and personal domains simultaneously" (p. 12).

The social constructivist philosophy positions learning as the construction of knowledge where the mind organizes, reviews, revises, and stores information. It is not a passive process of acquiring new ideas, information, and skills, but an active one where the mind reconstructs new material and uses previous knowledge as a basis for creating new ideas within a specific educational context (Joyce et al., 2004). Learners solve real problems through refining questions, designing and investigating issues, gathering and analyzing data, interpreting and making conclusions, and reporting findings (Schneider & Krajcik, 2002, p. 222). Shared meanings and understanding are built as teachers engage in formal and informal conversations and discourse with colleagues and other students. This process produces a collective energy that Joyce, Weil, and Showers (1992) call *synergy*.

Learning in and by a community of teachers who investigate pedagogical questions within a particular setting is a practice of social learning. Printy (2008) describes social learning as a reciprocal process where participation feeds back into the community and influences subsequent participation by its members. She suggests that as teachers interact with one another, they shape each other's educational practice. According to Wenger (1998), as people identify the purpose of their joint work, establish social norms, and understand valued activities, they build a particular community of practice. Printy (p. 190) posits that this focus on practice within a particular social context is the core of the learning community.

The learning community model is built on the premise that teachers' voices will be heard, needs expressed, and ideas shared. Kruse et al. (1995) propose that it operates from the ground up rather than from the top down. In this model, teachers are encouraged to assume leadership roles and to share ideas and questions from their classroom contexts. When this method is supported by providing time to meet within the school day, teachers can participate in authentic learning activities, share their effective practices, and assist one another in the learning process. In this way, teachers and administrators engage in job-embedded learning (Wood & Killian, 1998, p. 52) as they go through their daily activities with colleagues, building upon one another's competencies, supporting one another's learning and professional growth, refining their pedagogy, and helping students learn.

These features rely on the presence of effective collaborative teams. Sergiovanni (2005) suggests that, for collaboration to occur, relational trust, social capital, and community build toward a culture of shared leadership. Because few leaders have all the information, skills, and competence required to complete jobs, they rely on and build on the leadership capacity of other members of the community. In this way, he argues, leadership capacity increases intellectual capital, thereby connecting leadership and learning. In a learning community, this process takes place in a context where power, leadership, and embedded structures exist to serve teaching and learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, pp.138-139). Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) argue that it assumes the inclusion and empowerment of all participants working interdependently in collaborative teams, staff, students, and the larger parent community, through shared leadership and flattened hierarchies (Marks & Seashore Louis, 1999, p. 708; Mitchell & Sackney).

Sergiovanni (2005) argues that, by focusing on the heart (i.e., values, assumptions, beliefs, and hope for schools), leaders generate a shared vision for the school. According to Hord and Sommers (2008), vision and values tie all members of a learning community into valued teaching and learning activities that improve student achievement. Mitchell and Sackney (2001) propose that the vision is what guides members as they seek to improve their capacity and use their skills to enhance the capacity and competency of other colleagues.

Sergiovanni (2005) proposes that, in this process, educators learn from one another's practice and construct new knowledge. Marks and Seashore Louis (1999) suggest that this laser-like focus on the practices of teaching and learning is the "core technology of schools" (p. 708). They argue that the collaborative process of ongoing inquiry, learning, and knowledge construction depends on teachers' collective influence as they function as empowered professionals. The tight focus on practice, therefore, implies that the learning community model will improve teaching and learning. For example, Mitchell and Sackney (2000, p. 138) contend that profound improvement in teaching and learning happens through a deep internal search for meaning, relevance, and connection, which is an expression of members' personal, interpersonal, and leadership capacities as an interconnected life force.

The pedagogical benefits for implementing the learning community model of professional development are clear in the literature; however, there exists a gap between the espoused theory and the actual experience of implementing the learning community. The gap occurs in the translation of the learning community model into practice. An analysis of this gap shows some of the limits to the model. For example, the intense nature of the school improvement process, Schlechty (2001) argues, is difficult for most teachers. Sarason (1996) presents Wasley, Hampel, and Clark's (1995) argument who agree that it is easier to maintain the status quo than to examine one's teaching pedagogy and to face the challenge of altering one's teaching practices (p. 350). Other problems that educators encounter during change include the tendency of agreeing quickly on a particular issue rather than looking for the ideal solution, or the occurrence of conflicts among members who cannot decide who has the authority to make the final decisions in the change process (Garmston, 2004). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) propose that professional development is often mandated through school board policies. This context, according to Pancucci (2008b), can cause members to feel co-opted into collaborating and working as a learning community, which leads to resistance or subversion. Wiggins and Damore (2006) argue that this result occurs especially when teachers view their context as one of survival rather than collegiality. Finally, the learning community model could be conservative because of the difficulty of bringing new ideas into an intact group or team that already works well together (Firestone, 1996).

These limitations indicate that the learning community approach is not a guaranteed success. The success of the learning community, according to DuFour (2007), will depend on the commitment, persistence, and collective capacity of its members. Bandura (1997) states that "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action [are] required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Bandura's argument gives a cognitive explanation (i.e., self-efficacy) for why teachers are able to enhance teaching and learning within their particular school context. It also implies that those schools where teachers are not disciplined or do not believe in their ability to make a difference will be less effective at initiating and sustaining collective work.

In spite of these limitations, researchers have found successful learning communities. Mitchell and Sackney (2007, 2009), in their work, have found five principles of engagement that are evident in high-capacity schools. The first of these is a deep respect, where all members of the community, including students, parents, and staff, are respected. The focus is on the value of all members. A deep respect validates the participation of all members as having ideas to share and an important role to play. The second principle, collective responsibility, is evident as all members of the school community assume responsibility for all students, not only those in their own classrooms (p. 13). Appreciation of diversity, the third principle, celebrates difference as a means to move beyond comfort zones and to stretch and enhance practices because of the new ideas brought by others (p. 14). A problem-solving orientation, which is the fourth principle, facilitates asking probing questions about data and feedback to inform and transform teachers' practices (p. 14). The fifth principle, positive role modelling, acknowledges that members are continually acting as models and that they need to be aware of what kind of model they are in the moment. By focussing on their current actions, teachers can act as positive role models for others.

The learning community, as a popular model for professional development, is quickly becoming an aerosol word sprayed everywhere within the literature and within all levels of the organization. DuFour (2004) and DuFour, DuFour, Lopez, and Muhammad (2006) suggest that, because of this universal usage, the term is in danger of losing its meaning. Consequently, I created a definition that incorporated my experiences with the research literature: *A learning community is a group of teachers who share personal capacities comprised of professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies and a group that actively learns together to improve teaching and student learning.* In this definition, the focus is on the people most directly and closely involved in the work of learning communities: the teachers.

This definition also affirms the bottom-up character of the model. Historically, implementation of change has been top down in nature (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), with most learning models, including the learning community, following this trend. In the context of a learning community, where it is expected that learning in the organization will be energized from the bottom up, this trend produces an inherent contradiction, which creates tension within schools. Consequently, teachers may resist the change, thinking, "This too shall pass" (DuFour, 2004, p. 6). Regardless of the tensions created by the imposition in a top-down manner of a bottom-up learning model, however, successes do occur. In most cases, the successes can be attributed to teachers' construction of their personal capacity and to the inherent competencies that enhance the abilities, practices, and learning of all members of the learning community (Pancucci, 2008a).

Teacher Competencies

Mitchell and Sackney (2000, p. 12) identify within a community of learners three levels of capacity: personal capacities that are located within individual teachers, interpersonal capacities that are located within groups of teachers, and organizational capacities that are located at the system or school level. However, the three types of capacities can also be related to individual teachers, where each capacity is located and developed within each member of the learning community. Capacity-building, then, becomes a process of individual teacher development rather than one of building collective capabilities or organizational systems. From this perspective, personal capacity refers to teachers' professional competency, that is, the ability to construct and improve instructional practice; interpersonal competency refers to individuals' ability to influence and learn from colleagues' practice; and organizational competency refers to individuals' ability to use and create classroom, division, and school structures to promote ongoing reflection, action, and revision of pedagogy. This section will review the literature related to these three broad categories of competency.

Professional Competency

Van Horn (2006) states that teachers are "continually imagining and reimagining ourselves as professionals" (p. 58). She argues that teachers have an abundance of experiential knowledge and that they search for additional understandings as they work towards improving teaching, addressing individual students' needs, and resolving context-specific issues. Her comment reflects the view that teachers' competencies exist in abundance and that professionals seek to enhance their abilities through additional professional experiences. As educators build their professional competency, they begin to answer questions like the one posed by Comber and Nichols (2004): "How do teachers assemble what they understand as 'good practice' and what are the impacts of such practices on children who are in the educational game?" (p. 47). By working on answers to this question through daily reflective practice, teachers build pedagogic skills.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) suggest that problems of professional practice do not present themselves ready-made, nor are they solved by applying research-based standard theories or techniques, which Schön (1983) calls "technical rationality." Instead, Cochran-Smith and Lytle contend that competent professionals use a knowledge-in-practice perspective where they pose and construct problems from the complex uncertainty of practice situations and that they make sense of these situations by connecting them to previous knowledge and other information (p. 263). By connecting knowledge, a series of isolated lessons can be transformed into a more integrated process, such as, for example, combining improved writing skills with content-area curriculum. Comber and Nichols (2004) recognize this connectedness as a quality of "teaching which makes a difference" (p. 59). The process for achieving such a holistic perspective of teaching and learning is captured by Comber and Nichols in their observation that valuable teaching has

> intellectual quality, connectedness, recognition of difference and supportive classroom environments. Specifically this means: content that is interesting and worthwhile; teachers providing specific information about the contexts and the concepts that are integral to the task; clearly articulated priorities about the focus; verbal exchanges that accomplished specific teaching objectives; close reading of texts; specific feedback about the student performance, product or text; and close teacher monitoring to see how different children are interpreting tasks. (p. 59)

With this method, teachers closely monitor student progress and refine their teaching to tailor lessons to specific learning patterns and outcomes.

The learning community provides spaces for teachers to work and learn together to develop more effective practices. Mitchell (2007) contends that the model is founded on building capacity, which takes a respectful view of both learners and teachers by assuming that all members are competent learners with existing abilities, knowledge, and experiences that guide subsequent learning. Skill or knowledge gaps are not viewed as a problem but as the mystery that causes individuals to grow, to change, and to learn as they explore and solve learning puzzles.

Interpersonal Competency

With the adoption of a learning community, the insular model of teachers teaching with their door shut gives way to a collaborative and generative model where members share and build on the practices of their neighbours. This new model is evident in the following discussion by Višňovská, Cortina, and Cobb (2007):

> Beyond supporting teachers' development while research collaborations took place, professional teaching communities reportedly served as productive sites for

> *ongoing* teacher learning and collaboration, thus nurturing and sustaining generative growth (Franke & Kazemi, 2001a, 2001b). While a systematic design effort of university collaborators was often critical for the initial emergence of professional teaching communities (Putnam & Borko, 2000), several communities persisted and continued learning many years after the researchers withdrew from the site (e.g., Cobb & McClain, 2001; Franke & Kazemi, 2001a). (¶ 11)

This collaborative context values hard work, risk-taking, and growth (Midgley & Wood, 1993) because educators are involved in the difficult work of learning with colleagues for and about school improvement (Bredson & Scribner, 2000; Hord, 1997a; Hulley & Dier, 2005; Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999). With a change from singular teaching to collaborative work, one might ask the question: What skills and knowledge do teachers need to build their own and others' interpersonal competency? How do teachers go about enhancing their interpersonal abilities?

Mentoring is a means by which teachers may achieve the end of enhanced interpersonal abilities. Mentoring promotes teachers' evolution through members' support of one another and commitment to helping one another to develop skills and practices. Novice teachers acquire and strengthen new skills, and mentors may be reinvigorated in their own teaching pedagogy as a result of the mentoring experience (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Bruce and Ross (2008) allude to the interpersonal character of the mentoring relationship: "When a teacher receives positive and constructive feedback from a respected peer, there is even greater potential for enhanced goal setting, motivation to take risks, and implementation of challenging teaching strategies" (p. 348).

Their argument demonstrates that mentoring can improve daily practice and pedagogy if mentors and protégés remain positive, respectful, and productive.

Ongoing reflection on and revision of practice requires a safe and collegial environment to be successful (McLymont & da Costa, 1998). This type of professional practice is based on productive communication. Bruce and Ross (2008, p. 351), for example, argue that, for peer mentoring to be successful, members must engage in specific communication skills, such as using open-ended questions, paraphrasing to check for common understanding, and interjecting helpful probes. Using these productive forms of communication requires a high degree of interpersonal competency.

Competency with interpersonal communication is also an essential aspect of collaborative action research, as teachers observe one another, reflect on their practice, and revise it based on collective plans and observed needs of students (Van Horn, 2006). According to Lambert (2002), in action research projects, teachers collaborate and share effective practices, implement the practices and strategies, observe one another during implementation, and provide feedback. As members reflect on the process and revise their practices, the role of feedback becomes a key issue. For Carr and Kemmis (1986), a critical friend can offer helpful feedback in collaborative relationships where

> the 'outsider' becomes a 'critical friend' helping 'insiders' to act more wisely, prudently and critically in the process of transforming education. The success of the work of such 'critical friends' is to be measured in the extent to which they can help those involved in the educational process to improve their own educational practices, their own understandings, and the situations and institutions in which they work. (p. 161)

Hulley and Dier (2005) offer another strategy to inform collective reflection, which is the timely use of relevant information, such as student outcomes.

To be "in" a learning community positions the educators as a group with boundaries, which, according to Acker (1999), can have both a symbolic and a concrete meaning. That is, groups "on the boundary" (p. 121) may literally stand at, or cross on occasion, the territorial limits within and of a school building. This idea means that teachers may at times be included and at times excluded from particular groups in the community of learners. The decision to include or exclude may be made by the group or the individual, or it may be based on the nature of the task at hand.

To generate a sense of belonging for all members of the learning community requires trusting relationships. Mitchell and Sackney (2000, p. 49) argue that trust is a key factor in bringing profound improvement to a school because, without trust, teachers divert energy towards self-protection rather than towards taking risks. Pancucci (2008b) has also found that for educators to feel comfortable and to participate in meaningful collaborative professional development, they must feel that they can trust their partners to share both their successes and failures in the classroom teaching and learning process. Without trusting relationships, teachers may not feel safe enough to ask important questions that would lead to further professional growth. With trusting relationships, members use their interpersonal skills to build bonds and to share skills and knowledge that push boundaries and move teaching and learning forward in schools.

Organizational Competency

Organizational competency may be viewed as a means for educators to use and develop school structures and processes to build the kind of school in which they want to work. Hopkins (1990, p. 63) believes that teachers should be given the kind of professional development that helps them to create a school that supports teachers' and students' learning. This type of competency gives voice to teachers, who have been somewhat silent in the learning community implementation literature to date. The voice and value of teachers is also a concern for Goodson (1991), who criticizes practices that position teachers as research objects rather than as active participants in research agendas. Although Hopkins and Goodson are addressing different aspects of teacher development, they are both concerned with the place of teachers in the school-building process. If teachers are expected to take a central place in the process of building a school, then they need to develop organizational competency.

Shared and supportive leadership are elements critical to the successful development of organizational competency. This approach to leadership involves the sharing of power. In a flattened power structure, teachers and the school principal are considered to be members of the same team who share ideas to improve school effectiveness (DuFour, 1999). Leithwood and Mascall (2008) use the term *distributed leadership* to describe this approach. They argue that it

> enhances opportunities for the organization to benefit from the capacities of more of its members; it permits members to capitalize on the range of their individual strengths; and it develops among organizational members a fuller appreciation of interdependence and how one's behaviour effects [*sic*] the organization as a whole. (p. 530)

The shared contribution of many educators helps to build structures and processes that promote and enhance teaching and learning. As teachers build their leadership skills, they become more comfortable with and capable of adopting and adapting existing school processes and structures to fit the needs of students and teachers. In this manner, teacher leaders develop their organizational competency for the benefit of the school community.

In a flattened power structure, problems and conflicts can arise when the power of the institutional hierarchy threatens participation and collaboration. As emergent leadership begins to take hold in the hearts and minds of the educators within a school community, the imposition of the hierarchy can defeat initial attempts at professional growth. For example, Pancucci (2008b) found that when a hierarchy was imposed on a newly established learning community, it eroded confidence and trust, threatened participation and collaboration, and led to resistance and at times to subversion of the initiative. In this case, the imposition of structure led to open rebellion and undermined the collaborative nature of the learning community, which defeated the attempts to build organizational competency.

In schools where distributed leadership exists, teachers develop organizational competency as they move into shared leadership roles. Bennis (1989) defines leaders as individuals who express themselves fully, know their strengths and weaknesses, know how to achieve their goals, and can communicate what they need from others to gain support and co-operation. According to Lambert (2003a), this definition of a leader assumes that all individuals are adult learners who have the capacity for leadership. A number of other researchers, such as Coyle (1997) and Wynne (2002), also assume that leadership capacity can be developed as teachers engage in collaborative reflection, share decision-making, engage in teamwork, build community, and share best practices with colleagues.

When leadership is shared among members of the learning community, teachers have the opportunity to both lead and follow. At times, they support staff members and listen when others present ideas about the school vision and goals. At other times, they present ideas that other team members can put into practice within the school. By alternately leading and following, members collectively generate the vision and goals for their school. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) term this type of activity *emergent leadership* where "empowerment is not prescribed to leaders but is inscribed in the hearts and minds of people as they make purposeful decisions about issues that matter" (p. 139).

The diversity of creative ideas that are unleashed through shared vision, goals, and collective leadership cannot emerge when an administrator tells members who is going to do what and how they will do it. Instead, Leithwood and Mascall (2008) argue that influence and control should be widely distributed throughout the school. This context aligns with Miller and Rowan's (2006) conception of organic management:

> a shift away from conventional, hierarchical patterns of bureaucratic control toward what has been referred to as a network pattern of control, that is, a pattern of control in which line employees are actively involved in organizational decision making [and] staff cooperation and collegiality supplant the hierarchy as a means of coordinating work flows and resolving technical difficulties. (pp. 219-220)

Mitchell and Sackney (2009, p. 140) report that, in high-capacity schools, emergent leadership was promoted by administrators who adopted a whole-village school philosophy to extend capacity-building for everyone.

Organizational competency is not just concerned with putting strategies and structures in place that enable the learning community to flourish. It also requires teachers and administrators to develop a systemic perspective to see that their processes are part of a larger system of processes that flow back and forth across all levels. Senge (1990) defines systems thinking as "a discipline for seeing wholes" (p. 68). He adds that it is "a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static 'snapshots.' It is a set of general principles – distilled over [time]" (p. 68); it is "how learning organizations think about their world" (p. 69). That is, systems thinking requires teachers to look at the school as a whole rather than at their own individual classroom setting. By adopting a holistic view, educators will have the ability to see the whole rather than the parts, the ability to look at the strategies and structures in place and to use them to create the schools they want. According to Senge, this understanding of the big picture is

> the conceptual cornerstone that underlies all of the five learning disciplines . . . concerned with a shift of mind from seeing parts to wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future. (p. 69)

Adopting a systemic perspective enables educators to see the interdependence of members and the impact of each person in creating schools they want. They can also see ways to integrate personal, interpersonal, and organizational competencies to learn and to grow as individuals, as groups, and as a school.

Influences on Competency

To build schools that support authentic learning, educators are involved in the difficult work of developing competencies. This process is influenced by a variety of factors: professional learning, social bonds, and the role of the administrator, among others. In this section, the literature reviewed will focus specifically on these influences.

Professional learning is a key strategy for developing teachers' competencies as educators. The literature indicates that both individual and collective learning take place within a learning community. Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008), for example, propose that learning

> rather than being solely individual (as we have taken it to be) is actually also *social.* It happens through experience and practice. In plain terms–people learn from and with others in particular ways. They learn through practice (learning as doing), through meaning (learning as intentional), through community (learning as participating and being with others), and through identity (learning as changing who we are). (p. 227)

They argue that teachers' professional development should be provided through networks of teacher communities where "teachers teach teachers the strategies that have been successful with their own students" (p. 227). Similarly, Sparks (2005) contends that high-quality professional learning takes place in "successful professional learning communities [that] clearly demonstrate what is possible when teachers learn and collaborate within their schools as part of their daily work" (p. 2). He suggests that learning communities extend Perkins's (2004) *knowledge arts* of creating knowledge, communicating knowledge, organizing knowledge, and acting on knowledge. In practical terms, teachers "create knowledge about teaching and learning, communicate it to one another, organize it within themselves and for others to make it more meaningful and accessible, and act on that knowledge for the purpose of improving student learning" (Sparks, p. 2). Through knowledge sharing and collaborating, teachers build one another's competency as educators.

Individual learning also has a place within the collective environment of a learning community. DuFour and Eaker (1998) and Hord and Sommers (2008) both propose that a professional learning community is one where staff learning occurs continuously and where teachers are respected and recognized for their individual experiences, expertise, and learning profiles. Dinham, Aubusson, and Brady (2009) argue that action learning where teachers work and learn together, has many advantages like "inclusiveness, flexibility, respect for the knowledge and experience of participants, involvement, collegiality, empowerment, and ownership" (¶ 13), which supports the idea that individuals have a unique package of expertise and skills that they can contribute to their learning community.

Collaboration and collective learning flourish within a culture that is focused on learning. DuFour (1998) explains the role that culture or context plays in a learning community:

> Any consultant or facilitator who has attempted to help a school launch some aspect of school improvement has observed the phenomenon of school context at work. Two schools initiate major professional growth programs designed to improve conditions for teaching and learning. The consultant, content and presentation strategies are identical, but the faculty in one school embraces the concept and works to implement it while the teachers in the other respond with total indifference.

> These different reactions can only be attributed to the context or culture of the schools themselves. It is becoming increasingly clear that in the right school context, even flawed staff development activities (such as the much maligned single-session workshop) can have a positive impact. (p. 25)

DuFour argues that, in schools with a culture focused on learning, professional development initiatives and change take place because teachers are interested and open to new ideas and because they develop competencies by adopting the new ideas into pedagogical practices.

Culture is also instrumental in the formation of the second major influence on the development of teachers' competencies: the character of the social bonds in a school. Lavié (2006) argues that teacher collaboration is "embedded in cultural forms that blur the boundaries between personal and professional and stimulate interdependency and collective responsibility" (p. 773). By creating collaborative bonds, he says, teachers work to enhance teaching competency and student learning. Furthermore, a culture with strong social bonds and collegiality is likely to move educators forward in school improvement initiatives. For example, McLymont and da Costa (1998) have found that collegiality is necessary in developing competency through activities like peer coaching where members require a "comfortable trust building situation" (p. 26) to participate and learn freely. As one participant in their study noted, "I did not know that . . . I could think so quickly on the spot, but the relaxing atmosphere that as a coach . . . you created helped me to respond very freely and positively" (p. 27). They describe the peer coaching process this way:

> It is an interactive social process by which ideas, knowledge, notions, problems,

> and intent are explored through the reciprocity in roles and genres in a non-judgemental atmosphere. It is concerned with understanding as the questions generated in a collaborative setting probe or mediate for clarification, elaboration and intentionality. It forces one to listen as one acknowledges, empathises, synthesizes, summarises, and restates what was understood from the message conveyed. (p. 25)

McLymont and da Costa describe the context for teachers' learning process as needing to be both safe and collaborative. Elmore (2002) also sees the need for strong social connections to enhance teacher development. He suggests that "teachers learn through social interaction around problems of practice and that the enhancement of teacher learning requires support for collegial interaction where teachers can work on new practices" (p. 17). McLaughlin (1993) found support for this argument among high school teachers:

> The department was the professional community of greatest significance to teachers' norms of practice, conceptions of task, attitudes toward teaching and students. Collegial departments tended to have norms of innovation and learning; teachers in these departments were enthusiastic, committed to teaching *all* students, and worked together to devise strategies to help all students succeed. By contrast, teachers in less collaborative settings were less likely to innovate, had lower expectations for students, and reported less support for professional learning. (p. 92)

Her results show that teachers who form close bonds with colleagues find support in their efforts to develop competency.

A third important influence on development of teachers' competency is the role that administrators play in schools. Hodges (1996) argues that not only is a context of collegiality important but that administration plays a key role. She states, "The *context* for staff development should be one of ongoing administrative and cultural support characterized by norms of collegiality, experimentation, and reflection on practice" (p. 247). Sparks (2005) describes the role of leaders in schools this way:

> The quality of teaching, learning, and relationships in professional learning communities depends on the quality of leadership provided by principals and teachers. Leaders matter because they have the authority to shape conversations–what is talked about and how it is talked about . . . that lead to essential professional learning. Leaders shape conversations by persistently offering their values, intentions, and beliefs to others and by expressing themselves in clear declarative sentences. Leaders also matter because they, along with others, shape a school or school system's structure and culture in ways that promote learning, collaboration, and environments in which all members of the community feel cared for and respected. (p. 2)

His description positions leaders as important catalysts in creating and sustaining learning communities; it also extends the concept of leaders beyond the school administrators to include teachers. This leader-filled environment promotes professional learning and the development of teacher competency as members change and grow together within the learning community. For Sparks, "profound change in schools" begins with significant change in leaders that "radiates out to others and into the system" (p. 2). As administrators provide opportunities for members to grow and enhance their own leadership abilities, they also build each other's skills and competencies. Lavié (2006) proposes that "school effectiveness and improvement discourse depict teacher collaboration as a product of cultural management led by the school's principal" (p. 773).

These descriptions position administrators as instructional leaders. From this perspective, Blase and Blase (2004) base principals' leadership on the following beliefs:

> We are all *learners*; thus, school is a "community of learners," including faculty, staff, students, parents, and administrators.
>
> We are all *lifelong* learners; thus, our goal is to prepare students for lifelong learning by teaching them (helping them learn) how to learn.
>
> We are all *coaches*; thus, we learn from each other and help others learn.
>
> We are all *colleagues* and *collaborators*.
>
> We *openly discuss* our views and work toward consensus. This includes dialogue about curriculum, instruction, and program administration vis-à-vis students, teachers, administrators, supervisors, and parents. Such dialogue spans philosophy, belief, literature, and research. (p.65)

McLymont and da Costa (1998) provide an example of instructional leadership: "The Principal's active involvement, sharing his professional knowledge and even taking a teacher's class at times to allow the teacher to observe another teacher's class as part of the coaching process fostered the success of the project" (p. 14). In this example, the administrator used instructional leadership strategies to plan teacher professional development where members built one another's abilities through observation of each other and application of effective practices. In short, the role of the administrator as instructional leader is centrally concerned with setting a positive tone conducive to the introduction of new professional ideas and teacher receptivity to the message.

Administrators who share power and distribute leadership employ a participative style of leadership. According to Somech and Wenderow (2006) the authors Cannon-Bowers, Tannenbaum, Salas, and Volpe (1995), suggest that participative leadership "may be one means of enhancing both information exchange and the development of competencies" (p. 749). This quotation supports the possibility that a principal who shares power and develops teacher leaders through instructional leadership also develops teacher competency. Forbes (2004) states that there are "various strands of literature around the notion of leadership as building capacity among a wider group of people" (¶ 1), where "leadership is no longer purely an individual matter, but is spread throughout an organization with leadership roles and functions being performed by various people who do not necessarily hold formal leadership positions" (¶ 1). This description of leadership as a shared process suggests that members in the community demonstrate leadership roles or functions that develop teachers' competencies. Lambert (2003a) supports this argument:

> Leadership is about learning together toward a shared purpose or aim. Learning and leading are deeply intertwined, . . . Indeed, leadership can be understood as reciprocal, purposeful learning in a community. (p. 2)

Thus, by sharing power and leadership, administrators promote learning in community.

Chapter Summary

This literature review was conducted to examine how teachers grow and learn as professionals and how teachers function as competent professionals within a learning community. It was concerned first with professional development as a general concern, with a specific focus on the learning community approach. Second, it explored the development of teachers' professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies. Finally, it described some of the many influences on competency development for teachers. This review was situated within the learning community philosophy, which assumes that teachers work interdependently and collaboratively to solve practice problems and develop new working solutions that enhance teaching and learning.

To build capacity among educators, the learning community model provides teachers with the spaces where they can safely work and learn together to build upon existing knowledge, ability, and experiences and to create new solutions to problems arising in practice. In this way, educators develop their professional competencies. Within a learning community, teachers participate in both individual and collective learning. Not only do they learn continually, but they are also respected for their experience, expertise, and learning profiles. Teacher learning and practice are embedded in cultures where personal and professional relationships are merged to create interdependency and collective responsibility among members. Administrators influence this process as they shape conversations, structures, and culture.

A growing body of literature dedicated to the learning community has successfully described its role as a professional development model and its benefits for student learning and school improvement. However, a significant gap exists in the translation of this model into practice. This gap can be attributed to the lack of knowledge of how teachers develop professional competencies and function as competent professionals within a learning community. This question was the focus of the study reported in this document. The methodology used to conduct this line of research is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken to explore teachers' capacities that inform and sustain a learning community within an elementary school context. My primary research question is the following: How do teachers develop professional competencies and function as competent professionals within a learning community? The answers are expected to help researchers and teachers understand the role of teacher capacity in the implementation and ongoing success of the learning community as a professional development model. This chapter provides an outline of the qualitative research in general and the application of the selected methods. I begin with a general overview of epistemological foundations and qualitative research traditions. Next, I describe the specific design and philosophy underlying the study. Finally, I describe the methodological steps to this research study.

Epistemological Foundation

Philosophically the study is based on a social constructivist theory of knowledge creation and acquisition. According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998), "epistemology is the branch of philosophy that investigates the basis of knowledge claims or the grounding of knowledge" (p. 32). The epistemological grounding for any research inquiry affects how a researcher understands and justifies what constitutes knowledge. It also affects the choices made around value systems, participants, methodologies, and the underlying cognitive and theoretical frameworks. The social constructivist approach integrates ethical, scientific, sociological, and philosophical decision-making with personal and intellectual self-awareness and self-reflection (Bentz & Shapiro). This process of inquiry, growth, and development can be observed, for example, in the close interactions between researchers and participants (Creswell, 1998).

I have chosen social constructivism as the epistemological grounding for my study because, as individuals, teachers experience the world in various ways, have varied life experiences, and change their knowledge base over time (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Social construction of knowledge deals precisely with the multiple perspectives emerging from such diverse experiences and social interactions. From this perspective, understanding teaching and learning processes means aligning the social processes and physical contexts involved in the presentation and construction of knowledge with the varied actions that are based upon different constructions. As an example, the construction of a learning community will vary depending on the context and the various understandings, meanings, culture, and visions for different schools (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998). Social constructivism implies the presence of a culturally diverse group of individuals whose individual capacities combine with the school context to affect how a viable learning community will form, how meaning and knowledge are constructed, and how student achievement and success are affected through these efforts. It is therefore important to value and hear all the voices within this discourse and knowledge-constructing environment.

Qualitative Research Traditions

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) describe qualitative research as studies that emphasize data gathering for naturally occurring phenomena where most data units are words and where a variety of research methods are employed to gain a deeper understanding of the chosen phenomena (p. 26). In addition, qualitative inquiry occurs with researchers amassing data through interacting with participants in their natural settings and describing and analyzing individuals' beliefs, perceptions, and collective social actions so as to interpret phenomena in relation to the meanings participants assign to them (McMillan & Schumacher).

In this study, I used qualitative research methods to observe teachers in their school contexts, to acquire textual data, and to gain insight into the impact of their capacities on the learning community model of professional competence and professional development. Qualitative data were appropriate for this study because they allowed me to focus on contextual meaning where multiple realities were interpreted by the individuals in a particular social setting and from their own personal histories (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The key philosophical assumption was that individuals constructed their meanings and reality as they interacted in their social world and that qualitative methods were helpful for uncovering these meanings and constructions.

Case study research design was the form of qualitative research method used in this study. Brown (2008) has found that case study is an appropriate choice in qualitative research that attempts to answer questions about how certain phenomena take place in a specific context. Merriam (1998, p. 19) indicates that case studies are used to obtain in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved, with the interest being on the process rather than on outcomes, on the context rather than on selected variables, and on discovery rather than confirmation. Merriam (2009) further suggests that "anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon" (p. 51). Similarly, Yin (2003, p. 72) defines a case study as one that examines events within their real-life context. For Brown (p. 2), the experience of the case study process is an interpretation and sense-making of the phenomenon or case under study. In my study, I looked closely at what participants held important in their learning community, within what context their professional development took place and flourished, and what moved their teaching competencies forward through their learning processes. Consequently, the case study was an appropriate design choice. The case was defined as a school operating as a learning community, and the case problem was defined as the impact of teachers' capacities on learning community implementation, which had emerged as an unknown element in my work with learning community implementation initiatives.

Merriam (1988) states that once the research problem is identified, "the unit of analysis can be defined" (p. 44). The unit of analysis, or the case, can be an event, a program, or a person; it is that which the researcher will discuss at the end of the case study (Patton, 1980). Yin (1984, 2003) suggests that this decision is influenced by the researcher's theoretical, philosophical, or disciplinary orientation and research question. Defining the unit for analysis can be visualized as a bounded system limited in time and space for a specific period (Merriam). For my study, the unit of analysis was the individual teachers who were active members of a learning community. The study was bounded by time and place (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). I spent a 2- to 3-month period in the case setting, and I used multiple sources of information to determine the role teachers' capacities and competencies played within the learning community.

The case was an established learning community within Ontario schools. I chose to investigate individual teachers who were members of a viable learning community at two different school sites. Initially, I planned to present results for each individual participant and for each school site independently. As the data were recorded using the single-case design it became increasingly apparent that the participants and their school contexts were alike and the data would be best served by a seamless weaving of the teachers and the two school sites. Thus the single-case design evolved into a cross-case design where shared conceptual categories and themes arose from data analysis and theory-generation phases across the two sites.

Yin (2003) describes a participant-observation model as involving the researcher in the case so that he or she can participate in the events and assume a variety of roles. In this way, the investigator can perceive reality from the viewpoint of an insider rather than an outsider to the case (Yin, pp. 93-94). I followed a participant-observer method because it allowed for in-depth information to be gathered about the case, which provided for thick descriptions. This design feature, which provided a detailed, in-depth picture of school members' actions, interactions, and responses, was, as Brown (2008) puts it, "a powerful means to understand institutions . . . as socially constructed organizations" (p. 2).

Site and Participant Selection

A purposeful sampling strategy was used in this study (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling provided a case rich in information and provided in-depth understanding about the effect of teacher capacity and competency-building in the schools' learning community. A small group was desirable to manage the data collection and interviewing processes. Consequently, the study focused specifically on 19 individuals across two schools. The school sites selected for the case study were two elementary Ontario schools, one from the public board and one from the Catholic board that had a predominantly middle-class student population. Site selection was based on reputation and survey data among a few identified principals. Reputational sampling was conducted by asking a research officer or other informed board personnel to recommend several schools based on their reputation as a declared viable learning community. Once three to five schools were identified, a *Learning Community Survey* (Mitchell, Sackney, & Walker, 2004) was administered to the principals of these schools. This instrument was selected because it was found to be an excellent sorting tool for determining the existence of an established learning community (Sackney, Walker, & Mitchell, 2004).

By distributing the *Learning Community Survey* to elementary school administrators, I was able to identify schools that already demonstrated the characteristics of an effective learning community. The sampling was purposeful (Creswell, 1998) in that I selected school boards with a history of implementing the learning community model of professional development, and I selected schools that had the characteristics of viable learning communities.

Across the two schools there were differences in how members came to participate in the research study. At the Catholic school, a few volunteers were shoulder-tapped by their principal and they then agreed to participate. Upon entering the site as participant-observer, I solicited other volunteers for a total of 6 teachers and 2 administrators. At the public school, I initially solicited volunteers, and others were later encouraged to participate by their principal and colleagues, for a total of 9 teachers and 2 administrators. Hence, there were 19 participants involved in the study.

Data Collection

The data collection instruments included interviews, observations, checklists, field logs, research journals, and document analyses. Interviews are used in case study research to obtain demographic and personal data from participants, observations are used to witness the activities and responses of participants within their context, and logs, journals, and documents are used as written records of the lives of the participants (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Patton, 2002). This mix of data sources facilitates the researcher's ability to respond appropriately to situations, to new ideas about the subject, and to the worldview of the participants (Merriam, 1988).

From my exploration of relevant literature and personal experiences within an emerging learning community setting, I designed a set of interview questions for the first set of interviews (Appendix A). It was my premise that by asking questions in a semistructured interview format, I would obtain rich data that would help me to uncover those teacher capacities that informed and sustained the learning community process and what those capacities looked like in the school setting. The questions and topics evolved during the interviews based on the responses of the participants and the direction of the conversations. This allowed for a fluid and dynamic interaction as situations evolved (Merriam, 1988). Interviews were held twice during the study, initially in the first two weeks in November of 2006 and finally in the last two weeks of January 2007. Questions for the culminating interview were developed toward the end of the study to reflect the emergent themes and issues arising from ongoing data analysis. In the time period between the two interviews, informal conversations and observations took place.

I observed selected school teachers in their various daily activities within each school. Over a 3-month period (November 2006 through January 2007), I watched staff during the school day through all phases of school life (e.g., staff meetings, division meetings, classroom teaching, team teaching, community presentations, assemblies). By observing participants in their natural work setting, I observed how they demonstrated their abilities and competencies in their attempts to improve teaching and learning in the school. I maintained detailed field log notes of these observations, and I inspected the data regularly to reveal recurring themes or dominant matters that arose. I developed an observation checklist to guide my observation of behaviours and activities that took place (Appendix B). The checklist served as a code to record instances of specific behaviours, to remind me of key characteristics of learning community schools, and to keep the teachers' capacities at the forefront of my observations (Merriam, 1988). During this time, I used the information from the observations to guide my informal conversations with participants. I recorded these conversations in a research journal as appropriate.

I adopted the stance of participant-observer where my activities as an observer were known to the members and were "more or less publicly sponsored by [the] people in the situation [being] studied" (Junker, 1960, p. 37). For the most part I was an observer in the classrooms and during school meetings although some participants occasionally asked me to assist them during lessons. My participation in the group was always secondary to my role of researcher and observer who worked to record as many details as possible of participants' lives during classroom, meeting, and unstructured times. I achieved a balance between observing and participating by keeping at the forefront of my thoughts the relevant task at hand, which was to understand how teachers developed their competencies and acted as competent professionals in the learning community setting. With this thought foremost in my mind, I tried to remain as objective as possible, and to observe and record as many details as possible to capture the essence of these teachers' lives. Consequently I was able to negotiate any tension arising from classroom participation.

The data collection process was an intensive one with several types of material being collected. In the first two weeks and last two weeks of the study, semistructured interviews yielded a total of 38 verbatim transcripts. During the study, I solicited relevant documents like the school improvement plans, and teachers and administrators voluntarily provided other materials, such as lesson plans, literature, meeting agendas, handouts, data rubrics, planning materials, and other similar documents. I generated numerous pages of participant-observation data in field logs, observation checklists, and ongoing analyses in research journals. This wide array of data enabled me to refer back and forth between the various types of data collected in order to corroborate trends and patterns noted in one type of data. According to Yin (1989), for example, the most important use of documents is to augment and corroborate evidence from other sources, and that was the role they played in this study.

Data Analysis

I used an inductive approach to data analysis, which enabled me to treat human activities and social actions as text that describes layers of meaning. Under this interpretative orientation, I organized and reduced data to identify patterns of meaning, action, or human activity (Berg, 2001, p. 239), which helped me to uncover or capture the *telos* (essence) of my observations as I interpreted the text. In this manner, I discovered the practical understandings of actions and meanings. Initially I analyzed the data with the goal of first describing each teacher and each school site individually followed by a cross-case thematic analysis. According to Creswell (1998), this is often how case studies proceed:

> When multiple cases are chosen, a typical format is to first provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a **within-case analysis**, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a **cross-case analysis**, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case. (p. 63)

Similarly, Patton (2002) believes that when "there are several cases to be compared and contrasted, an inductive approach begins by constructing individual cases. . . . Once that is done, cross-case analysis can begin in search of patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences" (p. 57). However, as the within-case analyses proceeded, the similarities across the teachers and the schools were so striking that a presentation of the cases as separate and distinct entities became redundant and pedantic. Consequently, within-case reporting was limited to a snapshot description of each teacher participant and school setting and the bulk of the reporting drew upon the cross-case analyses.

Qualitative data analysis strategies can have diverse approaches that overlap with one another. To facilitate my understanding of the data, I used a set of analytic activities. Data were collected and made into text (e.g., interview transcripts, field log notes, observation checklists, etc.). From this textual data, descriptive codes were inductively identified in the data and assigned to transcripts or note sets. These codes were then transformed into category labels, and data units were sorted by these categories by identifying similar word phrases, relationships, patterns, commonalities, or disparities.

The sorted materials were subsequently examined to find meaningful processes and patterns in order to reveal some major themes that could lead to the creation of a small set of generalizations (Berg, 2001, p. 240). These analytic activities evolved as I responded to and interacted with participants in the study. In the remainder of this section, I explain the analytic activities more fully in the order in which they occurred.

Phase One: Descriptive Data Analysis

In the first phase of data analysis, there was a large amount of information to be reviewed. Because the entry into the study was based on Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) framework for learning communities, I laid the interview and observational data onto a data matrix comprised of their categories of personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacity. Data for the personal category were selected if they described the capacities or abilities within individual teachers. Data for the interpersonal category described characteristics that enabled teachers to work with others or characteristics that were held by groups of teachers. Data for the organizational category described characteristics that helped teachers to work within the school's system structures and processes. Data that did not fit this matrix were placed in a holding file until new categories were available to explain these data units. Mapping the data units onto the preexisting categories enabled me to describe what happened at each of the selected schools and to conduct within-case and within-participant analysis to determine what capacities and competencies were available and observable in the two schools.

Phase Two: Categorical Data Analysis

The second phase of data analysis was undertaken to accommodate the unsorted data and to understand what was influencing and developing the teachers' capacities and competencies. Data were first sorted into whether influences were internal (endogenous) or external (exogenous). I selected endogenous data by searching for inherent influences such as what teachers were observed to do in practice. I selected exogenous data by searching for outside influences that either helped or hindered them. The data within each category were then examined for commonalities and differences and sorted into subcategories within each large set of influences. The endogenous influences were subcategorized as collaboration, educational decision making, goal clarity or focus, and instructional leadership. The exogenous influences were subcategorized as bonds/ cohesion, professional development, resistance, the role of the school principal/VP, and structures. Again, data that did not fit into these categories were placed in an unlabelled category to await further analysis.

In Phase Two, the data were analyzed to move beyond the preexisting learning community categories and to move the results from a descriptive to a categorical level. Phase Two allowed me to do cross-case and cross-participant analysis to determine how teacher capacities emerged within the learning community and what influences had an impact on the expression and development of teacher competencies.

Phase Three: Thematic Data Analysis

In the final phase of data analysis, new categories were created to generate large explanatory themes. In this phase, I asked what made these teachers different from most teachers at other schools, and I searched for data units that would answer this question. Upon capturing the data, I examined them for commonalities and differences and, through this process, I sorted data into three broad themes: identification as professionals, investment in others, and affiliation with the institution. These three themes yielded a theoretical explanation for who are the professionals in a learning community.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

My professional experiences provided a unique background from which I conducted this study. I have worked as an elementary school teacher for over 16 years in both the public and Catholic systems. During these years, I participated in professional development and leadership opportunities as an educator, designate teacher, lead teacher (primary division and literacy), and member of a local school learning community. I also completed two principals' qualification courses. I was directly involved in the implementation process of learning communities in several school. I have held a variety of teaching assignments: primary classroom teacher (grades 2, 2/3, and 3), Learning Resource teacher (junior kindergarten (JK) to grade 5) in both the English and French immersion streams, core French teacher (grades 2, 4 to 8), vocal music instructor (JK to grade 8), physical education teacher for kindergarten students, and Special Assignment teacher specialist for literacy and numeracy (grades 1 to 3). I have also acted as a designate teacher or principal's assistant for over 14 years completing numerous administrative tasks. Finally, I have served as a member of my school's Directions team, responsible for the implementation of the learning community model of professional development and school improvement planning. In this role, I participated in formal facilitation training and I worked with my team to lead the staff in professional learning community training days and implementation activities. This professional background provided me with hands-on experiences in the initial, ongoing, and sustaining implementation processes for the learning community model, which gave me a strong foundation to understand the school contexts within which this study was conducted.

The doctoral research study involved a 3-month period of time for observation. This amount of time was adequate for teacher observations during critical school improvement planning times (November and January). The investigation focused specifically on teachers and did not address the voices of the students, the parents, and the community, because I wanted to maintain a tight focus on the teachers who are doing the actual work of change and implementation of a complex professional development model. By focusing my lens specifically on the teachers, I slanted the study towards their influence on learning community formation. However, the complex process for implementing any change initiative is affected by many individuals who play a part in the process. Consequently, I acknowledge that my bias towards the role of teachers' capacities meant that I was unable to explore in detail the role of the administrator, school culture, parents, community, and students.

I have had previous experience in several schools where successful implementation of the learning community professional development model has taken place. As a result, I have witnessed the benefits of this process, and I am a supporter of the model. I acknowledge that the model has its limitations, and I have tried to identify these limits in the literature review and to present them in the data analysis and findings. It is necessary to present both sides of an argument and to identify where the gaps in a process or model may exist.

Importance of the Study

The literature is filled with descriptions of the benefits of the learning community model of professional development (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lambert, 2003b; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), but few researchers discuss the obstacles and barriers to success. In my professional practice, I have found that different school cultures and administration styles shape implementation differently. In the autocratic imposition model, I observed a great deal of resistance, and yet success was attained because of teachers' commitment to and belief in doing what was best for students. In the collaborative implementation model, I observed little resistance, but I noted that success was obtained despite the presence of a volatile and negative parent culture. These two experiences suggested to me that, although multiple factors influence learning community implementation in elementary schools, it was important to understand the role of teacher competencies in order to support successful implementation.

By studying an established learning community I can observe how teachers' capacities informed the implementation process for this professional development model. By describing their capacities in the school setting, I may be able to make Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) framework for learning communities more accessible to people at the school level. In this way, I am linking the theory to school practice and working to create a framework for learning community implementation. It is possible that, by identifying teacher capacities or competencies that assist or hinder the learning community process, I may be able to link practical observations to professional development opportunities that are tailored to the needs of teachers at particular schools.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the ethical guidelines for research with human participants as set out by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (see Appendix C). Participants were asked to complete a consent form, with the understanding that members were free to decline participation in any part of the study. It was further understood that they could remove themselves from the study at any point. At the beginning of the study, I fully informed participants about the purposes of the study and the requirements for participation in terms of time commitment and my role as a participant-observer.

Formal permission to conduct research from the school boards and from the school principals was obtained through each board's formal research application process. Both school boards required presentation of a brief research proposal to their review committees. Once approval was obtained, I followed ethical processes as I observed, documented, and interviewed staff in their schools.

In order to protect the identity of participants and the school boards participating in the study, schools were identified by colours, and teachers were assigned a colour and number designation to assist with data analysis. No other identifying marks or names were used in the study, including the names of the schools or school boards. The participants and the schools were provided with a pseudonym in the text. The lists of participant names and their corresponding colours, numbers, and pseudonyms were locked in my home office.

In order to respect teachers and administrators and to minimize the amount of time required for participation, I limited their involvement to a maximum of 3 to 5 hours for interviews and survey completion. It was important not to burden participants unduly, because their roles as teachers and administrators are already demanding and I did not want to affect their teaching time.

Data were verified by providing e-mail transcript copies to participants for input and for review. Findings were verified by distributing a written summary feedback sheet that listed the major findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Specifically, participants were asked to confirm or revise the data they had personally shared and to comment on and recommend changes to the summary of findings. Upon verification by participants, a copy of the revised summary feedback was sent by e-mail to the Research Officers of the boards and to the school principals.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three presents how the study was designed and the methodology employed. The inquiry is philosophically grounded in social constructivist theory because teachers acquire and construct new knowledge through their social interactions with colleagues. Social construction of knowledge is an appropriate theoretical grounding because it accounts for the multiple perspectives emerging from educators' varied experiences and social interactions involved in teaching and learning processes. Qualitative research methods were employed because they enabled an exploration of individuals in their natural environments and the meanings individuals bring to the phenomena they experience. This approach facilitates an interpretive theory-building approach with a wide range of interconnected methods to analyze the textual data and to gain insight into the impact of teachers' capacities on the learning community model of professional development.

CHAPTER FOUR: DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

The purpose of this case study was to explore the influences of teacher competencies on the development of learning communities. The investigation focused on participants' personal capacity as expressed through professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies. Professional competency included any activities involved in enhancing professional practice. Interpersonal competency referred to actions that built effective work practices with colleagues. Organizational competency related to involvement in any structures that facilitated learning and professional improvement.

The expression of teachers' knowledge, skills, and abilities, which emerged within a social school context, was determined using descriptive analysis techniques. As participants reflected on their experiences within the learning community, they described their contributions, their connections, and their interactions within a school structure. In order to understand the impact of teachers' personal capacity and competencies, my analysis required a disciplined teasing apart of the data to reveal the patterns of meaning. The subjective meanings of personal capacity and teacher competency patterns were determined through the building up of meaningful categories to explain the data.

Chapter Four presents the context in which teachers' personal capacity and competencies unfolded. In this chapter the results of interviews, observations, gathered documents, and my participation in the host schools are presented. The contents of the chapter consist of two sections: (a) case contexts and (b) phase one: expressions of teacher personal capacity and competencies.

Case Contexts

Describing the school contexts provides a picture of two schools that were similar in some ways and yet distinct in others. Both schools were classified socioeconomically as predominantly middle class, with one school located in a rural setting within a Roman Catholic district school board and assigned the pseudonym Jude School; the other was located in an urban setting within a public district school board and assigned the pseudonym Mountain School. Jude School had 496 students, 29 teachers (full- and part-time), and 2 administrators (full- and part-time); Mountain School had 580 students, 33 teachers (full- and part-time), and 2 administrators (full-time).

Upon entering each school I felt welcomed into a place where meaningful learning was occurring. Each school greeted me differently: At Jude School, I met teachers through staff greetings at the office corridor; at Mountain School I was presented to teachers through a staff meeting of introduction. Jude School was welcoming and informal, whereas Mountain School was more formal and yet no less welcoming than Jude School. The office administrators were professional and approachable at both schools. The same was true of staff members, who were often present in the hallways and greeted visitors pleasantly as they travelled through each school's corridors. This welcoming dynamic gave me a sense of well-being when I entered the buildings.

The school cultures were generally friendly and collegial, with members interacting at the school sites and beyond. Jude School had a coffee club that met early in the morning and at breaks, and I was invited to join this group for some conversation, company, and espresso coffee. This seemingly simple gesture indicated to me that I was considered a member of the staff. Teachers often went out for dinner or lunch, and I was invited to attend these social activities. At Mountain School, members socialized at lunch, and I was included in conversations in the staff room. When Mountain School staff shared Christmas gifts, I was included in the gifts distributed in staff mailboxes. These various invitations were evidence of a caring, giving, and sharing culture in both schools, which made me feel a part of each team.

At Jude School, I observed and participated in Primary (grade 1), Junior (grades 4 and 6), Intermediate (grades 7 and 8), and Special Assignment teachers' (Special Education) classrooms. Similarly, at Mountain School I observed and at times participated in Primary (grades 2 and 3), Junior (grades 4 and 6), Intermediate (grades 7/8 and 8), and Special Assignment teachers' (English-as-a-Second Language) classrooms. Each teacher and each classroom had its own character, flavour, and culture. I met regularly with the school administrators, to observe teachers' interactions with them and to follow teachers whose practice it was to meet daily with the principal and vice principal in the corridors, at the office, and in their classrooms. I also made an effort to attend most staff meetings, learning community meetings, assemblies, division meetings, and other special events.

Participants

Before I describe school events, a description of the participants will introduce the teachers and their work, which is central to this study. Nineteen educators out of a pool of 62 agreed to participate in the study. Some demographic trends emerged from an analysis of the original semistructured interview transcripts: teachers had an average of 10.6 years of teaching experience, with 2 teachers at 2 to 4 years and 2 greater than 20 years. All 19 participants were from the elementary panel, although 3 reported having worked at the high school level early in their careers. Nine participants were female (47%) and 10 were male (53%). Of the 19 participants, 8 were in the Catholic school (3 females and 5 males) and 11 were in the public school (6 females and 5 males). Some of the participants were team leaders at Jude and Mountain Schools. The participants also included 2 principals and 1 full-time and one half-time vice principal. The half-time administrator was also a half-time teacher. To assist with distinguishing members from the two schools, the pseudonyms assigned to Jude School participants began with the letter "J," and the pseudonyms for Mountain School were all "M" names. The following description of the teachers gives a sense of their roles within the school's learning community and of their competencies. The snapshot of each participant begins with Jude School, by division, followed by specific descriptions for teachers from Mountain School, again by division.

Jane was a Primary teacher at Jude School who had taught for many years. I observed her to present well-organized and detailed lessons. She often asked for my feedback about lessons, and she invited me to participate in the lessons by circulating and working with students in the classroom. Jane was the Primary Division team leader and she described, during her interview, being honoured to have been asked by her administrator to take on this role. She felt that her team leader role was important because she facilitated teachers in sharing ideas and effective practices.

Joseph, a Junior teacher and team leader, showed me detailed units for social studies that he shared with his teaching partner. These units were examples of his preparedness and expertise in lesson planning. As I observed the lessons moving forward smoothly and students participating actively, I found his teaching style to be engaging, organized, and efficient. Pupils were attentive and participated during lessons. Joseph frequently told jokes or provided real-life situations during lessons. The students either laughed or responded to the anecdotes during these social studies sessions.

Jason, who was Joseph's teaching partner, liked to entertain. His lessons were filled with jokes and anecdotes about himself and his family that had students laughing or thinking about the issue being discussed. Jason spent long periods in discussion with students about various social studies topics, and he provided them with opportunities to work with classmates. It was an active environment where many students shared their thoughts and ideas freely. I found it entertaining to observe and at times to participate in his social studies and mathematics lessons.

Julian, an Intermediate teacher who taught in a detached portable classroom, had been teaching for many years. He shared with me interesting details about the math curriculum as well as the various in-depth tracking methods he used to provide students and parents with knowledge about progress and to help students move forward in their mathematics studies. Julian's technology expertise enabled him to keep an electronic record of student progress in mathematics. He used the classroom computer as a means to communicate pupils' strengths and weaknesses, which made them aware of their progress and the areas of the curriculum on which they needed to focus. By teaching with the end in mind the curricular focus, Julian tailored lessons to students' specific learning profiles. Julian also demonstrated his organized teaching method by sharing the rubrics that he used when teaching math. Prior to each lesson, Julian provided pupils with these rubrics, which indicated the focus area for the session.

Janet, a new Intermediate teacher, taught specialized literacy-based skills to all Intermediate students. Her program was created to assist pupils in developing writing and reading skills necessary to improve their literacy test results. I observed her bantering with students, teaching, and facilitating their acquisition of writing skills, like the ability to find the key points in a passage. Pupils responded readily to her antics and worked on assigned language activities, which included role plays, poetry, and writing.

When I observed Jack, the Special Education teacher, in his classroom, he was often working on his computer; however, when students arrived for their sessions, he worked closely with pupils on reading skills. I noted that students expended a great deal of effort to read each passage laboriously. These pupils were definitely struggling, but they worked hard at the tasks Jack provided. When Jack did not have student visitors to his classroom, he was engrossed in administrative tasks at his desk or computer.

Jeanette, a part-time Junior teacher and part-time administrator, whom I observed in the classroom and in the office, worked diligently at preparing mathematics lessons and addressing administrative tasks. Jeanette discussed her lessons with me as I observed her teaching, and she explained daily operational matters in the office setting, which provided context for me about the two roles that she held. Both the Junior teaching and administrator roles were new to Jeanette, but she worked hard to fulfill both positions to the best of her ability, which kept her busy throughout the day. I observed her being open to the staff and completing her tasks as best she could as I followed her from the office to her classroom during my visits to Jude School.

Jeff, the school principal, had numerous teaching and administrative experiences and was knowledgeable about staff, students, procedures, and research literature. On his daily walkabouts, I observed him calling all staff and students by their names and saying something personal to each one. At the end of each school day, I stopped by the office to ask school or board-related policy questions, which he quickly answered or found documentation to support a response. In addition, he often discussed or provided me with a new book that presented an interesting theory in education or professional development.

Participants from Mountain School also included Primary (grades 2 and 3), Junior (grades 4 and 6), and Intermediate teachers (grades 7/8 and 8). Mary was a Primary teacher on staff who worked only half days, teaching grade 2 in the mornings. During my observations, I found myself engaged in her lessons because she was an animated teacher who provided many exemplars for students and who elicited many responses from pupils prior to teaching a lesson or assigning learning tasks. I observed her lessons to be wellthought out and planned, with the use of visuals and manipulatives at each lesson. Mary used a chart board, a white board, story books, and other visuals that maintained student attention and engaged the pupils in the activities.

Marion, a Primary teacher and team leader, had taught for numerous years. In the classroom I saw her deliver many wellthought out and detailed grade 3 language and mathematics lessons. She paid close attention to student learning by assessing their understanding daily and moving lessons forward from there. Marion at times asked me to work with pupils during lessons, especially those students who required one-to-one assistance, which kept them participating appropriately and not disrupting the class. The lessons were delivered carefully, with many modelled examples for students to follow in their activities. During observed lessons, Marion was patient with pupils, at times inexplicably so. In one instance, when a student was particularly disruptive, I questioned Marion about her apparent calmness and stated that in her place I would have been annoyed and prone to correct the student's inappropriate behaviour. Marion replied that she was only being so calm because I was observing; had I not been there, she would likely have spoken more sharply to the student.

Madison, a fairly new grade 3 teacher, was organized and precise in her lessons and in her delivery of them. During whole-class lessons in mathematics, I observed that Madison taught mathematics by repeating ideas in several different ways to explain concepts and to respond to student questions. Madison's lessons were smooth and welldelivered throughout my observations. She appeared keenly aware of my presence during lessons, which contrasted with most other participants who seemed not to notice my observations unless they asked me to interact with students or help with lessons. On one occasion, I was delayed at the dentist, and with Madison's permission I observed her deliver a social studies lesson during a different period than was typical. At the time, this new arrangement appeared to be acceptable. However, on the following day, Madison reminded me to adhere to her observation timetable and not to reappear at an unscheduled time in the future, which prompted me to be more precise in sticking strictly to the schedule.

Megan, the third Primary team member, was an experienced teacher who was new to this particular Primary role. When I observed Megan, she was at ease with my presence, and she often engaged me in lesson discussions. Megan delivered grade 3 lessons competently by clearly explaining mathematics concepts, checking for student understanding orally, and reviewing their written responses as she circulated around the classroom.

Mike, a Junior teacher, appeared confident as he taught, with students sitting quietly and attentively at their desks. Mike's grade 6 lessons stimulated student creativity through brainstorming and interactive group activities. Students were often engrossed in tasks or discussing ideas when I observed the class. Mike, during observations, was engaged in teaching or observing student activities and checking for student understanding. When I spoke with Mike in the classroom, he provided short replies to questions and at times asked questions for clarification. During semistructured interviews, Mike found some of the questions repetitive and difficult to answer, and he chose not to respond to some of them.

Matt was an engaging and charismatic teacher who got students' attention and held it throughout his lessons by demonstrating interesting experiments and by not accepting inappropriate behaviour. He expected and received respect from his pupils, who then worked diligently to complete assigned activities after introductory whole-class lessons. I saw Matt deliver many well-organized and detailed science and design and technology lessons that engaged students in the activities presented. The lessons were motivational, and I participated in some of the building projects and activities.

Mark, a grade 8 teacher, was a team leader who worked closely with his team to plan lessons and to motivate students. He used literature that raised students' social consciousness. During lessons, Mark was an interesting speaker who engaged students in active discussions. Students appeared genuinely interested and participated vigorously. Mark's passion for teaching was evident in his lessons.

Madeline, the English-as-a-second language (ESL) teacher, worked with different Primary student groups to assist with their English language acquisition. She explained that she was entirely responsible in some cases for the English language learner (ELL) students' language arts grades. It was interesting to observe the skill she used when trying to reach pupils who resisted acquiring English language skills. Madeline demonstrated great patience and persistence in her interactions with these particularly challenging students. She shared some examples of the data-gathering rubrics that she had designed from the Ontario curriculum to address the specific language learning needs for ELL students. Madeline used this information as the basis for evaluating her students and then moving them along their English language learning continuum.

Melania, a grade 4 teacher, sat with me daily during lunch. Melania spoke to me about her teaching experiences and shared confidences with me. She was a friendly and open teacher who described her teaching role as a caring one. Teaching was a vocation for her. In our lunch conversations, Melania discussed school initiatives and expressed a degree of discomfort with the new ideas, but she was not resistant to them.

Mackenzie, a new vice principal, described himself as the go-to person who completed all the grunt work, which allowed the principal to occupy himself with instructional leadership matters, school discipline issues, learning community challenges, and other educational elements. I noted that Mackenzie was an active member of the school community. During observations, I found Mackenzie to be engaged in school business and to be frequently at his desk, albeit often present at outdoor duties. He seemed preoccupied with paperwork and with responding to e-mails. Mackenzie's comments, which conveyed a high regard for the school principal, provided clarity and insight into various school structures and procedures.

Mitchell, the principal at Mountain School, walked the school corridors, participated outside in recess duties, and worked in his office with the door open. On occasion, I saw him in his office working at his computer or meeting with staff or parents; however, generally he was somewhere else in the school. Mitchell demonstrated an outgoing personality, and he expressed a genuine interest in facilitating staff and pupils to reach their best potential. Mitchell invested time in reviewing school documents and discussing the school improvement plans with me. I appreciated Mitchell's time as he sat down with me to describe staff professional development opportunities, the school's progress in standardized testing initiatives, current research literature, staff-related issues, and school operations.

Participants in the research study represented the range of professionals commonly found in most schools, with a full array of strengths and limitations. In short, the teachers were representative of any school: They were dedicated, hardworking members who appeared genuinely happy. How educators at Jude and Mountain Schools differed from other schools was the way in which they expressed their personal capacity and competencies, assumed leadership roles, and interacted with each other. Table 1 presents a summary of the participants' teaching portfolios and leadership roles.

Teacher Interactions, Learning Events, and School Operations

A variety of learning events and daily operations occurred at both Jude and Mountain Schools. Some of these activities were described incidentally in the previous section, but others warrant further description. For example, designated learning community meetings had been established in both schools as opportunities where learning took place among teachers as they shared their skills and ideas with one another. Team meetings were another type of learning event that occurred both formally and informally. Some of these meetings occurred between team partners to consider specific aspects of the teaching-learning cycle, during which they shared effective practices, materials, assessments; reviewed student results; and planned for student success. Other meetings took place on a division level, which gave teachers an opportunity to review

Table 1

Participants and Responsibilities

Participant	Teaching portfolio	Leadership roles
Jane	Grade 1 teacher	Primary team leader
Joseph	Grade 6 teacher	Junior team leader
Jason	Grade 6 teacher	
Julian	Grade 8 teacher	Mathematics mentor, Meeting facilitator
Janet	Intermediate literacy teacher	Literacy leader
Jack	Resource teacher	Designate teacher, Literacy leader
Jeanette	Grade 4 teacher half-time	Vice principal half-time, Meeting facilitator, Literacy leader, Instructional leader
Jeff		School principal, Meeting facilitator, Instructional leader
Mary	Grade 2 teacher half-time	Materials organizer
Marion	Grade 3 teacher	Primary team leader
Madison	Grade 3 teacher	Materials organizer
Megan	Grade 3 teacher	Literacy lead teacher (previous year), Materials organizer
Mike	Grade 6 teacher	Presenter for primary team members, Mathematics leader
Matt	Grade 7/8 teacher	Instructional leader
Mark	Grade 8 teacher	Intermediate team leader
Madeline	English-as-a-second-language teacher	Data management leader, Teacher language support
Melania	Grade 4 teacher	Mathematics materials manager & leader, Materials organizer
Mackenzie		Vice principal, Administrative functions
Mitchell		School principal, Meeting facilitator, Literacy & instructional leader

Note. Names beginning with J are from Jude School. Names beginning with M are from Mountain School.

student assessment data, to share practices, and to plan for the next steps to address student needs. These various types of activities are the focus of this section as I present the collaborative work of the teachers and the kind of professional events in which they participated. I begin by describing how these events and interactions unfolded at Jude School, followed by how they presented at Mountain School.

At Jude School most interactions and learning events took place in the context of scheduled learning meetings and unscheduled exchanges. Jane, a grade 1 teacher, exemplified how the interactions unfolded in that school. Jane worked well with her Primary teaching team, was open to suggestions, and shared her skills readily with other teachers. During a team meeting with her grade 1 team partner, I saw Jane share some mathematics lessons and present language arts and mathematics topics she planned to cover over the next several weeks. During this meeting, Jane and her partner checked that they were both ontrack with teaching the same topics for language arts and mathematics. I also observed Jane during language lessons working closely with her educational assistant (EA) by explaining how the EA could help the students to complete the language lesson activities. At her school-based team (SBT) meetings, where the administrator(s), special education teacher(s), classroom teacher, and support staff met to discuss at-risk students, Jane was always well-prepared with details of student needs listed and presented for the team to review.

An example of the less formal staff interactions that occurred at Jude School can be seen in the daily exchanges between Joseph and his team partner, Jason, as they met to discuss lessons and outcomes of the day and to share materials. Joseph and Jason taught across the hallway from one another, and I observed these teammates frequently chatting together before, during, and after school about the material they were teaching, the resources they used, and the performance of students. After either Joseph or Jason completed a unit, they turned over the materials to the other partner, who would then present the unit, which exemplifies a reciprocal relationship of sharing ideas, strategies, and materials between two team partners.

Another type of relationship that I observed at Jude School was an informal mentorship program that took place with one of the senior teachers. Julian, an experienced Intermediate teacher, mentored many other staff members in mathematics. This connection crossed divisions and experience levels as Julian assisted any teachers in any division who wanted some help. He frequently used his preparation periods to coteach or present concepts in colleagues' classrooms, and I regularly saw Julian working with staff during his planning periods. Many teachers, including Joseph and Jason, described instances when Julian had helped them with his mathematics mentoring. Julian also had a student teacher with whom he patiently and thoroughly reviewed math lessons during my observations. Most days before lunch, I observed Julian discussing with the student teacher candidate what elements went well and not so well during the morning lesson. I also saw him mentor students on various occasions to prepare them for the Intermediate Lego Robotics Competitions, which they had won several times in the past.

Communication with colleagues was a key element for one of the newest staff members. Janet, who was a new Intermediate teacher, had no established curriculum for her position, so she met daily with other teachers to see what learning skills they wanted addressed in her literacy blocks, and then she planned accordingly. This daily interaction with teammates helped Janet to tailor her literacy lessons to student learning profiles, and, through targeted lesson planning, she was able to fill in the gaps that other teachers did not have time to address in the regular language programming.

Guidance was another type of collegial relationship that I noted at Jude School. I frequently saw staff members stopping by to speak to an "in-house expert" about literacy matters, student needs and programming, and administrative issues. For example, I observed Jack, the Special Education teacher, regularly moving about the school and chatting with teachers about identified student needs and other school matters. I also heard Jack speak frequently about administrative-related tasks, and I noted that the administrative team, both the principal, Jeff, and the vice principal, Jeanette, spoke with him often about these matters. Teachers dropped into the classroom regularly to discuss student- or school-related questions with Jack, and I saw him help his colleagues with a wide variety of emerging daily issues.

Through these various formal and informal team meetings at Jude School, common learning opportunities were created for teachers to participate in educational activities and interactions with team partners. For example, Jeanette and her team partner met daily to share information, exchange notes, discuss pupils, and plan lessons and units together. Jeanette also met daily with staff, reviewing daily events and issues at the office. I often saw her stop working to talk with teachers who dropped into her office. Being a new administrator and teacher in the Junior Division, Jeanette's brief meetings with teachers gave her access to information that enabled her to address emergent issues, professional development needs, or requests.

Jude School employed an innovative means of creating time during the day for staff members to participate in learning events and teacher interactions. Occasionally they held whole-school assemblies where the vice principal and principal supervised all students. This activity freed the staff members to meet with their learning teams to plan student activities, to review student data, and to identify and plan for the next steps that addressed learning issues.

Relationship-building was a key feature of the daily interactions that I observed as I joined the principal, Jeff, on his morning classroom visits. Stopping by each classroom in the school, he demonstrated that he was available for the staff. During daily classroom visits, Jeff chatted with staff members throughout the building. During his discussions, he often made reference to personal aspects of teachers' and students' lives. I also regularly observed him pausing during paperwork completion to speak with teachers and students, and he met frequently with staff at the main office before, during, and after school. He tended, however, not to go outside to visit the portable classroom on his routes, which left that Intermediate teacher out of the daily classroom visit circuit.

Throughout my daily meetings with Jeff, the principal at Jude School, he introduced me to various professional development literature texts. On one occasion, he showed me a short article that he had prepared on the benefits and purposes of learning communities as a means for staff professional development. At a subsequent staff meeting, teachers were given an opportunity to read the article and discuss their learning from it in small groups. The interesting ideas were then shared with the larger group, after which a lively discussion of the pros and cons of the learning community professional development model ensued. After sharing their ideas about learning communities, staff members divided into teams to plan an upcoming team-based learning community meeting. In the Junior team, teachers discussed the focus for the meeting (e.g., looking at student data), identified the materials needed (e.g., reading assessment results), and completed a planner that outlined their goals for the half-day planning session. Jude School staff meetings, therefore, were a combination of administrative material, professional development initiatives, and team planning.

The plans made at one staff meeting became reality in a subsequent Primary learning community meeting, when teachers met to review student assessment data. During this time, which had been provided during the school day, the Primary team members had planned to review student assessment data. Unfortunately, the teachers discussed instead the challenges they were experiencing in addressing pupils' learning needs and in managing their behaviours. Many teachers shared their experiences with particular students or parents rather than examining and analyzing the student data. The discussions about student behaviour and parents continued throughout the meeting, and I observed no discussions about the data profiles during that meeting.

At the final Jude School staff meeting of my observation period, teachers discussed the next steps for language arts instruction. The initiative proposed by the principal and team leaders was to implement the use of literature circles. Teachers described these activities in positive terms and expressed a willingness to move forward with this particular initiative. I noted that teachers nodded frequently and added opinions that were generally supportive in nature. By the end of the meeting, staff members had arrived at a consensus to implement literature circles.

Mountain School was similar to Jude School in many ways in that both schools had many staff who worked together on learning events and operations activities. In Mountain School, as in Jude School, many of these interactions and actions took place during formal and informal meetings. Teachers participated together and engaged frequently in learning opportunities, both at school and beyond. Team meetings were frequent events that occurred informally throughout the day and formally during staff meetings and other scheduled times. Professional development was regularly incorporated as the substantive part of staff meetings, and the principal arranged board-delivered training during the day and at other times as needed. Teacher development also was a regular part of teachers helping and collaborating with one another in their teams.

Regular lunch time, recess, and before- and after-school informal and formal meetings were a part of teacher routines at Mountain School, where teachers planned lessons, shared materials and assessment plans, and discussed student requirements. For example, Mary, a grade 2 half-time teacher, met daily informally and once a week formally with her teaching partner to plan and discuss student successes or needs. Mary co-ordinated her lessons with her teaching partner in an organized manner, which facilitated students receiving a seamless Primary program from two separate teachers. As Mary and her team partner shared student progress and pupil behaviour issues, they stayed aligned with the pulse of their grade 2 classroom. These meetings lasted from 15 to 50 minutes and usually took place during their lunch time.

Other staff members at Mountain School interacted regularly with teammates to co-ordinate their lessons and to share effective teaching practices. Marion, the Primary team leader, met frequently with her grade 3 team throughout the day and during her preparation periods. At these meetings, I found her to be open to suggestions, and she readily incorporated team members' ideas into her daily lessons, such as using Megan's math quizzes. Marion also shared her expertise, lessons, and skills with her teammates.

At a meeting with her team partners, for example, she shared a lesson about paragraph writing, using a sandwich to illustrate the parts of a paragraph. I later observed all 3 teachers delivering this lesson in their respective classrooms.

The 3 grade 3 teachers selected a focus topic and produced lessons that closely resembled one another. Madison, like Marion, was comfortable with her team partners. She met with Marion during her preparation period in her classroom, where they discussed lessons for mathematics, language arts, social studies, and all subject areas. At other times, I saw her meet with Marion and Megan in the photocopy room to discuss the math lesson for the day, and at lunch the 3 women reviewed their language goals for the week. These meetings varied in length from one preparation or lunch period (50 minutes) to recess breaks (5 to 10 minutes).

Megan, the newest member of the grade 3 team, participated actively in informal and formal meetings with her team partners, picking up new ideas, lesson plans, and materials. As a result, Megan's mathematics lessons were delivered similarly to Marion's and Madison's math lessons. In fact, the three lessons delivered within one day appeared almost scripted, although I was aware that the planning had been done mostly during brief interactions in the corridor, at the photocopier, during lunch, or at longer meetings during preparation periods. During these interactions I saw the grade 3 team discuss teaching strategies and activities that were later put into practice in the teachers' respective classrooms. In short, Marion, Megan, and Madison were open to each other's suggestions and used teammates' ideas in their lessons.

At Mountain School, teachers took the time to listen to one another and to assist as necessary. Some teachers at the school worked together on projects, such as a math initiative that Mike participated in with his team partner and with university researchers. The work was part of the school's improvement plan and was published in an academic journal later in the year. During a staff meeting, I observed that Mike presented the findings for his team's school improvement literacy results. In addition, Mike presented literacy results for the Primary team members, who did not enjoy large group presentations.

Relationships in the school were an integral part of the interactions. For example, I saw Mike, the grade 6 teacher, and Matt, the grade 7/8 teacher, chat about school-related matters and about social activities as well. In conversations that I had with both teachers, they described one another as friends, and I observed them to drop by one another's classrooms frequently to chat. Their relationship as friends and colleagues was typical of the interactions that I observed among many staff members at Mountain School.

Team cohesion was a characteristic of Mountain School, with team members generally in agreement regarding school initiatives and student programming. For example, Matt, the grade 7/8 teacher, and his team presented to Mitchell, the school principal, an opposing view about an upcoming academic awards assembly. Specifically, the Intermediate Division team wanted to cancel a scheduled Academic Award Assembly. Teachers proposed that students be given their academic award certificates in their respective classrooms, but Mitchell was not in agreement and presented his version for the group's consideration. He stated firmly that there would have to be an award assembly because it was part of the School Effectiveness Framework goals and the students had worked hard to achieve the goals. After some discussion among the

Intermediate Team, they conceded to the principal, and they once again presented a cohesive view on the awards assembly.

At Mountain School, teachers shared responsibility for student success, whether they were support personnel like the ESL teacher, a rotary teacher, or the home room teacher. For example, Madeline, the ESL teacher, taught language arts for ESL pupils and assumed responsibility for these students' language marks. She met with classroom teachers regularly to ensure a good flow of information about the pupils. Madeline was also involved with a larger community of ESL teachers because she was on the board ESL team. This group met monthly to address issues in pedagogy, curriculum, and organization for ESL teachers. Madeline took me to a meeting where the board consultant shared new materials, and members shared strategies and school structures that were working well at their schools. Madeline also discussed her role in presenting ESL program overviews to other neighbourhood schools. When Madeline shared her assessment and evaluation strategies for ESL with staff, I was impressed with the level of detail and the comprehensiveness of her data analysis strategies.

Interactions at Mountain School were generally positive, but at times some differences and misunderstandings around roles caused some tensions. In one instance, Melania, a Junior teacher, told me that she was uncomfortable with having one of the administrators observe learning community circles in her classroom. On a number of other occasions, Melania was either visibly upset by the prospect of supervisory visits or expressed a lack of clarity about the administrator's role during the visit. Initially, Melania might be described as a resister; however, this description would be inaccurate because, in fact, she was interested in many initiatives and wanted to implement them.

The difficulty arose in Melania's lack of experience with material, her timidness in approaching implementation, and her discomfort with the supervisory role. Using Tribes activities like learning community circles in the classroom was an area where she needed some ongoing support and training, and when this training was later provided through board-delivered workshops, it enhanced her understanding and adoption of the new initiatives. With this kind of professional training and with kindness from colleagues who listened to her discuss her concerns and discomfort, Melania gradually felt more comfortable addressing the challenges within her classroom and implementing new initiatives.

Building relationships one teacher at a time was an important activity for the school principal, Mitchell, who spent considerable time and effort in the pursuit of positive relationships with staff. As Mitchell walked around the school, he engaged in frequent brief conversations with staff and students. He was respectful in his interactions with staff and with me. During semistructured interviews, teachers often cited Mitchell as the reason for their viable learning community. Mitchell was keen to discuss his school and the learning that took place among teachers, the students, and parents. Mitchell referred to his staff and their leadership roles as the reason for the successful interactions that took place at Mountain School.

Mountain School staff meetings consisted predominantly of teacher-selected and teacher-directed professional development activities. Very little time was spent on administrative material; the principal spoke on average for less than 10 minutes during each staff meeting. During one staff meeting, I observed staff-led professional development with teachers participating in fitness activities in the school corridor, where a number of activity stations had been set up and two teachers demonstrated their use. Staff members were encouraged to try using the equipment so that they could do similar activities with their students during mandated daily physical fitness activities. Following these activities, teachers were asked to complete a survey about the appropriateness of the fitness activities for their classrooms and any additional equipment or ideas that they might require. The survey was followed by a grade 6 teacher presenting a summary of standardized test results completed during a half day of preparation time allotted to working with a board consultant. School Effectiveness Plan chairs or designates then shared brief statements about staff progress on achieving school improvement goals. The administrator presented synectics for 10 minutes, and staff members used the remainder of the staff meeting time to meet in their school effectiveness teams to input data for their school improvement goal. This goal was about persuasive writing where students were assessed and a baseline data measure was taken, followed by focused teaching to improve persuasive writing responses. Teachers collaboratively developed assessments to gauge student improvement in this writing area. Once the assessments were completed, teachers used their staff meeting time to input the data results into the board's data warehouse software for analysis.

Mountain School teachers were provided with an opportunity for job-embedded professional development during another staff meeting. This hands-on professional development training session provided staff with an opportunity to learn about another school effectiveness initiative: implementing design and technology activities to improve numeracy. In the session, they went through one of the lessons and completed the assigned student activity. Design and technology binders were distributed, and the teachers discussed some grade-specific activities from the binder that they would use at a future date. Teachers formed teams of three or four to solve a math problem that asked them to build a three-dimensional solid using the materials provided. Their final projects were assessed and graded for presentation to the other teams. Teachers participated in lively discussions and worked on the activities throughout the training sessions. I found this method for professional development fun, original, motivational, and engaging.

In the final staff meeting of my observations at Mountain School, teachers divided into their division teams to review a school effectiveness goal initiative that focused on students' reading levels. I observed the Primary team as they discussed at-risk, at reading level, and excelling readers by referring to their Primary (PM) benchmark reading assessment scores. The Primary team reviewed various strategies for assisting students in achieving their grade reading benchmark. One strategy was for the principal to work with a small group of students regularly to provide them with one-on-one assistance. During this staff meeting, teachers completed some data recording activities that would track students' reading progress over time. These activities included placing student names, their grades, and their assessed reading levels onto a large poster board. This board, which was called a data wall, provided teachers with a visual representation of student reading levels by grade, which facilitated tracking their progress in reading as they moved through the various levels.

Summary

The context described in this section was drawn from my observations recorded in field log notes and research journals as I documented my impressions and experiences of events. At both schools, staffs were engaged in frequent discussions that were focused on professional matters. These observations demonstrated that the professional conversations at both Jude and Mountain Schools were meaningful and had a positive educational tone, with minimal complaining. At times, negative discussions did occur about student behaviour or difficulties with parents, but the focus was on how to help the child succeed, how to avoid affecting the child's learning, or how to get reluctant parents on side with school initiatives. At Jude and Mountain Schools, then, teachers were engaged in trying to find new and better ways to do their work, to improve their pedagogy, and to enhance student learning.

Phase One: Expressions of Teacher Competencies

In the previous section, the stage was set with a description of who the participants of the study were, how those individuals interacted, and how the school was structured to bring people together. To find out how teachers were expressing themselves as professionals, I observed them in their school lives, conducted semistructured interviews, collected field notes and maintained research logs, and acquired documents. In order to get a sense of how teachers demonstrated their personal capacity, I separated these data units into professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies.

My perspective views professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies as aspects of personal capacity that develop within each individual to promote teaching and learning. Professional competency refers to teachers' ability to improve instructional practice; interpersonal competency refers to individuals' influence on and learning from colleagues' practice; and organizational competency refers to individuals' ability to establish processes and structures within the classroom, division, and school. In other words, competencies refer to those skills, knowledge, activities, and understandings related to personal teaching, group interactions, and administrative functions held by each individual teacher. In this section, data will be presented to show what these three competencies looked like on the ground.

It may appear that my study does not discuss observations about these topics that are identified typically as professional competence, such as lesson planning and classroom management. Although I did observe evidence of these activities, I was interested in answering my key question: How do teachers work together in a learning community to build their capacity or competency? Consequently, I focused on the strategies they used to move into ways of doing their work better.

Expressions of Professional Competency

In the first level of data analysis, I concentrated on observing the kinds of competencies that teachers were participating in to improve their pedagogy. Analysis of the data yielded a small set of common professional competencies demonstrated by the teachers at Jude and Mountain Schools: student-growth focus, self-reflection, action research, role awareness, and role shift. These activities helped the individual teachers to improve their pedagogic practices.

One type of professional competence that I observed was teacher planning for student success, which relied on teachers' ability to assess students' learning needs appropriately. Many teachers whom I observed demonstrated a keen understanding of how planning ahead could contribute to student success. For example, Mary, a grade 2 teacher, told me that it was important to look ahead and to plan for student success as measured by the Ministry of Education's standardized test administered in grade 3: "Definitely in grade 2 I'm thinking about that grade 3 test, trying to get them ready so it makes the job easier on the grade 3s." Mary believed that it was part of her role as a grade 2 teacher to ensure pupils were prepared to take this examination, so she taught with this end in mind.

Madeline, an ESL teacher, believed that planning for change and future success could arise as teachers reflected on current practices and identified their strengths and weaknesses. As she described how the learning community model worked at Mountain School, she observed,

> Teachers can make a change by doing something concrete because they know that they are touching on something in that area. The purpose would be that this is an issue we want to address and we have designated that it has importance.

She felt that the collective problem solving that was built into the learning community became a cornerstone for enhancing pedagogy. The focus on student growth led teachers to develop the competency of self-reflection. Madeline made the connection this way: "Think about what worked and use that personal desire to make things better. Then you will seek out the learning community when your major role is an internal drive to improve." For Madeline, the learning community was a springboard for personal reflection. The importance of reflection was also evident in the following statement from Jeanette, a Junior teacher and administrator:

> I know that we need feedback. We need reflection. You have to think about what your colleague says to use. Will it work in my classroom? Maybe it will work this year and it won't work next year because I will have different kids.

These quotations demonstrate that self-reflection was a key factor in improving teaching pedagogy.

A third professional competency for improving pedagogic practice was action research. Jane applied this strategy to her daily teaching activities to examine how her teaching needed to change. In Jane's grade 1 classroom, she incorporated action research daily through what she called the "see-look-do" teaching cycle. In this cycle, she taught a particular lesson, assessed students' understanding, reflected on her teaching, and finally evaluated their products. Jane described her regular use of this method: "I always use the 'see-look-do' cycle when teaching lessons because it helps me to evaluate how effective my teaching pedagogy is for my grade 1 students." Whereas Jane conducted job-embedded action research to enhance her general teaching abilities in the classroom, Megan, a grade 3 teacher, applied her action research to specific units like writing. This action research project was part of Megan's professional development for credit in an Additional Qualification (AQ) course on writing. She noted,

> I was doing the *Write Traits* for my action research. I finished it, so it was just within my own class, with my own grade 3 students, just to see if there's an improvement in their writing and motivation. I did baseline, interview, pre- and post-, and then I collected some data as well.

As the literacy expert in her school, Megan saw this action research project as an opportunity to enhance her literacy skills. The process Megan used in this action research project was an example of active learning that increased her pedagogic competencies at the same time that it improved the students' writing ability.

The professional competency of role awareness refers to teachers' understanding of their abilities. Jane described her teaching role as one that evolved and ultimately improved her teaching skills. She said,

> I think [teaching skills] all encompass each other. I think it's a kind of developing thing too. You might take a position now, and you don't know exactly what you're getting yourself into. You may find that you grow in your skills as you are in that position. You discover certain things that you didn't know you had or certain things you had but you don't have [now]. So I think a skill is something that you start with but it develops. It doesn't stay the same as you go along.

Being aware of her strengths and weaknesses provided Jane with an understanding of her pedagogical practices, which facilitated her skill development over time. Janet, who taught grade 7, articulated the importance of being aware of her role:

> We're accountable for what goes on, so it's probably a good idea to see where people are, what their roles are, what they believe their roles are. Sometimes what we're told and what we believe are two different things. We don't always believe all the bureaucracy and things that come down, but in some way we've got to make sense of that and then deliver that program to the children. It's the way we do it, I guess. Somebody has to look in there and see how people are doing things and what's working, and then we can look at that. I think it's good practice to do those kinds of things and see what's going right and what's going wrong and how are we going to fix it. In anything, we all want to know [this information] and then to build on it.

For Janet, having other people involved in the process of teacher work was important because they could examine others' practices and provide information on which teachers could reflect to improve as practitioners in the classroom.

Taking on challenging new roles at schools was a professional competency that extended teachers' capacity into new tasks. I observed this competency when teachers assumed leadership activities, and when they filled in gaps as other staff members moved on to new positions. Jeanette believed that staff members were talented and could take on any role if necessary. She said,

> I think others would pick up the slack or pick up that role [if teacher leaders moved schools]. I think that there's enough potential here at the school that we could ultimately probably select others from that group. We would hate to see them leave, but if others were to step into that role, then they could assume those responsibilities.

Jeanette saw teachers at Jude School as having great potential and professional competence that enabled them to assume challenging new roles as needed.

Mitchell, the principal at Mountain School, offered teachers new roles as a means to develop new competencies and to build cohesive learning teams. He described his experience:

> When I first came here, I saw a need for a change in the Intermediate team. I saw that some members needed to collaborate more, and I decided to shake things up. Sometimes you need to do this. I suggested that the grade 4 teacher move into the grade 8 position. I was lucky that he decided to change roles and that the team worked well together.

To achieve this end, Mitchell moved Mark, a Junior teacher whom he viewed as a strong leader, into an Intermediate teaching role to develop team competencies. Mark understood that, as he assumed this challenging new role, he was in a leadership position: "I would loosely consider myself the Intermediate division lead and cultural-type lead person where people would come to me with questions along that line." Mark's leadership fulfilled Mitchell's goal of introducing new competencies into the Intermediate division and building a cohesive team. Mark discussed his changing role, saying,

> I taught a year of grade 4. My second year here, the numbers were really high in grade 8, and Mitchell asked if I would teach grade 8. I gave it a shot, and I really liked it, and the results were pretty good. I really like to get involved with the thinking aspect with the older kids, and it worked out really well.

Mark continued to develop his teaching as he provided innovative curriculum for students in language and visual arts, as he focused on current and former social justice issues in society, and as he encouraged team members to address normally taboo topics, such as slavery. Mark described the transition as a positive process that opened up new teaching avenues and that led him to new resources for his teaching practices:

> I also give people ideas to implement culture within the classroom. I know the grade 6 classes, for example, are doing a novel study on *Underground to Canada,* and I know that the board has a great film that is along that line of study so I talked to Mike about showing that film.

Mark had been recognized for his work in social justice awareness and "promoting a lot of the stuff that I am talking about," and he had been given teaching awards like the *Outstanding Teacher Award* and the *University Alumni Award.*

Role awareness sometimes was most visible to the principal, who could use his awareness to develop teacher competencies that enhanced teaching pedagogy. Matt, a grade 7/8 teacher, described the principal's role in this way:

> The role of the principal is the learning community–that is everything. All the aspects of it. Some people call them the facilitator, the manager, caregiver, and nurturer. The role of the principal in the learning community is to make sure that it is happening. It is one degree of separation from the community to look back. Teachers have to do that within their classroom, and the principal does it for the school. It is not the teachers' job to see that the learning community of the school [works]. It is to participate in the learning community of the school and to see their own part in it. My view is that a principal's job is to see the whole and to be able to move things around like a chessboard. Get the right people on the bus, and then you have to get them in the right seat.

Matt believed that the principal ensured that the learning community was running properly by putting appropriate teachers in leadership roles to facilitate the professional development process. Matt consolidated his description of the principal's role when he stated,

> You have to make sure you are encouraging people for what they want. The biggest role of the principal for me is making sure that you know your staff well enough to know what they are interested in and you help them towards that, regardless of what it will cost you in the end. If it means they leave you, so be it.

Matt believed that the principal played a significant part in determining the course of the learning community's development by assigning staff to key roles based on their strengths.

Expressions of Interpersonal Competency

To investigate expressions of interpersonal competency, I was interested in the impact teachers had on one another's practice. To discover the means through which teachers built their interpersonal competency, I examined how they improved their teaching abilities by working and learning together. This level of data analysis yielded the following competencies: supportive relationships, collective interests, a comfortable, safe environment, and professional sharing. Through these competencies, the collaborative work in which teachers participated helped strengthen and improve their teaching abilities.

The first competency, supportive relationships, included three levels of support that I observed at Jude and Mountain Schools. The first level dealt with how teachers within a grade team supported each other. The second level examined how teachers assisted colleagues from different teams or across divisions. The third level related to how school administrators supported staff activities and professional learning.

The supportive relationships that teachers within grade teams engaged in were focused on helping each other to improve student learning. One way teachers assisted each other was through sharing subject-specific teaching duties. Joseph described this process:

> There is no rotary in grade 6, but next term there might be. Jason and I usually do. He'll do social studies; I'll do science, or vice versa, just so we get to know the kids. This year we had a tough group of kids, so we did not do it for first term.

By sharing subjects, these team partners supported each other and learned about their students. Other teachers learned new teaching techniques from their teammates. Janet delineated the benefits of working with colleagues this way:

> Honestly, development for me is that my team partners and I learn from each

> other almost every day, whether it is quite simply, "How did you approach this?" to "How did you deal with this situation?" Probably the biggest benefit is learning from each other.

By working together, Janet and her team not only had access to new professional ideas, but they also learned from one another about dealing with common issues in teaching. An additional example of within-team teacher support occurred with Marion, a grade 3 teacher, who described her role in this way: "I do a lot of behind the scenes stuff because I feel more comfortable that way." Marion helped the team move forward by collecting and organizing material and data for the members.

Feeling supported by colleagues enabled the teachers to dedicate their energies to student learning. Megan, a grade 3 teacher on Marion's team, made this point:

> I would say not only as a learning community, but as people, we have a lot of good people on staff that care about one another and support one another, not only professionally but personally, to feel that your biggest goal here is just to help and teach kids and nothing else. You have nothing else to worry about.

Both her teammates nodded when Megan commented, "Just to share and support each other, so you are not doing it all on your own." Marion continued the conversation, saying, "I think it is all of that. I think when you are improving teaching, you are improving learning." With the support they received from one another, these teachers had the security to focus their energy on student achievement rather than on trying to impress their colleagues.

Support also arose through interactions across divisions. Jane described a process where teachers contributed by closely supervising each other's students. She stated,

> You see the concept of a learning community out on the playground, too, because as supervisors out there, you are in charge of everybody. You often will have teachers coming, if it is a child in my class and they have taken the time to come to me, to say, "Jane, you know such and such happened outside." So they are taking responsibility for my kids out there and not just saying, "Well, you know it is not my job."

Cross-division support extended into other aspects of the teachers' work. For example, in a discussion with Marion, she described her discomfort with presenting in front of large groups, saying, "I do not like to be out in front speaking. I am not comfortable teaching colleagues." I subsequently observed Mike presenting the grade 3 team's EQAO data during a staff meeting. I had discovered the reason for this support when Marion told me that Mike from the Junior team would present data at the next staff meeting on her behalf. Because Marion, who, as the team leader, should have made the presentation, was uncomfortable in front of the large group, Mike, a junior teacher, supported his colleagues by presenting EQAO data results for the Primary team.

Marion shared an example where support extended from the grade 3 team to the junior division when they shared their writing program: "Even in the staff room with our writing program, with Mercedes doing it for the grade 4 team." In this instance, the grade 3 teachers had shared with Mercedes, a grade 4 teacher, a practice that they had used successfully with their pupils. Mercedes then moved the practice further in the school by helping with its implementation in the Junior division.

The third level of support, from administrator to teacher, was observed when Jeanette, the vice principal, encouraged staff to participate in activities. She stated,

> Including them in things that I think they may want to be included in and being able to look at people and say, "Oh you know what? That is a good quality in you," and being able to say, "Why don't you help me with something because I think that would really help." I think that builds the community of educators within our school, and I think that's important that they feel comfortable with who they are in their own skin and being able to bring that out and to teach others what they know.

Jeanette used a combination of pressure and support to motivate staff to take part in certain activities. She selected particular teachers who demonstrated skills appropriate for specific initiatives to help build community at the school level. Jeanette and the school principal, Jeff, also supported staff by providing time for job-embedded professional development. Jeanette described an occasion when this took place:

> A lot of things can bog staff down and me down, but by having a good leader saying, "I'll give you time. Let's have the kids together in the gym," and really encouraging that teachers have some planning time by encouraging them to work together throughout the year. Even at our last staff meeting, being able to break out in smaller breakout groups and not having it all administration.

By providing release time for teachers, Jeanette and the principal encouraged and supported staff to meet together in division teams. Jason's description of Jeanette provided further insight into her role as a supportive administrator:

> Without sounding sexist, but usually when you get the female principal, they come in and they feel that they have to compensate for that and come in a lot stronger and demand, demand, demand. Jeanette's coming and totally not

> demanding. I know with me she asked questions the first month of school like, "What is it that we do outside?" "How do you handle this?" and "How do you handle that?" Getting to know the community in terms of just the student community and in terms of how you deal with parents. I guess that's something you have to gain experience with them. I always feel that she's very supportive, easy to talk to, and open-minded.

Jason, a grade 6 teacher, portrayed the vice principal as a person willing to listen and learn about their school community. Later, while interviewing Jeanette, I found that she also described herself as supportive. She said,

> I am really accessible. I hope that my personality makes people feel comfortable with my presence. If they have a question or concern, they are always more than willing to come to my office and ask questions in my office. I try to lead by example, and I hope that I try to instill my work ethic into teachers.

Here she echoed Jason's comments as she described her attempts to make her office a supportive, open, and inviting place for teachers to voice concerns and ask questions.

In a parallel process at Mountain School, I observed a level of administrative support when Mitchell, the school principal, agreed to present results during learning community and other meetings for Marion, the Primary team leader. Marion explained that this was the condition she had set prior to assuming the Primary team leader role because of her discomfort presenting to large groups. In discussing her role as team leader, Marion highlighted her similarity to her teammates:

> I'm the Chair and I just come up with the agenda with Mitchell. I prefer not to stand up. Funny enough, I think all three of us have that same quality. I am not

> big on presenting in front of people. I feel much more comfortable sharing ideas about our class. I mean, I'm always interested in professional development and helping anyone else out, but I do not feel comfortable enough to share my learning and to be teaching others on a larger scale.

In this example, the support of the administrator enabled the teacher to fulfill a leadership role: Marion, the Primary division chair, gathered the key information, and Mitchell, the school principal, presented the material to the staff.

The second competency, collective interests, was evident in many aspects of school life at Jude and Mountain Schools as teachers were engaged in identifying and setting common goals used to enhance student learning. Collective interests were observed among teachers within and across grade teams and included various focus areas.

Jane described one of the collective interests for the Primary team: a focus on student assessment data, specifically as collected in observation surveys. She said,

> To facilitate working among the Primary teachers, the teams are to tell materials used in the school with students. Many of the teachers get together previously to give a heads up and a sharing of that information. We have a team meeting to talk about *Observation Survey* data and the specific needs children have and how we can address them. The *Observation Survey* is a collection of data done in September. . . . We think it's great, but it does take a lot of time. In the beginning it was not well accepted, but that's where I get my information from when I do my PM benchmarks. I do them, and I look to see how their progress goes and what my overall look is.

Jane noted that her Primary team met to share their data from observation surveys, to target specific student needs and to plan appropriate lessons for future student success. Although only the grade 3 and 6 students had taken the EQAO tests, I noted that all the teachers, as a group, showed interest in the results. This staff-wide focus on standardized test data enabled everyone to examine the information to plan for lessons and student improvement. According to Madison, a collective interest and collective concern about students' progress was of paramount importance for students' academic success. She stated,

> Even though a student might be in grade 1, grade 2, or grade 3, those students have the support of all the teachers, who then work together in support of the students. I find that I also often will go back to the grade 2 teachers just to figure out, if I have a student who is struggling, what strategies they have already tried that did and did not work, so there is constant interaction.

As teachers followed student progress throughout the grade levels, they consulted one another to find teaching strategies that could address specific issues.

Teachers also examined student data to set common goals. Janet, a grade 7 and Intermediate Literacy teacher, explained the importance of commonly shared goals:

> Goals are huge in my books, like goals that are aligned with one another. You can't have 25, especially in a school this size, different teachers working on a series of unrelated goals. It really doesn't make much sense. I think that's why we do annual learning plans pretty much together as team partners.

According to Janet, goals needed to be aligned in a large school to ensure that staff worked together in a logical fashion. This process was facilitated by creating annual learning plans that set out common learning goals in a formalized written plan. Later she described an example of her team's goals for guided reading and writing:

> One of the team goals had to do with Fountas and Pinnell [authors of a levelled literacy intervention system designed for children who find reading and writing difficult] and guiding readers and writers by just looking more closely at that type of literature and incorporating it. Like I say, grade 7 has been a focus on numeracy for a couple of years because of the lack of time for literacy and numeracy instruction.

In this case, the Intermediate team's goal was to target specific skills in reading and writing, which provided a team focus for enhancing pupils' literacy abilities.

Other teachers viewed the learning community as a vehicle to focus collectively on student improvement. Members of the grade 3 team at Mountain School made this view clear when Madison said, "A learning community is the place where you find support, you find encouragement for growth, and a dedication to children." Marion added to this statement, saying, "A common goal is to help students." Megan verbally agreed with both her teammates. This team felt that the learning community was the means by which they helped each other develop as professionals with a focus on student improvement and success.

The third competency, a comfortable, safe environment, was described as a key ingredient in the cultures of both Jude and Mountain School. Staff members focused on methods for creating this comfortable setting for students and for teammates. Julian discussed the importance of creating a safe and comfortable learning environment for students by making school an enjoyable experience:

> For us, creating a learning community, I think, is being invitational, making the

> classroom inviting, less threatening. If they like coming–my goal is to make them enjoy coming to school and being here. Put on a happy face. I've noticed that, even this year, the most anyone has missed is three days this year. So yes, I try to make it inviting for them, fun, enjoyable, and not intimidating. Even though the work could be intimidating, I try to chunk it down for them so that they feel comfortable with it and they're not struggling. I think if you give them the positive feedback and tell them that they can do it, they feel they can do it and they're willing to work.

He explained that creating an inviting, safe, and comfortable classroom environment resulted in pupils attending school regularly. During our conversation, Julian agreed that he had high expectations for students, saying,

> It's exactly it. Some of them don't know that they just need that word of encouragement and a little help, and I think I do that very well. That's one of the reasons most kids want to be in my class. They know I make it easy for them and comfortable and enjoyable.

He acknowledged that his attempts to make learning fun in a comfortable space made students want to join his class.

A major initiative for building a safe, comfortable learning environment at Mountain School was the Tribes program. In conversations about this approach, I learned that it had been implemented over a 2-year period to improve social skills and to develop the learning community. Although the active focus for the initiative had shifted over the 2 years, several staff members reported that, by reducing behaviour problems and promoting staff professional development, the Tribes program promoted a safe and comfortable learning environment. Megan noted that the staff's efforts had made the school a good place to work. She said,

> I think it would be very difficult if you went to a school where there was not a learning community like our school, for example, if everyone did their own thing. I have only been at one other school, and it was pretty good too, but not as great as it is here. I feel comfortable with the people on staff, and everyone is so willing to help everyone out. I do not know what it would be like if it was not like that. I imagine it would be very difficult and stressful. I think that it is just so important to feel comfortable when you come to work.

The value of the learning community for Megan was first that her colleagues made her feel comfortable in her workplace and second that teachers were willing to help each other.

The fourth competency, professional sharing, figured throughout daily school interactions among students, staff, and the community. Teachers shared pedagogy, lessons, and time with their colleagues. Professional sharing that could benefit students by enhancing one another's teaching frequently occurred between grade classes, as described by Janet:

> There's a huge difference between someone who has one grade 7 class and someone who has three. It's still important obviously to collaborate with team members, but it's not as crucial. I guess you figure if you're educating the same grade level, you need to be on the same page.

Janet observed that, when same-grade teachers worked together and stayed current about the material, all the grade 7 students received consistent messages, even when the curriculum was taught by different teachers.

Professional sharing extended beyond matters of pedagogy to the actual school experience. Speaking figuratively, the physical walls between classes did not exist as ideas flowed back and forth between classes, regardless of whether they were the same or different grades. Jack described this situation at Jude School:

> Formal or informal, there's definitely a feeling that there are walls dividing the classrooms, but there's not–there's not–there's a physical boundary, but the teachers are open to interacting with students at all levels. The sharing and the information isn't isolated to a specific grade level. What's happening in one class can happen in another, and it doesn't necessarily have to be laterally with one grade 6 to grade 6 class, but rather a grade 1 to a grade 8. There's definitely that openness and a willingness to participate in everything.

In this excerpt, Jack described the school as a place where professional sharing occurred among all members, regardless of the grade level they taught. Later, he described a cross-division meeting where teachers shared student data and identified literacy skills as the area that required targeting by the team:

> This was a Junior/Intermediate meeting where everybody was together, even though they did break into their division. I did go and talk to [the Intermediate teachers] afterwards because they were down in one of the classrooms. They looked at their results and tried to see what they need to focus on. They've started a Literacy class scheduled in the rotation schedule, so one of the teachers is actually teaching literacy skills, and so they're starting to see that that is impacting on the results of the DRA [developmental reading assessment].

In this example, professional sharing occurred first during a cross-division meeting and subsequently deepened during a smaller team meeting. To address specific student needs, one team member, Janet, had assumed the role of literacy teacher to provide instruction to all intermediate classes in the identified literacy skill areas. From an analysis of student DRA results data, the team found that this targeted literacy skills teaching was improving student results. Jack's presence at these meetings enabled him to help move the literacy initiative into the Junior division.

I learned about another means for sharing literacy skills in a discussion with Megan, at Mountain School, when she described how she provided professional development for the Primary team:

> I actually did have to lead workshops last year. It wasn't my cup of tea. I wasn't comfortable doing it, but it was a good experience. I had to in-service the kindergarten and grade 1 teachers on some new assessments that we were doing and report that information.

Megan explained that her role as a Literacy Lead teacher the previous school year had put her in the position of the in-house expert trainer. In that role, she was expected to share skills with Primary team members, to assist with implementing new literacy assessment tools, to help with their delivery, and to collect and analyze data. She stated that she preferred sharing information in a more casual forum. She commented,

> My contributions to the learning community are sharing ideas. I have recently finished my Reading Specialist course. For example, sharing ideas from my action research work, not that I am going to be presenting, but here and there I talk to people and share ideas with them or our committee. Sharing and being

> flexible, trying new ideas, and being open to suggestions, not just communicating about your program but also for helping out with students that you might be having difficulty with. It is good to bounce ideas off one another, whether it is their academic ability that is the difficulty or whether the student is having social issues. It is good to be able to get that support from a colleague.

Megan shared ideas from her reading course with colleagues as a means for disseminating professional knowledge and getting feedback from colleagues to address student needs and to enhance teaching. She provided additional avenues for professional sharing in the following comment:

> I see the learning community as groups of teachers, staff, and students supporting each other professionally, doing book clubs, or sharing resources. It could be as small as a team learning community. It could be the whole staff as a community and staff meetings. I see it sort of everywhere.

Megan felt that ideas could be shared through a variety of methods and at different levels throughout the school and perhaps beyond. The school motto she presented: "Hand in hand we make a difference," summed up teacher interactions.

For Jane, sharing extended beyond the school into the broader community. She described such contributions in this manner:

> I'm thinking of community not just as the school community, but as the larger community. I know myself I try to do a lot of the community things. We go at Christmas time and we sing at the local church. A lot of other schools do that, too. We also do the soup kitchen as well, where we make soup or sandwiches in our little classroom and we send it to the church. At the church, every month, they do

> a Soup Kitchen where they take it to [the city] and they feed the poor, so I think there's a lot of that happening in our classrooms already.

Jane participated in the community through sharing the gift of song and food. In this way, her grade 1 students learned important life lessons like the value of giving to others within their community.

Expressions of Organizational Competency

To explore organizational competency, I was interested in the way that teachers worked at various levels throughout the school. To discover the means through which teachers built their organizational competency, I examined how they used existing school structures to improve their teaching abilities and to generate opportunities to work and learn together. This level of analysis yielded the following competencies: communication, professional growth, common focus, and distributed leadership.

The first competency, communication, included opportunities for teachers to talk or send messages to one another. At both Jude and Mountain Schools, I observed teachers creating communication avenues and using them to advance their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The communication avenues were expressed though formal and informal methods and were used for two forms of communication: pedagogic communication and affective communication.

One formal avenue of communication was observed when teachers met at structured meetings. An example found in both schools was learning community meetings held to share student data and to discuss student progress. These meetings originally were intended for pedagogic purposes where data were used to promote targeted teaching for student improvement, but they also served affective purposes where teachers could vent their frustrations and move forward in the daily teaching process. An example of these two uses occurred when teachers at Jude School presented student data from observation surveys at a learning community meeting. During a reflection about the meeting, Jane, a grade 1 teacher, described the pedagogic purpose by saying,

> That's why I came with this package of stuff here, which are actually the observation surveys. . . . We got into DRA and how that would be beneficial for the grade 3s to have, so that was kind of it. . . . We did talk about those problems that we have with it and how could we best use it.

In this meeting, I observed the academic focus in the teachers' discussions about how best to use a developmental reading assessment with grade 3 pupils. Data sharing, the official purpose of the meeting, took place to a certain degree and allowed teachers to decide on a course of action for assessing grade 3 students' development in reading. However, that meeting also served an affective purpose, as Jane further described:

> The grade teacher and you look at the observation surveys and see where your kids are and how you can help each other. That should have been done . . . I thought there was a lot of talking going on. . . . A couple of times we have gone with an agenda we talk about, but from my experience, it's like anything else, like kids in a classroom. You get distracted and you get talking about certain things, and some of it is good talk and some of it is just chat. A certain amount is good because people need to vent and let things out a bit.

In this learning community meeting, which took place during the school day, the teachers were to have met to discuss student data, but I observed a lot of talk about various other matters, including complaints about student behaviour and difficulties with parents. The

Primary division lead, Jane, described how the learning community meeting should ideally have progressed, with staff examining student data and determining collectively how to move forward to improve student success. However, these meetings served both purposes of sharing student data and allowing teachers to voice their problems. This observation illustrated that teachers used formal, planned meetings not just to communicate pedagogic information but also to share frustrations and to build relationships with teammates.

Jack, a Special Education teacher, provided further insight into this meeting and what may have caused the teachers to move away from the pedagogic purposes of analyzing important student diagnostic assessment data. He commented,

> The Primary meeting–I just felt like they may have missed the point . . . I think a lot of their attention has been focused on the report cards [due] in the next couple of weeks, and having to change what it is that they don't want to change, that they have been comfortable with: the qualifiers and the comments that they've been using, and now the new language and the qualifiers and then the level of achievement have been causing people stress . . . I think they needed to vent. I think they needed to talk about it, and they needed to talk about it with each other because there were things that were happening. There were things that other teachers could bring to the table that maybe they weren't necessarily getting in their casual day-to-day interactions.

Here, Jack's account expanded upon Jane's description of the communication patterns that took place during the meeting. Initially, they both felt that teachers missed the point of the meeting because they were not focused on student data, but later they observed that the forum of a formal meeting provided a communication channel for teachers to share their concerns and diffuse their stress over the revised report card process.

In a general discussion about teacher roles, Jane explained that teachers had many avenues for communication within the school and beyond to the school system. She said,

> The teacher has many roles, so in the learning community, the teacher is facilitating in her classroom. Then they are communicating with their partner if they have one in the same grade. At the next level, communicating within the division, and then within the school, and then within the board. So there's a lot of different roles within each of those areas for a teacher within the learning community.

In this school, teachers disseminated information and taught skills in their own classroom and then shared what they had done with their team partner(s). From there they shared information, materials, and effective practices with their division, the larger school community, and then beyond to the board, which provided team members with opportunities to communicate at various levels in the organization.

Another structure teachers used to disseminate information and to facilitate communication was the school intranet. I observed this channel being used in both schools, but only 1 participant in the study described it. Madeline, the ESL teacher at Mountain School, said, "Everyone seems good about communicating, whether it's informal like a quick [e-mail]. We check our [e-mail] regularly throughout the day, so that helps keep everybody in the loop." By communicating through the board intranet, teachers shared their ideas, lesson plans, data, and materials efficiently and quickly. I observed teachers during a staff meeting entering their student PM benchmark data into the board's data warehouse. Members of the grade 3 team and other teachers at both Mountain and Jude Schools sent each other lesson plans and ideas over the intranet, and they used it to check on what another teacher was working on during lessons or to keep ontrack with each other. The intranet provided teachers with a virtual forum to learn and grow together in their knowledge and teaching pedagogy.

The grade 3 team members at Mountain School had developed several formal and informal methods for communicating. Some communication took place at scheduled times like staff or learning community meetings, but I also observed it during brief encounters in the photocopy room or at lunch. Madison, a grade 3 team member, described this situation well when she said, "We do have big meetings to discuss ideas, but it doesn't have to be." She elaborated by noting that the teachers shared ideas during casual encounters in many places. Megan, her team partner, supported her position: "You don't have to have a big meeting to share your ideas. It could be in passing. . . . Everyone is so involved with everything, so it's kind of on the go." In this conversation with me, Madison and her team partners, Megan and Marion, agreed that they held formal meetings to discuss important matters, but that sharing occurred informally as well through brief encounters while passing from one activity to another. In this way, they used the formal structures and also created informal structures to communicate with one another throughout the day.

A second organizational competency was the ability to deliver professional development for colleagues. This competency, which I have labelled professional growth, was demonstrated when teachers used existing organizational structures to develop each other's professional skills and to share knowledge and information. The structures included formal staff and learning community meetings as well as planned and informal mentoring activities.

An example of a formal structure where I observed professional growth as the focus was at a staff meeting. It began with teacher leaders demonstrating daily physical activity (DPA) skills and staff participating in some practice of these activities in the corridor. The professional development continued with a hands-on session to gain experience using the Design and Technology (D & T) binder and practice in implementing this literacy initiative. Here teachers were asked to complete a task with materials provided in the D & T laboratory. Mark, the Intermediate team leader, described the process he used to facilitate sharing information, materials, and skills:

> With the D & T, it's kept simple. Everybody's going to be having a binder. Here are some things to do, and there's stuff that's going in, and give it a try. I think, and I keep saying it, that the focus has to be defined, but it also has to be really simple for everybody to implement and at the same time effective as well, that you're going to see some results.

Mark explained that using a binder with the materials easily accessible made implementation more straightforward. At the staff meeting I observed, staff were shown how to use this binder with students. The meeting provided a formal structure for the staff to learn and apply their new professional skills. By incorporating time for job-embedded professional development, staff members had an opportunity to learn and grow together with teammates.

Professional growth through mentorship was another means for developing team members' skillsets. Julian, an Intermediate teacher from Jude School, believed that helping other teachers during his preparation period was important to their pedagogical development as effective math or physical education teachers. As a result of the mentorship, novice teachers or experienced teachers could provide students with solid mathematics or physical education instruction. He said,

> For math or phys-ed or something else, where they're having a little bit of difficulty with some concept, they'll come to me. Grade 6, grade 5, it doesn't really matter what grade. I'll either go over it with them or say, "Some days I don't mind coming in during my planning prep. I can help you out or during Music." And I give them an idea as to an easy way to do things. I know some things in math aren't always the easiest, so that becomes an area, if you've got some expertise, you can help people. And that's sometimes what we do.

Julian indicated that senior teachers could mentor junior teachers and provide job-embedded professional development through team teaching and observation of one another's practices in the classroom setting. When asked about having common preparation periods to facilitate his working with other staff members, Julian replied,

> That's the tricky part. I know we try to get blocks of time [but] that was crazy because of one gym and French teachers, and it was hard to block a language section uninterrupted. It would have been really nice to do, but timetabling is very difficult to do.

However, by structuring his day and using his own preparation period to work with his colleagues in mathematics, physical education, or any needed area, Julian found time to help novice and experienced teachers develop their skills, pedagogy, and understanding of complex concepts.

In his description of the leadership roles at Jude School, Julian observed that only a few staff leaders remained. He noted that mentoring new teachers was a means to create new leaders:

> [Four teachers] and myself are the only existing part of it. So that's something that you have to do. You keep some stability with somebody in there, and then you can do some mentorship with some of the new people, and it works. It works out. We work well together.

With high staff turnover at Jude School, mentoring new staff members was necessary to make them aware of the key focus areas for their division and for the school.

A third organizational competency was the ability of the teachers to develop a common focus for the school and the students. Janet, an Intermediate teacher at Jude School, and Madison, a grade 3 teacher at Mountain School, both noted that providing students with opportunities and valuing their differences were key characteristics that teachers focused on at their schools. Janet stated,

> [This is] a huge school for inclusion. We all believe in it so much; it helps what we're trying to do here. What do we value? How to reach our kids, especially Intermediates. This is a challenge in itself. The parents, too.

Janet believed that to have a clear focus on students and to include everyone was a key to success. In striving to meet the needs of all learners and to include parents in this process, the teachers at Jude School structured their daily school life to achieve inclusion and to improve learning for all pupils. Madison outlined a similar focus at Mountain School:

> A huge part of what the school believes in is the equal opportunity for all, whether it be for the children–focusing on the children. There are so many different beliefs

> and values coming from the home. Mountain School offers the "Angel Fund" for when we do trips. So when we do trips, everyone's always included.

Marion completed her thought, saying, "Regardless if they have the money or not." Madison extended this comment: "Yes, just an equal opportunity for all of the students. The beliefs of the staff . . . are all so similar: the vision, the values, and the beliefs. They're all intertwined." In these examples, Janet at Jude School and the grade 3 team at Mountain School spoke to the idea of creating a common focus, valuing student differences, and providing equal opportunities for all students. The development of this competency was facilitated by teachers using existing school structures, such as common preparation periods or after-school meetings, to determine goals for the day, the week, and the team. Both schools participated in similar planning activities, with Mountain School timetabling shared preparation times during the day and Jude School holding regular meetings after school to achieve a similar outcome.

To provide students with consistent pedagogy and instruction, the grade 3 team at Mountain School communicated regularly to ensure that they were working towards the same outcomes while maintaining the integrity of their vision for individual students in their classrooms. Madison described the means by which they achieved this consistency:

> For me it's just making sure that we're always on the same page, even if it's not doing the same lesson the same day. We're still all doing the same things. I think it's also important to have the understanding that even though we're on the same page, we're still working towards the goals of our own classroom and allowing that to lead us as well.

Joseph, a grade 6 teacher at Jude School, described a similar situation of collaboration and common goal-setting between himself and his coteam leader, when they met over lunch to plan various rubrics or programming pieces to share with their division teams. He stated,

> [Name] and I are friends; we go out for lunch, and so we'd be talking about stuff. We'd come up with rubrics or whatever it is. Instead of just keeping them between us, we'd share them with our division. We brought in a few different things for language such as the Four-Square, and now it's the thing that everybody in the division is using. Another one is the 6+1 Traits of Writing–the 5s and 6s are doing that. . . . What we're going to do in terms of Historica, a lot of people don't want to do it, so Jason and I took that on. We kind of divide the work amongst us.

These examples provided insight into how teachers worked together in a division to set common goals for their classrooms and divisions that ensured students were receiving the same information and concepts. The teachers noted that, although the delivery of the material might change from teacher to teacher, the essential learning outcomes endured.

Matt, an Intermediate teacher, described how the character of the school board offered a more fluid way to focus on pupils. He said,

> Despite the size of the board, we're very rural. We're low key. I know in a nearby board, you have to wear ties all the time. Here it's about the kids. They really do believe that it's about being there and it's about setting the tone, and I like it. I don't know whether I could work in the two nearby boards, that corporate style. I don't like education as a business.

Matt described the school board as rural and grassroots in its practices, whereas he thought that the adjacent urban and corporate school boards focused more on outward appearances and perhaps missed the focal point, the students. The common focus among teachers could also be seen in the classroom among students. He elaborated on this point when he said,

> You have to have something bigger than the group. It has to transcend time. So in my class I always introduce ourselves at the beginning of the year as, "You are the new members of 78 or 73 or Mr. M's class. There are people that are 10 years ahead of you, but if you say my name it's like a little password in and they'll know, good or bad." . . . Then you have to have something that's worth having, so you create a classroom, a school that meets everybody at some point, who are all for something. Be it sports, academics, fun, stupidity, silliness, and then you have to find each individual's role in that and build that up as a class so everybody knows. And then you have to sit back and let things happen on their own.

Matt created a common focus in the classroom so that all students had a shared focus, with each person contributing something to the whole. In this fashion, students identified themselves as a group within their classroom setting.

The final organizational competency of distributed leadership was observed as staff participated in various leadership activities and stepped into leadership positions as people moved on to other schools. By sharing leadership tasks, teachers brought multiple experiences to facilitate the evolution of teaching and learning in the school. Jeanette, a Junior teacher and school vice principal, shared leadership with Joseph, the leader of her teaching team. When I asked Jeanette if she was the Junior team leader, she replied, "Another teacher is team leader. If we had any questions or any planning sessions, he would usually head it up." Although Jeanette was a formal leader in the school, she shared leadership responsibilities with a classroom teacher. In both schools, team leaders were part of the school's organizational structure. Through sharing leadership tasks, staff members divided responsibilities and shared the workload. This division of labour not only helped to lessen the burden, but it also provided teachers with more time to plan and work together as a team, which ultimately benefited the students.

Another means for sharing leadership was to include all staff, both permanent and visiting members, in the learning community and to provide opportunities for teachers to contribute in their areas of strength. Jeanette said,

> Empowering them. In the learning community, you also have student teachers–including them into the learning community, even if they're here for 4 or 5 weeks and they go off into the big wide world. This is what they did at Jude, and they really worked well together.

The process of sharing leadership and facilitator roles with all members of the team illustrated to novice teachers the importance of sharing the workload, so that when they entered a school as a contract teacher, they understood the importance of shared leadership.

By having distributed leadership opportunities available for teachers, an informal leadership succession was born as teachers who participated in leadership tasks were capable of assuming leadership roles when existing leaders changed schools. This sharing of leadership provided all staff at both schools with the opportunity both to lead and to follow. It also ensured that when leaders moved on, new ones were ready to step into leadership roles. This situation was described by Megan, a grade 3 teacher at Mountain

School, who said, “A lot of teachers here have leadership qualities. If some people left, you would see others step up. . . . Everyone always offers to jump in to help out. . . . We’ve had quite a turnover lately, actually. A lot of turnover.” The grade 3 team agreed that, over the past 2 years, several people had left the school, and they believed that others would volunteer to take over those leadership positions. They supported this belief by describing how staff offered to help each other out with initiatives and other matters. Matt described how the lead literacy teacher moved on and assumed a vice principalship, which left the role of lead literacy teacher open on staff. This leadership position was filled by Marion, and I observed the Primary team and their literacy focus moving forward in the area of reading skills. This ability to share leadership and to step into new roles upon the departure of key leaders sustained the implemented change initiatives.

A further example of distributed leadership was evident at Jude School when Jack, the Special Education teacher, led team members through a process of examining student data trends. The school principal had assigned Jack, as Special Education teacher, to lead this meeting, which gave him the opportunity to participate in leadership tasks, although he was not necessarily aware of this fact. Jack stated, “I don’t know whether I was in charge. I was asked to help facilitate it and make sure that the work was happening.” The teacher in this case was asked by the school principal to ensure that the important work of studying student data and planning for appropriate targeted lessons and student success took place at this learning community meeting.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presents results of the first level of descriptive analysis, which was completed to understand how teachers’ knowledge, skills, and abilities were expressed within a multidimensional school context. The details of these competencies are summarized in Table 2. This chapter presented the case contexts, the participants, and expressions of teachers' personal capacity and competencies. The context revealed who the teachers were, how they interacted, and how the school facilitated their collective work. The data revealed that educators were engaged in activities that brought them together to focus on educational matters and to examine ways for enhancing their pedagogy and improving student learning. Teachers interacted regularly with each other to enhance professional capabilities, to focus priorities and goals, and to share leadership tasks within supportive and comfortable learning environments. Organizing the data into professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies showed how educators worked on targeted strategies that made them better teachers, how they interacted to help each other improve, and how they used school structures to enhance their teaching and pedagogy and to build collaborative practices and shared understandings.

Table 2

Expressions of Teacher Competencies

Domain	**Competency**	**Action**
Professional competency	Student-growth focus	Direct efforts towards planning for student success
	Self-reflection	Examine existing practices to improve pedagogy
	Action research	Examine teaching and student learning following a plan, present, reflect, and revise cycle
	Role awareness	Identify strengths and weaknesses to facilitate skill development over time
	Role shift	Assume challenging new roles and extend abilities into new tasks
Interpersonal competency	Supportive relationships	Use collaborative work to strengthen and improve teaching abilities and to focus on improving student learning
	Collective interests	Identify and set common goals to enhance student learning
	Comfortable, safe environment	Make schools places where staff and students want to be
	Professional sharing	Share pedagogy, lessons, materials, and time with colleagues to enhance teaching and to benefit students
Organizational competency	Communication	Talk formally and informally on pedagogic and/or affective matters
	Professional growth	Use existing structures to develop professional skills and share knowledge and information
	Common focus	Develop a shared focus for the school and students
	Distributed leadership	Participate in leadership activities and step into leadership roles

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETIVE RESULTS

The first phase of analysis, which yielded a description of teacher competencies, gave insights into how the educators worked within the learning community environment. What was still unclear was how the teachers developed the competencies. Were the competencies inherent to the individuals, or were they developed through external influences? To answer this question, second and third levels of analysis were conducted through inductive data analysis. Phase Two explored the external influences, and Phase Three examined the inherent qualities of the educators. These results are presented in this chapter.

Phase Two: Influences on Teacher Personal Capacity and Competencies

In the second level, an inductive analysis was conducted to identify what influenced teachers' personal capacity and competencies. Selection criteria were developed by using both latent and manifest content analysis strategies. The manifest content included elements that were present physically in the text, such as the repetition of word patterns (e.g., teachers collaborated), and the latent content incorporated an interpretive reading of the text (e.g., teachers worked together effectively as teams). As part of the content analysis, I looked for elements that affected teaching practices and pedagogy. Specifically, I examined the data to identify external influences with internal effects. I used inductive analysis to develop categories that would capture the influences and effects. The analysis yielded four categories of influence: professional learning, social bonds or teacher cohesion, resistance, and school administrators. These influences and their effects are presented in this chapter.

Influences of Professional Learning

The influence of professional learning emerged from an analysis that concentrated on the following questions: What did teachers' new learning provide or enable them to do that they did not have or do before? How did these influences change their practices and pedagogy? This analysis yielded four major effects: being exposed to new ideas, moving beyond comfortable routines, questioning further, and developing some shared understandings.

The first influence of professional learning was being exposed to new ideas. Madison, a grade 3 teacher, recognized that new information acquired from colleagues caused her to diversify professionally. She stated,

> Every day here, I grow in my professional development. Whether I hear about a situation that either Marion or Megan have had and I learn from that how to deal with it if it were to happen in my classroom or with other staff as well. It could be as simple as dealing with a parent, or different academic situations that happen, or different ways of teaching. Every day I walk out of here learning something new, and the more that we share those types of incidental learnings, I think you grow professionally as well.

Madison described how being exposed to new ideas assisted her in learning about how to handle situations. Exposure to new ideas also provided teachers with an expert resource person to contact. Jane, a grade 1 teacher, described this situation:

> Everybody has their strength, and I see a lot of sharing of that even in our meeting. Sometimes there are other teachers that feel good about what they're doing in certain things that have worked for them, and they're willing to share it

> with us. So we know who to go to if we're wondering how that might work and get a little bit of guidance from someone that has more experience.

This example illustrated how staff members grew professionally by knowing who the expert teacher on staff was to assist them as needed.

Professional learning also prepared teachers to move beyond comfortable routines. Matt, a grade 7/8 teacher, described that as a beginning teacher he was thrust into participating in extracurricular activities, which opened many opportunities for him. As a result, he believed in strongly encouraging new teachers to expand their horizons. Matt expanded on his approach:

> I just keep throwing stuff at them like, "You might want to try this and you might want to try that." . . . Just pull guys in. I really believe in jumping in with both feet. Pull them in. Pull them out of their comfort zone. That's what happened to me when I started, and it was the best thing that ever happened. It changed my career. So anytime I have these new teachers. . . . I'm always [saying], "Do it. Just jump in and do it. You don't know what you're going to get."

Matt's personal experience had led him to believe that new teachers needed to move beyond their boundaries to learn new things that could help develop their teaching careers.

Thinking about teaching practices and pushing past routine operations to question further and examine ideas in more depth was the quest that Jeanette, a half-time Junior teacher and half-time vice principal, described. During our interview, Jeanette posed a number of questions that she asked of herself, her principal, and her teaching partner to push into a deeper examination of educational matters:

> I find that I'm really open to the principal or my teaching partner: Where are we here? How can we deal with this in a better way? [My teaching partner] has been here 9 years, and she has a lot of that information that she can filter on to me. I think you need to be collaborative like that. You need to be open. You need to work as a team and be able to take others' suggestions and feedback and use them: How do we implement them and how do we bring them into our community? How do we actually use them? Being able to talk to each other: How are you using that in your classroom? How can we do it better? Things like differentiated learning: How can it work in my classroom–work better? . . . With assessments, the data collection, [we did] a lot of that last year. Sure, you can filter that data out–What are you going to do with that now, and how as a division are we going to use that data now?

By working through these questions, Jeanette and her colleagues determined better methods for implementing ideas like differentiated instruction or for using data to inform instruction.

Professional learning also helped the teachers to develop some shared understandings about teaching practices, pedagogy, and student learning. Julian described a situation where teachers looked at pupils' assessment data to determine targeted strategies to facilitate student learning:

> We looked last year at learning styles. We don't have kids that are one learning style. In the old days you just taught one way. It was visual or whatever. Now we're doing a lot of the assessments to find out the learning styles of the child and teach to that: . . . programming for the needs of the individual rather than just one

> [style].

At Jude School, by looking closely at student learning styles, the teachers were able to get everyone on the same page concerning individual learner needs. At Mountain School, shared understanding in one case grew out of an existing grade 3 program. Madison explained,

> What it comes down to is Marion was the first of us with grade 3, and her program is great! There's no need for changes. When I came in, you know, sure, there are things that I see: "Well let's try this," and the same with Megan, but it comes from having a great program.

These grade 3 teachers built on the strong foundation and a common teaching focus to discover areas for improvement that enhanced the program. Mountain School also developed a common focus by setting goals for improvement planning. Madeline, an ESL teacher, explained the process:

> Every year we work on SMART [Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound] goals. We have meetings once a month, and we see what has to be done. This is probably the fourth year we have focused on writing. It started really broad and focused more and more.

Madeline described how teacher teams developed a shared focus on writing, first by examining what needed to be completed and then by narrowing to target specific writing needs. Marion, a grade 3 teacher, elaborated on how SMART goal-setting changed from year to year:

> There are different visions every year for the Literacy, Math. Now it's Design and Technology, but it was Climate Committee before. We'd have a different

> SMART goal, as we called it, for the year, and we'd come up with those as a staff.

Megan added to this discussion by saying, "So we're constantly revamping our goals." In this example, the shared process of SMART goal-setting led to a common focus for staff. Mike, a grade 6 teacher, believed that shared understanding depended on communication across the levels of the school organization. He said,

> I don't know if you can just look at teachers. . . . The communication has to go across all the groups, and all the groups have to be trying to achieve the same goal. They can't be on two different paths. I think just from the other school that I worked at, this one definitely does that very well. They're all on the same page.

For Mike, cross-talk between and among divisions ensured that all members had a consistent focus to develop the desired shared understanding. Similarly, Madison felt that colleagues needed a mutual understanding and growth-oriented perspective. She elaborated on this thought:

> It's important to have a learning community so that we're all on the same page. I think that as a staff you never stop learning, you never stop growing, and it's important to learn from each other's mistakes or each other's gains.

Madison saw a shared focus as a pathway to learn from one another's failures as well as from successes. This kind of learning helped her to grow professionally.

Influences of Social Bonds or Teacher Cohesion

The influence of social bonds or teacher cohesion grew out of the analytic question: What influenced how teachers felt as professionals? This analysis provided four broad effects: professional security, professional confidence, professional well-being, and professional belonging.

The sense of professional security grew within a pleasant and inviting setting. Jane, a grade 1 teacher, described Jude School as a place where members felt that they were free to ask questions:

> I think it would be important that all stakeholders in the community, whether it be pupils, teachers, administration, cleaners, parents within a learning community, everyone should have the opportunity to participate, to voice their opinion, to facilitate. Everyone should feel welcome and comfortable talking about the things they think are necessary within that community for that community to work at its best possible learning. . . . It's important to have an inviting kind of atmosphere so that people feel that they're welcome to come in to see what's going on, and they don't feel threatened to ask you a question or to give you a call.

By having a safe climate to voice opinions, teachers and other community members felt welcomed, which facilitated discussion. Jack, a Special Education teacher, presented a similar description:

> For those that have been here for the long haul, I think they're starting to see the payoff of what it is that we're trying to do. That's been encouraging them to take it a step further. For those of us that are new to the environment, it's definitely made us feel safe. It's made us feel welcome.

Jack felt a sense of security as a new member at Jude School. Jeanette, a half-time grade 4 teacher and half-time vice principal, described a similar experience of feeling welcomed and comfortable to ask questions.

> Only being here since September, the whole learning community has been very

> welcoming and approachable. I can approach anybody for any type of suggestion. Being an outsider coming in, it has been a wonderful experience for me. I think that any teacher coming into the school says, "Wow, Jeanette, what a great school you have." You have a supply teacher say, "Please call me back." What a great feeling.

Jeanette believed that the inviting and secure atmosphere was because of the Catholic school setting:

> Everything we do is faith based, it's value based, and it reaches into our heart and our soul. It's not that the public board wouldn't have the same thing, but it's ingrained into everything that we do. The lessons we teach, the way we all communicate to people, our inviting approach. I'm not saying the public school doesn't do that, but it's who we are, and it's what we believe in.

Jeanette presented the Catholic faith as a basis for the inviting culture in the school, but a caring culture was not limited to Jude School. Mary also described Mountain School members as happy and supported in their school lives. She explained,

> That's an important thing in the school too, because there are tons of extracurricular [activities] going on. The kids are happy, the staff is happy. This is the nicest, most caring, compassionate staff. We're colleagues and co-operative. Definitely collaborative. That's why we work so well together.

Mary believed that because teachers were content, they worked well together. Madison, a grade 3 teacher, presented a similar picture of the staff:

> There are lots of other roles that a teacher plays in a learning community, but I think it basically comes down to the support of each other and the support of the

> students. . . . The support and sharing of what works and what doesn't work: As a team we have a very good learning community. We're very supportive of each other, we share ideas, and talk about what works and why it works, and things that don't work. As a Primary Division, the same sort of thing: We're very supportive. At our Primary meetings we end up often veering off a little bit to offer each other that support.

The social bonds felt by teachers also generated a sense of professional confidence. Jack described how these social bonds had given him a new sense of interest in teaching.

> There is room here for us to spread our wings. Not that I felt stifled at all by my old community, but by my old position, yes, and by the limitations, I think, of what that school community could give me. Coming here has been like a freeing and a shot in the arm for me professionally and has really got me interested in education again.

Jack believed that he could explore and grow as a professional at Jude School. Mark, a grade 8 teacher at Mountain School, also saw the value of professional growth. He observed that keeping initiatives simple facilitated teachers trying new things and being successful in those endeavours.

> People can see the benefit. People can work with a group that they're interested in, and then the idea within these groups is, let's make it simple for people. Let's not say, "Okay now, everybody, in your class you've got to do 10 minilessons." Let's keep it simple. I think with that approach, that's why we've had success at the school.

Mark noted that simple, practical strategies gave teachers the confidence to share ideas in their groups and to participate successfully in initiatives like persuasive writing, problem solving, and Design and Technology, among others.

Professional well-being resulted from the social bonds forged by teachers at both Jude and Mountain Schools. One of the effects was described by Janet: "Quite simply, stress relief. It's amazing how stressful you could be at the end of the day, and you go talk to your team partners, and then automatically half of it's gone." The simple act of talking to teaching colleagues at the end of the school day lifted a weight from Janet's shoulders and helped her to feel better about her day. Julian similarly described the setting at Jude School as one where teachers had a common bond of friendship and spirituality that created unity among staff and students. In the interview with Julian, I suggested that, as a Catholic faith community, staff moved easily into a learning community structure for professional development. Julian agreed:

> Yes this is us. That part of it brings us together. I think that sometimes you look at the difference between public and Catholic and all these other things. I just look at it–we have that element, that spiritual element that brings us together, a common bond, and we build off of that in all of our classes. It's not just in one. You know, I don't teach religion just as a religion class. It could be in a math class, it could be in anything. Sometimes things come up, and we try to do that, but I think that helps us make a good learning community because we have a common bond, so when we get into a learning community, which is a common thing, we already know where we're at.

For Julian, the links forged by their beliefs gave individual staff members a common ground to stand on and a sense of well-being as they moved forward in their learning community. A sense of well-being grew for other teachers from the level of comfort they felt sharing with each other. Madeline described this situation:

> We have a really special group of teachers here, and we have a comfort level with each other. We do things socially, and I know who I can go to when I need to borrow resources. When teachers get together, we chat, and we are open and friendly. We genuinely want to help, and it has contributed to all of us benefiting.

At Mountain School, a sense of well-being emerged from the respect that staff members had for one another. In a discussion with Mark, he captured the essence of this effect when he said, "Well, I think it also comes to this idea of respect for each other." As colleagues demonstrated respect for each other, they felt good about themselves and about their professional lives.

Professional belonging is the final effect of the social bonds formed at Jude and Mountain Schools. When teachers acknowledged each other's differences, the sense of professional validation helped them feel that they belonged. Jack, a Special Education teacher, described his thoughts:

> We are all different in this building, so what do we need to make life work, to make our professional life work for us? And then, how do we bring that to the community? So I think it's to really kind of make that whole community, to identify the individual needs of the entire community, and I'm not just talking about students, but the adults in the building as well, and the teachers.

Jack suggested that the needs of individuals and of members as a whole community must be considered if teachers are to experience success in their working lives. He continued his thoughts about inclusion and belonging:

> You've also got to get involved all of your support players in the school. Whether it's your educational assistants, your support staff in the office, or in the library, the caretakers, everybody has a role to play. It may not be as clearly defined as the teachers or the administrators, but they're part and parcel of the product. I think anybody that walks through the front doors of the building–we are support players too.

Jack believed that everyone at Jude School had an important place and a meaningful role to fulfill. At Jude School, the staff built close connections both within and outside of the school. This situation was described by Jeff:

> It starts off informal, the greeting, the stopping, the chatting in the hallways, the talks, the willingness and wanting to listen to one another to share good stories, bad stories, to become even closer, and not only in what we do in school but what we do outside the school. That's number one.

The relationships created among staff linked members together. A means to build this sense of belonging was described by Jeanette as a feeling of being welcomed. She stated,

> It's so inviting that you feel it as soon as you walk in the door because there's a smiling face at the door. I know that I've said, "Good morning," and there's a happy face greeting everyone. It's a stable, safe, and happy environment. We're all safe, it's all fair, and it's all even. I hope that the kids and the teachers know that I'm a fair person and it's not all black and white.

The welcoming environment provided members with a safe, happy, and welcoming school that encouraged a sense of place. To crystallize the effect on teachers, Janet said, "It is more of a family. When it boils down to everything, you've got 'Family.' I think that it's a good word to describe it." In this one word, *family*, Janet provided a descriptor for why teachers felt a sense of acceptance. This feeling of belonging to the group was experienced similarly at Mountain School, as described by Madison:

> I've worked at other schools in the board, and when I came here, just walking in the door for my first interview, it was very different. Part of it I think is because it's a Tribes school, so I notice a huge difference in the students. The students overall were just very welcoming to me as a new staff, and the same with the staff. I thought that they were very welcoming, especially Marion, in my first year teaching grade 3 . . . offered to share everything. We did a lot of planning together. The same with other staff members teaching different grades. Very welcoming to me, and I think that's how the learning community started with me: feeling like instantly I was part of the team.

Madison had a sense upon entering the school of belonging to the team. This experience was strengthened by staff members' efforts to share materials and time. Madeline elaborated on the open nature of the staff and her experience at Mountain School:

> If I had children, I think I would want them to come to this school. I am really grateful I have this job. The openness and willingness to learn from each other started with a few people, but it is all encompassing now. It started with a small group. Back when I started there was a core. I would say Mitchell [the principal], who was so wonderful. Our caretaker knew what was going on. My teaching partners and a lot of teachers were in their first 5 years of teaching.

Madeline believed that the social activities brought the staff together and created a sense of membership. Mark shared a similar sense of professional belonging:

> I think really there's got to be a good connection between the team, there's got to be camaraderie between them. They've got to have a common goal, and it also works well that we have people that have different specialties, and they bring their specialty to the table.

According to Mark, the social bond helped members to feel professionally and personally connected and members of the team.

Influences of Resistance

The influence of resistance affected two groups of people: individuals who resisted the learning community directions and others who attempted to gather resisters into the group. The questions that drew out this influence were: What happened when individual teachers did not follow the group? What were the observed outcomes? From these questions grew three effects: missing opportunities, providing a voice of reason, and gaining time to settle. At times, the influence of resistance was negative, while at other times it provided unexpected positive results.

Resistance produced a negative effect when teachers missed opportunities because they chose to ignore change. Madeline, an ESL teacher, presented one way in which opportunities were missed: "Some people don't want to change, and they want to fly under the radar. There's almost like this sort of taboo thing of–we can't talk about this because we might shake somebody's program up." At times, teachers who did not enjoy change tried to go by unnoticed, and others did not want to disturb them. By not moving forward and adopting change, both the status quo teacher and the partner who "did not want to rock the boat" for a colleague missed the chance to grow in their pedagogy and practice–a potentially serious situation if continued in the long term. Mark, a grade 8 teacher, described this situation:

> My style of teaching is very, very open. If [my teaching partner] said, "This movie is great," and I haven't watched it–she's got it–it's due tomorrow–I'm going to pop it in. As I'm watching it 150 questions are coming to my mind, so I will start asking the kids about it, but there are a lot of people who are reluctant to –you know, "I don't want to try something new. I don't want to see that. It's scary. It's not what I've done before."

In this example, Mark illustrated how teachers may have missed opportunities due to their fear of trying new things, participating in new activities, or using unfamiliar teaching materials. Mackenzie, the vice principal at Mountain School, provided another example of how teachers missed valuable opportunities: "You get that mentality–don't bring forward a complaint because then you'll head the committee for it–that kind of mentality that sets in, in most schools." Mackenzie suggested that teachers acquired a particular mindset that led them to resist an initiative for fear of being put in a leadership role.

By avoiding change, teachers sometimes were providing a voice of reason. This positive effect resulted when teachers stopped the change process to consider all aspects of a particular issue. Mary, a grade 2 teacher, described this situation:

> Everybody does the same thing, and then you go off into this tangent, and it just takes you nowhere, and it's useless. I guess you need people–that black hat thinker that will always bring you back, and make you question, "Okay, why are we doing this?"

By moving the group's thinking forward to examine their motives for a particular initiative, the black hat thinker blocked dead-end proposals, and brought the group back to focus on issues that benefited students and staff. This kind of open discussion also enabled teachers to support their position when opposed by resisters and to embrace change because of the perceived positive impacts for disturbing the status quo. Mary expanded,

> There have been people who are negative. If I agree, I try to defend it. I will defend my viewpoints, and I will try to find the positive in everything. Like anybody, I'm not very fond of change, but then sometimes I find out that change is really good. I love it. You've got to shake things up a bit. It makes you think, so I guess I would try to pass that along . . . look on the bright side, and always thinking: How is this good for kids?

By looking for the positive aspects in her work, Mary found that change could be beneficial. To see change as a good outcome, was a useful strategy for bringing resisters into the learning community. Another method that teachers used to encourage membership was described by Janet:

> There's only so much you can do. Right? It's either showing them the benefits, and if it works, [great,] if not, what else can you do other than come off as a forceful person? Probably not the best way to approach it.

Janet believed that resisters could be encouraged to buy in to a desired change initiative through pointing out how the change could help them or their students.

Another positive effect of resistance was teachers' gaining time to settle in change initiatives. Matt, a grade 7/8 teacher, felt it was important to allow teachers to find their own way and to understand their own direction in teaching. He said,

> You start with the belief that they're professionals. You allow them that opportunity, and you allow them to fail. They'll find their own way. If it's good, and if it's real, and if it works, it will get done with or without forced mandates and coercion. If it's not good, or if it's not right, it won't succeed no matter what you do. So focus on what it is you're trying to do, not who you're trying to get to do it.

According to Matt, giving teachers the time to try and to fail validated them as professionals and allowed colleagues to determine their own individual path to improved pedagogy. Melania, a teacher at Mountain School, described her frustration when teachers were not provided with time, additional training, support, and at times supervision to implement changes:

> Money and time restraints with so much new coming in, and you still have to do the old. You're stuck, because you left it until the end, and you could have done a better job if [you had] more time.

Although Melania expressed some unhappiness with her situation, Mitchell, the principal, described the process he had put in place to help Melania achieve success:

> [She] needed walk-throughs, and the vice principal [was assigned] to evaluate the use of Tribes community circles in the classroom. [His role was] to ensure that this was taking place and following through with learning community participation.

In our interview, the school principal presented a counterpoint to Melania's frustration as he explained how teachers were supported and supervised by the vice principal as they undertook Tribes activities. If necessary, they were also given additional training to promote understanding, acceptance, and implementation of the initiative. In Melania's case, by having more time to assimilate the tenets of Tribes, she had an opportunity to acclimatize, and she eventually adopted the change within her classroom.

Influences of School Administrators

To understand how administrators influenced teachers within the context of the school learning community, I asked the following questions: What roles did administrators play in determining teachers' participation and buy-in to learning community initiatives? How did administrators shape teachers' responses to the multiple, fast-paced changes taking place within a vibrant and evolving learning community? Four effects were uncovered that provide a clearer perspective on the administrators' role within a learning community context: facilitator, vision builder, encourager, and supporter.

At Jude School, Jane, a grade 1 teacher, described the principal's role as a facilitator when she said:

> The role of the principal is that he facilitates the teachers in the ways that they need to be able to teach within their classrooms, within their divisions, with their partners, and that he gives the information that's from the board–provides us with the information that we need to know, and that he could take back our ideas, our concerns to the board level

Jane presented the principal as a liaison person who filtered key information from the board level. The administrator also brought forward and shared teachers' ideas with board personnel. Joseph, a grade 6 teacher, agreed with Jane:

> [He's] just the leader, the facilitator. He brings it to us, gives us a lot of–he doesn't really tell us to do anything. Well, sometimes he has to tell us to do something, but he'll give us a choice of what we're doing. It works the same way with us as it does with the kids: If you give them a choice it works a lot better.

Joseph positioned the administrator as a leader who facilitates staff by providing them with choices about issues that require their attention. Facilitation also was evident when the administrator led by modelling for the staff. Jason, a grade 6 teacher, illustrated this role:

> It's the same as the principal and the teachers. Obviously they're in the role of being a teacher and administration, so again a lot of it's just being open-minded and leading by example. I mean, Jeanette was in here this morning for 30 seconds. She came in, asked, "How things are going? What are you doing?" I just finished transitions and marked their tests. "Okay, carry on."

In this case, the administrator's interest in the teacher's daily teaching activities helped her maintain contact with what was happening in the school. Jeanette further explained her interest in the teachers' experiences:

> Yes, and I would even come out and ask them. "Is there something I can do to help you work with so and so better? How can I improve that relationship?" And then maybe they may not want to speak to that person on a formal basis, but maybe encourage the relationship to work.

Julian, a grade 8 teacher, similarly described the administrator's role as observing closely and keeping a finger on the school's heartbeat:

> The principal kind of oversees and makes sure the curriculum is being taught and

> administered throughout the school properly. I think his role is making sure we have proper resources, making sure that we work together, because it's a learning community. Obviously he's at the top of that learning community, making sure that our roles are designated by him and making sure that things are going smoothly within the school. I think the school runs itself, but the principal's there to oversee and make sure. Their role is minimized in a way when things work well, but when they don't work well, it's their job to come in and make sure things are back on track.

Madeline, an ESL teacher at Mountain School, also described the administrator as an overseer who observed and monitored the progress of the learning community:

> At this point it's more of just overseeing everything. There are a lot of learning communities in place in the school already, and Mitchell just kind of checks in and asks what's going on and shows that he has an interest. He shows that he appreciates that people go to the [meetings]. They take the time out of either their lunches or after school or their preps to meet with people and try to make things better for the kids in the school.

Mike elaborated on this idea:

> I definitely think so–I think that in terms of, with Mitchell, I think he's managed to bring strong people into the group and we have a very good group dynamic where different people are good at different things and everyone kind of complements each other.

Not everyone, however, was pleased with how the administrators facilitated the leadership structure. At Jude School, for example, the principal had chosen to rotate division team leaders annually. Julian, a grade 8 teacher, described the process this way:

> Each year . . . we try to switch [the division leader] so that there's somebody new who's going to do that, step into it. So in case one person is moving on, each person's had a chance at being a division leader, or running some sort of important event that's going to be part of the school.

Julian did not think the process worked well. He believed that mentoring needed to take place before teachers took on leadership functions. In our conversations, he noted that assigning teachers to leadership roles when they did not have leadership experience or desire led to problems. He explained,

> There's no gym today. The kids will be upset. This bothers me. When I was in charge, we organized this, and I sent a timetable out ahead of time, and you knew of a schedule change. Now we don't do that anymore, and I never know what's going on. When I was in charge, they did things my way.

Julian's concern was that the principal failed to provide sufficient preparation, facilitation, and direction for teacher leaders. Another example of a lack in administrative facilitation occurred at Mountain School. I had witnessed a situation in which the principal rejected the Intermediate team's suggestion of presenting awards to pupils in individual classrooms rather than at an assembly. Matt, a grade 7/8 teacher, had agreed to present the team's concerns about the assembly to the principal because he felt strongly about the issue. At the time of this incident, I observed that the principal spoke harshly to Matt and reiterated that an awards assembly would be held in accordance with the written School Improvement Plan. In later discussions with the teacher and the administrator, I learned that both of them were sorry about how the incident had unfolded and that they had apologized to one another. In my conversation with Matt, he said,

> Mitchell came down pretty hard on me. I don't know if you noticed that . . . I respect Mitchell, and I don't know if it's because I'm a guy or because I grew up with a man who came through the war. . . . Whatever it is, when there's an authority chain, it doesn't matter what I think. When that person up top says, "This is the way it is," it doesn't faze me. It's okay. I like the fact that there's a clear-cut line because I trust him. He's earned the respect, so therefore when he says stuff like that I had to double think what I was seeing and what I wanted.

The problem in this incident was that the principal did not provide a clear understanding of the purpose of the assembly and the arbitrary selection of criteria for the awards, which confused the Intermediate team. However, although the principal did not clearly articulate his vision or motives for the team, this episode did not undermine Matt's confidence in the principal's ability to facilitate professional activities. He went on to say,

> The concept of leader, I'm still having some issues around conceptually, not practically. If people are following, then by definition you're the leader, right? So that's pretty clear. I learned a lot from watching the [former principal] and Mitchell. They're easy to get along with, and their basic style is summed up in two words: pressure and support. . . . You set the expectation, and you're fairly committed to the end result. You allow them to sort of dictate the pathway to some extent, and then you just inundate them with support and hands-on in their presence.

Matt viewed the formal leader as the one who made final decisions for staff. By contrast, Janet, a new Literacy teacher, felt that the administrators were equal to teachers, with some leadership functions thrown into the mix. She stated,

> I don't think it's much above the role of the teacher. He is a teacher, and he's got administrative duties, but essentially, he is a teacher. Obviously maybe a bit more of a leadership role but . . . more as a colleague than as a superior.

Unlike Matt, Janet did not see a hierarchical distinction between the teachers and the administrators.

At Mountain School, Mary viewed administrators as facilitators, but more important to her was their role as vision builders. She stated,

> The principal provides a vision of what they see a learning community to be. When they're doing that vision for the teachers, they're helping to facilitate it and they're helping to model, the same way we're doing with our students. I think a principal should also be a mentor, somebody that you would bounce questions off of, somebody that's watching you and coming up with ideas for you to make your role as a teacher even better. I guess they would notice where the gaps are. When you're a teacher, you're so busy that you may not notice them, and it's nice to have a mentor that you respect that would do that for you.

In Mary's opinion, administrators facilitated teachers first by building a vision of what the learning community would look like and then by facilitating and mentoring staff to achieve that vision and to enhance their pedagogy. At Jude School, Joseph, a grade 6 teacher, and Jeanette, a vice principal, agreed with the description of the administrator as a vision builder. Joseph compared Jeff, the current principal, to the former principal at the school:

> I've only been at this school, and both the principals have been somewhat the

> same. The other guy was good too, but in a carefree manner. He didn't have the same vision. Jeff has more of a vision for what he expects out of the school, out of his teachers, what's going to happen within the school, where we're going, what goals we're working towards.

Jeanette, the vice principal, shared a similar vision for Jude School: "I want everyone to succeed as best we can. We're going to give them the tools, and do that. I believe that I transfer that to my staff and students in my classroom." Jeanette believed that her role as an administrator was to keep the vision of success central to help staff move forward, but she did not necessarily establish the vision. She believed that was the principal's role:

> He [the principal] has a big role in the learning community because he's the one that gives the vision to the students and he would give the vision to the staff. He would also set the parameters when meetings should take place and give the staff the guidance and direct them to what needs to be done and what needs to be investigated.

Mary, a grade 2 teacher at Mountain School, provided a description of the vision-building role that closely matched the examples from Jude School. She said,

> What [the vice principal is] doing is facilitating more what the principal's vision is for the learning community and setting it up for them. Definitely, they should share that vision and support it. They're the role models for teachers and others in the learning community, like students and parents.

In this example, Mary presented the vice principal as a key player in the success of the learning community through his support for and facilitation of the principal's vision.

To achieve this vision, administrators needed to take on another key role, that of encourager, which provided staff members with the impetus to move forward with initiatives that enhanced their pedagogy, practices, and student learning. Jane, a grade 1 teacher, described how the principal encouraged her to become a primary team leader:

> I really did not want to lead the divisional meetings, but Jeff obviously has seen something, and he said, "You know, you should try it." So I'm trying to think of things, and I'm taking a focus of literacy on in the division meetings.

The view of the administrator as encourager was supported by Jeanette, a vice principal and grade 4 teacher at Jude School:

> We're working on EQAO results . . . I think there has to be somebody who's watching it from a different level, because our staff needs that structure as well. Not that we're demanding it. We're encouraging it. We encourage that you discuss, that you sit down with your partner and talk about the math test, and so on. . . . There also has to be somebody who's watching how you make those decisions and share those effective practices.

In this description, Jeanette presented the administrator as one who maintained a close watch on the pulse of the school, not by supervising teachers but by encouraging and structuring their learning. The principal as encourager could be described as the guide-by-the-side, which was Jack's point:

> I see [administrators] as being the guide or being the engine that drives it. In a way, they have to be willing to allow the staff and the students a chance to experiment and to grow within the community and to allow different points of view to exist. If it's just simply–they can't simply–I don't want to say the word "dictator" but they can't–I think their vision of the professional learning

> community is part and parcel of it, but it can't be the whole thing. A principal can't come in and say, "This is how I'm expecting a professional learning community to run." They have to be able to say, "We've got a shared vision and I have certain goals for myself within that vision," but it's to create a community or it's to set up the school environment so that the community exists, rather than a top-down sort of approach. I think, for it to work, it really has to be that way. Using our school as an example, I've seen that happen here, where it feels more of a community and a shared thing as opposed to where the rest of the community is just turning to the principal to be the leader, tell me how, tell me what to do, and I will do it, rather than here's the strategies, here's the material, here's the motivation. Now you go and do it and come back with it.

For Jack, the administrator was not a top-down autocratic leader but still played a critical role. He said,

> The real players, the ones that need to get the ball rolling, I think it has to come from the administration. Regardless of the fact that it's a community, there needs to be a sense of leadership, and somebody needs to be stepping up and driving that. Without the backing of the administration . . . the community doesn't really develop. You know individual teachers may develop, but not the community, so there needs to be somebody, or someone, or a group of people who are focusing that.

This kind of administrative encouragement, however, had the potential to become a form of coercion, which can be detected in Janet's comment: "You either volunteer or our principal suggests that you should do it." This quotation suggests that staff at Jude School might have felt pressured to volunteer because they knew the principal would assign them to a leadership task. At Mountain School, administrators also volun-told teachers for leadership. Marion described this situation:

> The principal sets up a lot of people for leadership by giving them the power and the opportunities to present and to do things. His personality and just the fact that he's very relaxed and easy going and supportive and positive, I think a lot of that has to do with the role model we see.

Mary described how the administrator encouraged staff morale. She said,

> He's always thinking of things that he can share with the staff that will make our job better. Also he doesn't hold back in giving us those little compliments, the little things that he hears out there and that he gives back to us so that we feel good about ourselves. You know that's important as teachers because you don't get it very often. We get lots of criticism, but we don't get that pat on the back very often, and so when you do get that pat on the back it's so important.

Madeline, who had been a supply teacher at the school, had actively searched for an opportunity to work at Mountain School because of the principal's ability to encourage staff. She stated,

> I worked in private schools for my first 4 years, and I tried to forge my way. I got hired finally as a half-time ESL teacher at another school, and I wanted to come back here because I always really felt that Mitchell [the principal] saw that I made an effort and really valued my contributions. . . . That's like what a good teacher does. They gradually release responsibility, they touch base, they encourage, they show appreciation for the work that's being done.

Madeline's description captured the strategies the principals at Mountain and Jude Schools used in their role of encourager.

By showing support for teacher efforts, administration fulfilled another important role in the school learning community. This role was achieved when the administrator acted as a supporter for the staff, described by Madison:

> [The principal] is also really good with any needs that we have. He helps us. He'll get consultants in from the board to provide us with more information, and I just think he's really supportive.

At Mountain School, to provide further professional opportunities, the administrator timetabled shared preparation periods for teachers. Megan described this situation:

> He's tried to plan common prep. time. Usually the three of us don't have one, but I can meet with Madison; I can meet with Marion, and then share that. He scheduled that and he's done that for every grade team. . . . This is a good starting point, because I think that's where most of it happens, but it's happening because Mitchell's letting it happen.

Besides creating times and spaces for teachers to meet within the school day, the administrator at Mountain School gave teachers the freedom to move forward with initiatives. Mitchell held a number of beliefs about how to support staff in growing as professionals. He said,

> There are some rules–and collaborate. You know you don't have a choice–you are on a committee, so while you're there you might as well participate. But we are going to do it this way, and we are going to run staff meetings this way, and we are going to set School Effectiveness Plan goals–through that sort of structure that

> we set up, so if you choose not to participate, you are gonna be sucked up into it anyways. But you also have to do some facilitation for different people because they have different skill sets and skill levels. And sometimes it's gonna take extra effort, and time, and money on the part of the school to get people involved. They might need spelling off so they can have some extra planning time with someone, so that they can get caught up to speed because they're at different places.

Mitchell assumed that, with organizational structures in place and with the pressure and support, teachers would work together and develop their skills with team members. Madeline saw administrative support coming from both the principal and vice principal. She said,

> Mitchell and Mackenzie seem kind of similar in that way. They share those same qualities where they encourage, they thank us for doing something nice, or. . . I really feel like they value what I do and just kind of let me get on with my thing. I take that as a compliment. They just let me be and let things happen here, probably because they trust me. It's not because they're not interested or whatever . . . but micromanage, they don't do that.

In this description, Madeline presented the two school administrators as leaders who trusted teachers to move forward with initiatives and supported them in those activities.

Phase Three: Inherent Professional Qualities

The analysis of the teachers' professional competencies (Phase One) and the influences shaping those competencies (Phase Two) indicated that the teachers in these two schools had qualities and patterns of interaction not typical of traditional schools. To tease out the nature of these qualities and patterns, I asked the questions: Who were these teachers as professionals? What made them different? Using these questions, I conducted an inductive analysis to find and categorize data that crystallized the qualities and patterns of action. This analysis yielded three key themes: identification as professionals, investment in others, and affiliation with the institution.

Identification as Professionals

In examining the data, I drew out the key characteristics and interactions of teachers within the two case study schools that were representative of their unique qualities and actions. In the teachers' excerpts, their voices and identities emerged to create a picture of their identification as professionals. That is, the data showed that the teachers I was observing viewed themselves to be professionals and as having something to contribute to the learning community.

Teachers' lives at Jude and Mountain Schools were filled with activities, energy, and emotion directed towards their work as educators. They were committed to teaching and learning and maintained a continual focus on developing their teaching pedagogy and practices and on the action of learning. This focus can be seen in the following description by Jack, a Special Education teacher at Jude School:

> By being a learner themselves, by modeling it for the students. I think that's first and foremost. If a teacher isn't developing professionally, if a teacher's not interested in learning new approaches and new ideas, then the students aren't going to be open to that.

Jack was passionate about learning, and he demonstrated his interest in finding different ways of teaching and spreading that enthusiasm throughout the school. Mary shared a similar view of the teacher as role model. She elaborated,

> I don't know if I ever said that they [teachers] were a facilitator of learning and growth. And always modelling what a learner does. Just continually searching for answers to questions that may come up in their mind about whatever it is that they're studying at the time. So being a facilitator and a modeller.

Mary not only shared Jack's view of the teacher's role as a model and a facilitator of learning, but she also shared his energy and interest in learning and the desire to answer questions for herself. This interest in the profession, which was evident across the two schools, generated a sense of shared leadership where anyone could and would contribute to the group and adopt leadership functions. As Jack noted,

> Within our professional community here, it's definitely become a shared responsibility, where the leadership is there and the guidance is there but others are now beginning to bring their contributions to the table and taking the lead when what they have to offer is–so the responsibility becomes shared. I've got something to contribute to the group, and even though I may not technically be the leader, when my contribution can be of value I'm the go-to person.

In this conversation, Jack described all members of the learning community as leaders who shared the responsibility for education of students and who believed that they had a valuable contribution to make to the learning community. Mary, a grade 2 teacher at Mountain School, similarly described teachers as willing to make a professional contribution:

> Somebody will naturally fall back into that person's place and fill their shoes. And that's what's kind of neat about this school . . . whenever there's a gap, somebody just naturally fills in.

Mary's point, that teachers shared leadership roles and took on additional functions as needed, was reinforced by Mike, a grade 6 teacher, in his description of how he and his teaching partner shared team tasks:

> [My partner] goes to the Junior meetings, and I go to the Intermediate meetings. . . . We're kind of balanced for both. I'm down here with all the Intermediates where she's in the Junior end, so we try to do a bit of both.

In discussion, Mike indicated that he and his teaching partner shared the responsibility of team leadership by each attending different meetings and sharing what they had learned. He continued the discussion by describing the Intermediate team:

> The Intermediate team I know is very strong, and everyone's willing to step out of their comfort zone to do things. It's not like, "Okay I do this, and that's all I do." Everyone's willing to be flexible.

Mike's description of the Intermediate team captured the character of the professionals across the two schools. They saw their roles as members of the group who made active contributions to the rest of the community, not as isolated teachers who worked individually behind closed doors. In other words, these teachers were committed to spreading knowledge and skills across and between the divisions of the school.

Teachers at both schools were dedicated to seeking new practices and to pushing the boundaries of their craft. This dedication grew from a belief that teaching was not a technical job turning out mass-produced students. Julian, a grade 8 teacher at Jude School, described his view of teaching students and attending to students' individual requirements:

> I know we meet regularly, and it doesn't even have to be division meetings. We

> get together for report cards, get together for all these, just to make sure that that kid doesn't fall through the cracks. You know, if something's happening in one area, we're quick to pick up on it and know that this kid needs help with this. I know that we look at the IEP [Individual Education Plan] students and monitor them and know which ones are in which class, so we know which ones to be aware of and concerned.

Teachers actively participated in many school committees to maintain their awareness of pupils on an individual basis. In conversation, Julian talked about how teachers responded to pupils with particular social or medical issues. He said,

> In the Intermediate Division as a group we do that for kids on the playground, just to know the behaviour modifications of any child and how to deal with them out there, any problems, medical, all those things. I think that's making everything run smoothly. . . . Just ensuring expectations for kids. It is not just transitions between classrooms and making sure that kids are talking to each other appropriately. I know at this point at school, they come to school and they kind of know their manners–what is acceptable and what is not, but monitoring that, not just in the classroom but out in the hallway, just to make sure that it is not inappropriate. It turns into a major role sometimes, but it is something you always need to be watching.

By being aware of the expected modifications for specific students, teachers were equipped to help these students be successful in all aspects of school life, including during unstructured times. This connection between appropriate behaviour and student success carried over into the teachers' work with all students, as Julian pointed out.

> You're more of a mentor for them. They're supposed to be doing it on their own. You try to give the onus to the students. Even when I'm working with other teachers, I try to give them the feeling that they're doing it, that they're in charge. I think it's our job to try to educate, model, make good citizens . . . I try to model those beliefs to [the students]. You're not going to remember everything that happens in math, but if we can get you to understand what it's like to be a good role model and person in society, everything else falls in.

Julian believed that teachers were obligated to educate students by mentoring them to become positive role models who could think for themselves and live appropriately rather than a mass-produced student who fit a particular societal or school-designed mold. Matt, a grade 7/8 teacher at Mountain School, had a similar view about teaching students to grow into critical thinkers.

> When I do interviews with the grade 7 parents, I tell them that's the starting point for their future education. It's the discipline, it's the behaviours, and there's some key curriculum issues that come out in grade 7 (integers, pure substances, and particle theory), real basic stuff that's the next level of their cognitive development. It's solidifying what they know, and it frees you up to spend more of the time on the social side of things. Strengthening their resolves, getting more resilient, becoming more. You're refining their critical thinking, and I spend much of my year breaking students free of giving me the answers that they think I want, that sort of cookie cutter student.

In this discussion, Matt's beliefs about developing students as individuals who could think critically represented a common focus among the teachers on teaching the whole child. Mark, a grade 8 teacher, developed this idea further:

> We have set goals as grade 8 teachers that I think reach far beyond the curriculum and deal with a lot of social issues, not only with the kids personally but with a link to Canada's past and some social problems that exist. For the kids to be aware of that and apply it to their own learning and make connections to see how they are not just kids in grade 8 but they are linked to a global community, it really starts with us. The idea is to see the kids as part of a much bigger picture.

Mark saw his role as helping students develop as thoughtful individuals who understand their place within a larger societal context. This thoughtful and respectful approach to teaching was common at Jude and Mountain Schools. It was directed not only to increasing teachers' repertoires but, more important, to expanding their professional craft by mapping teaching strategies onto student development. This thoughtful examination of practice was evident in Jack's description of his experience with failure: "So you know by showing the students that sometimes you can fail at an attempt at something, but learning from that–that lack of success rather than failure." Because Jack viewed failure as a means to improve and grow as a professional, he wanted to model that perspective for students. He had found teachers' experimentation to be an important endeavour in encouraging students to try new things. He said,

> And growing and sort of evaluating and sort of approaching it differently–that to me is a sign that–for the students because we've always talked about modeling being the best way of teaching. The best way of showing and demonstrating what it is that you want them to know and you want them to do. So that for me is how the teacher best contributes to it [a learning community]. And then by actually

> doing it–you know and going out there and looking.

Mary, a grade 2 teacher at Mountain School, offered a similar description of thoughtful teacher practice:

> I think you model for kids because kids do see that we're constantly learning and we're constantly reading. We admit that [we do not know everything], let's find that out. Where will we go to find that out? It's okay not to know everything and that we are all learning. And that we even learn as adults and modelling that for kids is important.

For Mary, when teachers were learning continuously with their students, the pupils could see the value in questioning further and learning as they grow.

A commitment to developing reflective practice was another common characteristic of educators at both Jude and Mountain Schools. By examining their pedagogy, teachers demonstrated their desire to improve and move forward in their professional learning and skill development. In response to my question about whether teachers reflected on their practices, Janet, a Literacy teacher at Jude School stated: "Oh definitely! Yes, oh yes, it's not even just, it's not even known to you at some point, but it's really consistent." Janet believed that staff members were committed to reflecting regularly on their teaching pedagogy and practices. Julian, a grade 8 teacher, was of a similar mind, that teachers were focussed on enhancing their professional skills, but he described the situation somewhat differently:

> I don't know if they are resistant. I think some people are kind of maybe hesitant, let's say. A strong word, "resistant." I think everybody's willing to work together and then for the benefit of the kids and for our benefit as well. But I think for

> some people it's hesitancy. They're not sure to jump in or to voice their opinions or new–it could be a lot of reasons; some people are just a little more hesitant.

Julian's description indicated that teachers were considering the benefits and implications of proposed changes rather than simply resisting the changes. This reflection on different aspects of an issue gave the teachers time to review issues before adopting those ideas in their daily practices. At Mountain School, Madeline, an ESL teacher, presented a similar idea about teachers' reflective practices:

> I see subtle changes go on in the different [classes]. It's not like the same program I see happening in grade 1 every year or grade 2 every year or whatever. I see changes being made and you know–so obviously people are going, "That worked last year, so let's not change that, but this didn't work, so let's change that."

Madeline described teachers' need to reflect in other ways:

> I think it's good because, like I said, I think that we're the ones that have the direct contact with the students, and I mean it really is up to us day to day what goes on in our classrooms, so you know we're kind of like that filter or whatever right before it gets–we've got all the different things to kind of pull from, but the decisions are the teachers', so, yes, it's like readings, previous experience, and colleagues' ideas, and whatever. You have to sift through all that and [say], "Okay, now what am I doing?"

In this quotation, Madeline showed how she thought about what information students needed and used prior knowledge to inform her decisions. This active reflection on practice prior to delivery was fundamental in determining the direction teachers took in their teaching. Mark, a grade 8 teacher, supported Madeline's view:

> I think as professionals, that is why people chose this profession. They want to do good things for children. Something as simple as a shift in our Intermediate Division in the past couple of years has been literature circles, and you know, instead of everybody doing the exact same novel and questions, let's open it up and let's make it a little bit open-ended.

Mark's description of the process they had followed to examine existing practices and to consider new practices, so as to provide the best teaching possible, was evident in both Jude and Mountain School teachers.

Investment in Others

The previous section was concerned with the question of who the teachers were and how they developed. As the character of the teachers as professionals emerged from the inductive analysis, the results pointed toward some very different collegial relationships at the two schools. To understand the nature of the collegial environment, I asked the following questions: How are the interactions of these teachers different from typical collegial relationships? How do the teachers' relationships affect their professional work and lives in the school? Teacher interactions were analyzed inductively to draw out the key relationships and patterns of action. These relationships and patterns revealed that teachers were heavily invested in the well-being of all members of the school community.

One sign of this deep investment in others was a shared understanding in both schools that the learning and well-being of students was paramount. This heavy investment in students was the impetus for the collaborative approach in the schools. Jeff described the investment in this way:

> What is our imperative purpose of doing? Why do we exist? If it's not about kids and about potential that the kids have, then what we can do to help them to reach that potential, that's the only reason we exist. The schools are here for kids, and it's difficult for teachers to understand, even though you want to make it a wonderfully comfortable learning environment for everybody and working environment, kids have to come first. It's not always going to be in the best interest of the teachers. It's going to be in the best interest of the kids.

Jeff indicated that the school culture was built around this investment in students:

> The culture of the school is such that everybody understands that it's the learning that is the focus. That those three questions that we continually ask won't go away: What do we want them to learn? How do we know they've learned it? What do we do when they haven't learned it? That's going to drive it. . . . You are in it for that one reason: for the kids, and if you can't do it with the people that you are working with, you're in the wrong business.

Jeff described teachers' roles as being wrapped up in their vision of student success:

> I think the most important role is the teacher recognizes themselves and understands what their real purpose is. It has to start with that. That they're not coming in here to do, you know, a 6-hour job. That there is a true, an intuitive understanding of what their moral purpose is. So it's above and beyond coming in and teaching. So it's above and beyond the skills and knowledge of being a teacher. . . . It encompasses everything that we should know about how kids learn, and then the teaching is the art of taking all that stuff and to focus and carry it out. To me that is the most important thing, that there is a real, true understanding.

Jeff believed that the focus on student success positioned teaching as an art incorporating a variety of strategies. It also focused all collegial relationships directly on student growth. Jane, a grade 1 teacher, commented:

> The observation survey, I think it has to be a one-on-one. It's me talking with my other team leader, my other team teacher, grade 1 teacher and saying, "You know what? I noticed that I have these kids that are very low. Do you have any that are as low as that? How can we sort of put together a plan for them? And then I noticed there is this child who is very high, and you have one that's very high. What kinds of activities are you enriching that child with? What kinds am I doing that we could share?"

Jack took this investment in student success a step further by showing how students were included as members of the learning community. He said,

> When you're in the classroom and the focus is on them, and you've taken the spotlight away from you, and you actually get started to develop a community within your classroom, that's when you realize, I think, that they play a big part in what's happening in the school. I've heard a couple of things happen. I've worked with some of the senior students coming to administration with a survey that they've done about what they like and what they don't like about the school. And I mean in a positive way. They were not being critical. They want to be a contributing member to the school.

This investment in student success was also a focus for teachers at Mountain School. Marion, a grade 3 teacher, described this situation:

> I think all of the teachers here feel that by helping one another, we're helping the

> greater good of the school and helping each student. I don't think there is any, or if there is, there's few of the staff that hold onto what they know and not share it, or feel like it won't benefit their team or other people.

This idea of a common goal among teachers was explained by Matt, a grade 7/8 teacher:

> So we value recognition, that we'll all share common ideas. What those common ideas are and how long they last. We'll write them down for now, but the importance is that we recognize that we want something. Not even that we have them, but that we want them. You can start a community with the want.

From Matt's point of view, it was the idea of teachers' shared understandings and common focus on students that was important; what those ideas were in and of themselves was not the point. Mark presented a similar view of the value of a shared focus on students:

> [The teacher] who teaches grade 8 as well, she's also very much along the same lines as I am, with the common concern that people need to recognize that not everybody's always treated in a fair, equitable manner. And we've really worked together with that common goal. Like, we get together and say, "I watched this film on the weekend." We get a copy and show it to the kids. I think it's our third year working together, and we were talking the other day that things are really meshing together, and it's because we have that common goal. We're not butting heads with each other. We respect each other's opinions, and I think that's huge. . . . Well, I think the School Effectiveness Plan is part of it, the curriculum guidelines are part of that but, then there's a–like I said, [Name] and I have this common vision that kids need to be aware of things, and we kind of link that in.

> So everything, the school effectiveness plan, the curriculum itself, and then common vision between the teachers.

Mark's description provided insight into how the teachers kept the focus on student learning and how their understandings came more in tune with one another.

The teachers' focus on student learning was the key driver that led them to become invested in each other and in their team. By working together to achieve their goals, they built professional and personal bonds that provided them with a sense of satisfaction and belonging. Mark explained,

> I've worked in the past where maybe people didn't pull their weight so to speak or didn't value the team's opinion on things, and things fall apart really quickly. Because there's not that common link, the kids don't really get that connection very easily. But when everybody is on board with the same sort of drive and the same sort of emphasis, things work really well.

The team focus was a means that kept the teachers growing and moving forward, as described by Jack, a Special Education teacher:

> I've known a number of these staff members and others who've worked in the building before and you do get . . . I got a sense right off, from the very beginning that the focus is always on the learning that's going on in the building, whether it's just the students, or the teachers themselves learning professionally, and the growth that's happening across the staff.

Madison, a grade 3 teacher, presented a similar perspective on professional growth and team commitment:

> I think the purpose of a learning community is just so that you never stop

> learning, you never stop feeling that support, you never stop taking in more professional development from a huge base, or even going down to a small personal level. I think the purpose is to just remain as a team and to simply work together.

Dedication to the team also revealed itself in the willingness of teachers to take on leadership roles. Janet explained how this process worked:

> They haven't always been the team leaders though. . . . You still have team leaders on staff, so if one of them were to, for whatever reason, leave, you always have a team leader from somewhere else filling in that position. That's one of the things that makes the community here so strong: the team leaders. Firstly, each year there's a new division leader, so everyone gets a chance to have that experience and make it function the way it should.

Janet believed that the teams were strengthened because the staff shared a common knowledge of the leadership goals and skill sets and they all had opportunities to practice those skills. This team commitment by teacher leaders can be seen in Jack's description of his service as teacher-in-charge:

> I think I can definitely look at the needs of the school and look at them objectively. And so when you're making a decision as a leader I'm not necessarily looking at what's in the best interest for me, but what would be in the best interest for the group and what we need to do. I think I can–me personally, I don't like to step up and delegate or dictate, but open the dialogue up and look for people's strengths and try to tap them on the shoulder when they have something to offer to the group and to make sure that they're contributing . . . I'm willing to listen

> and to work together, and through that you can sort of achieve what needs to get done. You know, I never look at it as my decision goes. It's my contribution to the team [that] helps get us to where we need to go. I like to think that I help lead us in that right direction or I can move us in that right direction.

However, not all teachers self-identified as leaders, even when they performed leadership functions. Madison, for example, said,

> I look at the people who are willing to stand up at a staff meeting or who are willing to take on a leadership role for developing a new part of the program. And I interact more with just my team, and that's what I'm comfortable with right now. . . . No I am not a leader. I don't like to take on the leadership role. I definitely have ideas and my own opinions of things, but I'm more behind the scenes definitely . . . I'm not going to be the one standing up at a meeting sharing these ideas. I would rather share it in a small group.

Madison's description positioned her as a leader-by-the-side rather than a formal leader standing and presenting in front of a group. Although she did not self-describe as a leader, her actions supported her team and illustrated a heavy investment in her colleagues, their success, and their well-being. Similarly, Mike, a grade 6 teacher, said,

> They may perceive me as a leader, but I don't take that front role. I know that I've done a bunch of stuff like leading some stuff at staff meetings, QDF [Quotidian Daily Fitness] stuff at staff meetings . . . I think coming in terms of the actual entire committee, I bring different skills to the entire school in terms of coaching and just having my hand in everything. I don't like just doing one thing. I'm flexible, which is the big one.

By being open to helping with varied activities, Mike was committed to the group and their growth, but he believed that the support went both ways. He said,

> The numeracy team did that. I wouldn't say I was the lead. It was a group effort. Some of the stuff in there, [my teaching partner] and I designed from our problem-solving stuff and brought it in, and then I took the lead with doing just the organizing of tasks.

In this example, how Mike defined his role did not matter; it was the deep investment in the team that was evident in the supporting roles that he and his colleagues fulfilled. This commitment to the team extended leadership capacity across the school. Mackenzie, the vice principal, described this scenario:

> That's where we find out how our capacity has increased, if we have, and I feel that we do have, people now who can step up. That's why I like the cochair idea. It spreads the workload, it lightens the workload, but it increases the amount of staff who are getting experience in those roles and becoming familiar with what needs to be done. So if Matt left, then I feel confident we've already got budding leaders in the grades: both of the grade 6 teachers. There's Mark there, you know, and other people who've had good models, even our newer teachers. I think they could step in.

Mackenzie believed that teachers' leadership abilities had been built within the staff. Even with a new principal arriving and key teachers leaving, he felt that the learning community would continue because of the cross-divisional interest, dedication, and commitment. With strong teacher leadership in place, other teachers felt compelled to follow. Melania, a grade 4 teacher, described her commitment to the team in this way:

> I think you have to be flexible and go with the flow of the group. You have to be willing to put in time. You have your own work to do, and the committee wants to meet. Take the risk of what the committee has decided to do and [be] willing to try in your own classroom.

Melania's investment in her team was evident as she followed through with the team goals. These various examples demonstrate that, although teachers defined their actions differently, their dedication to the team and their investment in supporting the members of their group were consistent.

Analysis of the data revealed that teachers' investment in the success of their team and students generated a culture of care in both schools. The first step in building such a culture was described by Jeff, the principal at Jude School:

> It has to start with the passion. It has to start with that understanding that they do make a difference. They can't get into it and just, through serendipity, hope that it works out–that it has to be planned, it has to be skilled, it has to be knowledge based, it has to be co-operative, and understanding that I can't do it alone. I need to work with others in order to accomplish the big idea. . . . It is how we help each other to do our jobs better.

Jeff believed that, with the staff working together, their impact was more meaningful to their lives as professionals and to students' lives as learners. For Jeff, building the school culture was what defined them as a community of learners:

> I think the culture and the individuals help define what the learning community is. It's not necessarily my definition. . . . This is not a new concept. Whether we call it PLC [professional learning community], or teams, or groups, or whatever, it's

> not a new concept. It's probably new in the translation of it or the practicality of it in school, but it's nothing new.

Although the learning community concept might appear to be what is found in most schools, how the culture was enacted in these schools was very different. For Jeff, the staff were key to building the culture that would define them as a learning community. Jeff saw his role in building the culture as one of service.

> Well, depending on the day, sometimes, and it is situational, but in the long and short of it, I am their leader; therefore I must follow, type of approach. Once instilled as a co-operative environment, then we work together, and I am there to serve them, as much as they are to the mission of the school . . . I am their leader, therefore I must follow. Just to be there, to be a conduit to them, actualizing everything that they know about teaching and learning. And to help them feel supported, to have a voice, to listen.

This excerpt illustrated that Jeff cared deeply about working for and with staff to achieve success. Jeanette, the vice principal at Jude School, also fulfilled a service role in her leadership. She said,

> I am respected in that way, and they do come to me with issues and concerns. It's too early to say how they perceive me as a leader. I am open to suggestions, I am not close-minded, that I am willing to go the extra mile. I am willing to do things they may not expect others to do. For example, if they need a request, I take the extra step to help them if time allows. I'm open to suggestions and going the extra mile for my staff.

As Jeanette described the lengths to which she was willing to go to help teachers, she elaborated further on the sense of feeling welcomed and valued in the school: "Every person that walks into the school is valued. We're all included, and everybody counts." The welcoming culture at Jude School was evident in that members dined together regularly, and they invited me to join their morning espresso coffee club and outings. This social nature of the staff was also revealed in Janet's comment: "Lunch, we go out for lunch. You go out and talk." Janet expanded on the description of staff members as good people dedicated to working together:

> If, for whatever reason, something comes up, or you can't either be there, you get sick, whatnot, you know that there's a strong support system for work in your classroom, so you know things are going to go smoothly if you're not there. That's another advantage to it.

Janet felt comfort in knowing that she was cared for and supported by her teammates. Madeline, an ESL teacher, felt the same way at Mountain School:

> [Lots of] extracurricular or very social and keeps staff together. . . . You know you can't really force that, except that maybe just by creating a positive environment, maybe people are more likely to step up and make those friendships. We have a lot of personal connections at this school, so it really does make things go smoothly.

The caring and respectful environment encouraged teachers to create personal and social bonds with each other that extended beyond their professional interactions. Matt similarly described the team as socializing together when he said, "We're a good team for that, for doing stuff together." Mark, a grade 8 teacher at Mountain School, described his contribution to creating a caring culture:

> I think people would say that I'm pretty easygoing and that I'm open to new ideas, new suggestions–I will literally try anything. I also like to–I'm really willing to listen to other people's ideas and let people find their skills as well, and if they have something to offer let them go with that as well.

Mark understood that by supporting and encouraging team members in varied endeavours, the staff had a safety net where they felt free to try new initiatives. Mitchell, the principal at Mountain School, believed that a trusting culture facilitated teachers' creativity:

> [A learning community is] where there's full participation, and people are sharing their best practices, and their thoughts, and the environment is conducive to that, so it's gotta be a place where people can feel that it's risk free to investigate, take risks, and join in, and share information, and you have to have the culture, and the set-up to do that, and the facilities.

Mary, a grade 2 teacher, offered a similar perspective:

> What's important is that you still feel safe and so [if] you have to give one piece of advice to that principal, as the outgoing principal, is just, you know, "You have a great staff here. They just need to know that they're in a safe environment where they can take risks and be respected."

When asked whether he was a charismatic leader, Mitchell, the principal at Mountain School, described building a caring culture by connecting with staff members individually:

> I'm not the type of person that I stand up and inspire a whole bunch of people in a talk. Like, say, I'll talk to 50 people in a talk and they all leave buzzed. The way I

> work is one by one. You've got to make a connection with people one by one, and let them know that you're around and you're interested, and that takes time. And when someone–when you get that moment where someone wants to take a risk, you say, "Hey, that sounds good. Okay, go for it." There was your chance, right? That was if there's any charismatic thing, it's right there, take the risk, go for it.
>
> It's right there. I've seen real charismatic principals, and I'm not one of them.

Mitchell believed that he demonstrated his interest and care for staff by engendering trust: "What I said I'd do, I did, so that they felt they could trust me. That's huge–that's a huge thing." Mitchell saw trust as a foundation for participating in the community, but Matt presented a somewhat unusual perspective on the sense of belonging in a community:

> Communities are based on exclusion and secrets. For a community to exist, it has to separate itself from other communities; so that's the exclusiveness, right? . . . . If people want to be in the community, they have to realize that there's a cost. There has to be a sacrifice on their part in order for it to have value. In real life things are financial sacrifices that somehow give it value, personal sacrifices, whereas if it doesn't cost you anything, if there's no commitment–there won't be a commitment if there's no cost. That's the word I am looking for–investment of what they are doing.

Matt believed that the investment in the community created boundaries of belonging. Matt's subsequent description of the outcomes for members who did not invest in specific team activities demonstrated his concern that a forced structure might interfere with the natural development of their community.

If they want to be in it, there has to be the threat of the exclusion, and it doesn't have to be punitive. It can be simply space, availability, that kind of thing, right? If you don't follow the norms, we have to ask you to leave, kind of thing. . . . You have to teach the norms. Norms, they're dynamic and they're organic. They have to–you can't put a list up. We have our laws, but they're constantly changing in our society. The Tribes is a good start, but it doesn't follow it through towards–with a view towards the culture that you want. . . . It's designed directly toward where to look, not necessarily what the answer is, but these are the things that are important to us. . . . It's consistent with what I find negative about education as a whole, which is the forced, just the forced structure. Communities find their own structure. And sometimes it's "no community" that's its structure. [With Tribes], there isn't an allowance that there are times when we don't want a learning community. We want to be individual. It's the ebb and the flow. Coming to the group–leaving the group–coming back to the group. It's almost as if as soon as you come in you can become a member. . . . And that the deviance from that belief system is subject to punishment either within the group, within the community. It could be physical punishment, it could be emotional, it could be psychological, or it's just simply, well that would be outside of the group then, or they can throw you out, but it's the adherence to a set of beliefs where you can't deviate in any way. If you don't buy in, there's a sense that there's something wrong with you. You can't opt out of it, and if you want to, if it's just not your time to be in the community, or sometimes part of the community is the caring for those that aren't going to get it. We don't offer that, not in a positive way.

For Matt, his team was held together by a common commitment to each other and to creating the desired culture for their group. Their investment in a common goal not only fulfilled their need to belong in the community but also gave them enough flexibility to be an individual at other times. He resisted the forced structure of the Tribes initiative because it limited the organic flow of professional activity within his team. Madeline, however, offered a different perspective on the need for structure. In her role as ESL teacher, she needed to provide guidance and direction to staff members, but not having defined boundaries for the community or definitive answers to questions was problematic for her. She stated,

> You don't get that, so you get some people that want to do this and some people that want to do that, and I find that another thing that's really difficult for me to wrap my head around. I know that there are a few other teachers, since we talk about this sometimes. Because there aren't some definitive answers in some areas, people have, over time, done their thing. And I mean it's important in some of the schools because you have different populations, you need to have the flexibility. Like, we couldn't have somebody say, "You have to do this. You have to do that." Because it doesn't work in every school. But there are a few things that need to be decided upon . . . I know that it takes a bunch of different ways to get there, but there are some things that need to be black and white. . . . That's sort of, I guess, the gray area though. I mean, you want to provide people with a framework, but you don't want to force people who are going to be really creative, who have students who have needs that don't really fit into that framework. There are just a few things that I think for me personally, because I

> would like some questions answered, and then I can move on from there, and when I don't get those answers, then I just feel like, am I doing things wrong? Am I telling people to do the wrong thing?

Madeline cared deeply that she was not adversely affecting teachers' ability to think innovatively and to program for their students' individual needs, but she did not want to steer them in the wrong direction. She saw the structures as necessary for her to support her colleagues in their quest for answers. Her deep respect for her colleagues was shared by Mark, the grade 8 teacher, who said, "Well, I think it also comes to this idea of respect for each other as well." Mitchell, the principal, supported this view when responding to a question about learning communities:

> And you also have to realize sometimes people have stuff going on in their lives which makes their ability to stay late at school, to be involved in something, makes it impossible for them. So you have to sort of set your minimum standard, and after that you gotta hope that the culture pulls people along.

Mitchell understood that teachers' home lives may take precedence over their professional lives, and he respected them enough to let the team encourage them as needed. Mark, a grade 8 teacher, outlined a similar flexible respectful approach he shared with his teaching partner:

> That's how it happens with [my teaching partner] and I. We kind of in the morning, bump into each other for 5 minutes, after school, bump into each other for 5 minutes. It just works really well. I've worked with other people that–we've gotta meet at this time, we've gotta talk for an hour. And it's funny, because I've spoken to [my teaching partner] just yesterday, and I said to her that my number

> one priority is my own family, and that is secondary. So I have my kids to pick up after school or get them to school in the morning, so those meetings in the hallway, although they're brief, they're really to the point: "What are you doing? We're on the same track. Fine. Okay, tomorrow we'll meet after school." It's really quick, and it's to the point, and I can really see the effects of what we've been presenting to the kids.

Mark had found a way to be committed to his teaching and students without sacrificing his family. This constant ebb and flow of respectful interactions among staff members extended beyond daily teaching and lesson planning into role assignments as staff members helped each other out in various ways.

Institutional Affiliation

The first two themes demonstrated teachers' investment in professional activity and investment in others, but the data also pointed to a third level of investment–to the school as a whole. To analyze the data with respect to teachers' affiliation to the institution, the following questions were posed: What occurred school wide? Why were teachers doing school-wide activities? What were the outcomes of these actions? Inductive analysis yielded some action patterns.

At Jude and Mountain School, teachers felt a strong sense of collective responsibility for all students' learning. By taking responsibility for the school experiences of all students, teachers demonstrated their attachment to the school-wide community. Jeff, the principal at Jude School, said,

> The fact that every teacher knows the kids, we can name every kid in the school, we know their families, we know their siblings, we know the connections between

> who should be with one another, who shouldn't be. So knowing the kids, to me, is the most important part of it.

Julian, a grade 8 teacher at Jude School, was of a similar mind. He said, "I think we indirectly do that in the hallway in just meeting the kids on a different plane." In these informal encounters with students, staff built rapport and gained understanding of all students. These connections did not occur only in the hallways but also took place in the classroom, in the community, and beyond. They were based on a common understanding of the principles that permeated everything in the school. Janet, a Literacy teacher, described the impact of these common beliefs:

> I think that it's embedded in everything we do, just from when we're up there just teaching. I think a lot of the things relate to the things that are going on in the Catholic community all the time . . . and all those things that we want kids to have are things that they are doing, and we just embed it in everything we do. We teach religion as a class, but sometimes having a math class or another class, you find yourself talking about things we believe in as Catholics, as a Catholic group of people, and I think it just gives kids more stability. I think [it] gives them something we have in common, a common belief, and they know where we're coming from, even though they may not be Catholic. A lot of the beliefs of religions are very similar, you know, our commandments or whatever it is, you know, who doesn't believe in that? So I think it's another way to unify, put us closer together to each other.

In her description, Janet presented the moral purposes, which she called beliefs, as common knowledge that was shared by all and that led to collective responsibility for all students. Julian, a grade 8 teacher, described one way teachers achieved this shared responsibility: “We got a list that has all the IEP kids on it, so we know which ones, as well as anybody who’s not on an IEP could be on the list for other reasons.” According to Julian, through their awareness of students’ special needs and behaviour modifications, teachers knew which students required particular attention. This shared awareness was the foundation of teachers’ dedication to helping all special needs pupils. Jane, a grade 1 teacher, explained:

> I think it used to be: “Let the next person worry about that problem.” And more and more we realized, “You know what? You’re responsible for the students and if you have to put them on an IEP you need to do that.”

This sense of collective responsibility extended into other aspects of teachers’ work, as Julian explained:

> Most people are here very early in the morning doing work, working with kids. It’s something more for us. I think that definitely they take it seriously. I think that’s the way the school runs smoothly. If we don’t take that collective view about learning, I think that’s when things break down. You know, if the grade 6 teacher doesn’t pass on what their kids know to the grade 7 teacher coming up, so that we know all that ahead of time. It just makes things run smoother, and we do that very well.

Mitchell, the principal, explained how he helped to expand the collective view at Mountain School:

> I think it’s getting wider and wider. At first I focused on teachers, and now the EAs [Educational Assistants] are becoming more involved, and, you know, they

> are talking about their professional development [PD]. And we're doing special PD for them and that kind of thing. So more and more involving them. It's tricky because then you're dealing with, you know, they can't come to staff meetings; it's another [union] structure. And also I think the parents more and more are getting involved in the school.

The collective responsibility expanded further as students took charge of decisions about the school they wanted. Mike, a grade 6 teacher, described this situation:

> The leadership council is something that was new this year. . . . All the grades 7 and 8 kids went out and they signed up for one group. They didn't have to, but they did. They work until February, and they have the option to switch to a different group if they want. To kind of build that community, which is kind of putting the onus back on the kids: This is your school, what do you like about it? If you don't like something, here is your opportunity to change it. Actually, we got rid of the student council and replaced it with the leadership council because it involves more kids.

To focus the school on student success, teachers were engaged in shared planning and problem-solving activities. This attention to school-wide school planning can be seen in the following description by Janet, an Intermediate Literacy teacher:

> Critical, critical, I don't think a day goes by where we, where I don't consult with six or seven staff about something. Something as simple as, for Christmas, where we're going. Like I told you, we don't go into how we're doing. That is something that we're looking to be doing. But right now, it's what are we doing? Where are we going? When are we planning on getting there? We'll do this test

> on Thursday. Try to do our tests on the same day. Even the Primary teachers, Intermediate and Primary teachers. Intermediate and Primary reading buddies every Friday. There's constant communication in this school. That's one of the things that attracted me. I actually started here as a student in Jason's class. That was awhile ago, so when I got called back to this school, I was very excited. The dynamic is a great dynamic. In the morning, I have prep. with Primary teachers and we talk about different things.

Although Janet's description seemed to bounce from one division to the next, it demonstrated that they followed a process of school-wide cross-divisional planning. Julian, a grade 8 teacher, described how staff planned for the whole school by creating timetables that worked for all members:

> You know, we structure the timetable. We make sure that things are allotted and slotted in for the students and that they're on task. Other than that, I think it's just working together, and make sure everything gets fine tuned. You know, sometimes you have to rearrange the schedule because there's too much in one day and not the other day. So we work together. We actually do the schedules together, from yard duty to daily schedules, so we've got a lot of input in that.

Staff attended to many variables when planning school wide for student success. Beyond scheduling issues, attention to student achievement data gave teachers shared information that they could use to make plans for all the students, as described by Madison, a grade 3 teacher:

> Now you can see that when you put any sort of data up, or when Mitchell's doing his presentation, everyone's interested in the EQAO [Education Quality and

> Accountability Office standardized test] results. Everyone's interested in what's happening as a school.

Confirming this perspective was Mitchell's observation that the "staff culture is in the habit of using data to drive instruction." Madeline, an ESL teacher, added to this point:

> In the past couple years, our board has become data conscious, and I think the goals may have come from that and formed the vision. Tribes activities came in and were a push from the board to get that language going. After 2 or 3 years we wanted to move on, and as a staff we spewed forth ideas about what our new committee could be about. Design and Tech and Literacy were important.

From the school-wide focus on data grew a Design and Technology literacy initiative that was implemented across all divisions. Matt, a grade 7/8 teacher, described some of the next steps they went through as they developed school-wide planning:

> The first school to have every staff trained in the use of D & T [Design and Technology] by the Board person. Getting the school council on board. I've gotten funding in, and tying it into the literacy, tying it in to boys' literacy, to see if you can actually get the data in. Actually I've left it to the Literacy team. My Literacy and Numeracy teams are doing it, because when we look at the EQAO scores, our EQAO scores are going up, . . . but over the past 6 years there has been a consistent discrepancy between male results and female results of 12 %. That's a huge difference, and that's unacceptable. Even though everyone's going up, that's 12 %, so we're trying to diminish that gap, and that's measureable.

Matt's description demonstrated that an examination of the patterns in achievement results led the staff to plan initiatives around Design and Technology to enhance student literacy in all grades. Mark, a grade 8 teacher, described other ways in which teachers led goal-setting for social aspects of school life. He said,

> The social goals would be met, along with the Tribes program that we're running at the school. And I think that's about it. The teacher is kind of the leader in that: setting the goals for the class, the kids in the class, and that links to the larger community.

The Tribes program, which was entrenched in the school culture by this time, not only addressed social issues at school but also helped create a link to the community, which provided a more global perspective for students.

Staff not only shared knowledge, but they also solved problems together by examining their practices and reflecting on the outcomes. According to Julian, a grade 8 teacher at Jude School, teachers were committed to problem solving:

> I think it's good practice to do those kinds of things and look and see what's going right, what's going wrong, and how are we going to fix it, in anything we all want to know and then to build on. If it's something good that's happening in one school, then how do we get that transferred to another school? What's happening at this school as compared to another school, and is it the staff or is it, because we do have turnover as well, so is it something that's happening when people are here as a community, as compared to not having it somewhere else? I think it's a good idea to look at everything, people, administration, you know, what are the children's perceptions, their teacher, their school, and that plays an important role for them too.

Julian expanded on the work of solving issues at the school level:

> We've started tackling it awhile back, and looking at how we can make it a better learning community. I know at every staff meeting, we're always discussing these things and coming up with ways to improve. How do we get parents involved and work the relationship? And it's not just us, so I think we've done a pretty good job, you know, just in seeing scores, DRA scores, benchmarks, in what I've seen in students' abilities. Coming from the younger grades to an older grade, I've noticed definite improvement, so something's working. We do have parent involvement to an extent, which has seemed to work.

The collaborative work to solve questions about learning and teaching led to activities that teachers described as leading to improvements in student scores that carried through from one grade into the next. In addition, staff worked to include parents in this process. Jeff similarly described the culture as geared towards examining and reflecting daily on school issues. He said, "I have a lineup, at the beginning of the day, at the end of the day, where teachers are sharing experiences or thoughts or concerns or looking for support, so they're always reflecting on it." One method of putting those reflections to use was described by Jack, a Special Education teacher:

> When they looked at the way that their students had achieved, it was consistent that literal and reflective writing and answering questions was an area of concern for the students, so ideas were thrown about: "How you can target that in the classroom? What are others doing? How to work towards it?" But noticing that it's on the continuum, so the grade 4s are having trouble, and the grade 5s are having trouble, and the kid, there was a struggle in 4 as well, so they can see that. There's some things that they need to shift and they need to work at. But getting a

> chance to hear what others were doing, so there was actually a sharing of ideas, a sharing of, I wouldn't say responsibility, but collectively taking responsibility for what it was that they had to do.

In a similar way, teachers at Mountain School met and shared information to facilitate problem solving and planning as a school. Mike, a grade 6 teacher, described this process:

> I think in terms of the learning community is making sure that everyone within the community, on the team, is on the same page. Making sure that all teachers are doing consistent things in their classrooms. Essentially, even though we are a staff, we teach individually in our classroom, and you may not see another teacher ever teach a lesson in your life. Just like communication through our staff meetings, through just talking in the hallways, I think is definitely key for the learning community to be successful, to make sure the kids are where they should be.

Staff members were committed to meeting at various intervals throughout their day to communicate, plan together, and address any evolving issues. Matt, a grade 7/8 teacher, expanded on how change initiatives spread between divisions to address student learning issues:

> The school I came from didn't have anything compared to what this place has. The two things I see about this school, and it really is just two things, because every school has the basic ideas . . . I used to talk about it in terms of the spiral effect years ago before I knew any different, before I knew about it. But you know that . . . the curriculum spiral comes back on itself but at a different level.

> That's what we do. We do the same things for our Literacy team, our Numeracy team, our school climate, all of those, all the things we are doing. Every year we keep doing them, but we never do it the same, so it's dynamic. We're always evaluating, altering, and yet there's a commitment to seeing it through. So a failure: There's no such thing as failure. That sounds really cliché, but we really, and Mitchell leads this brilliantly: the failure leads us to the next step.

In further conversations, Matt observed that every teacher belonged to at least one school improvement committee and that their work on these initiatives evolved and changed as identified areas of need led to the next cycle of problem solving.

By planning and problem solving together, the staff developed consistent practices that were adopted as appropriate for each grade level. Jeff, the principal at Jude School, described how consistent school-wide practices benefited the students and provided school-wide consistency: "It's connecting the ropes from one grade to another." Jack, the Special Education teacher, described the impacts on students in this way:

> I think what was happening, there was really more of a focus on what we were doing. They looked at their DRA [developmental reading assessment] results and realized that, pretty consistently across the board, the students were having difficulties or struggling in the same areas.

Julian, the grade 8 teacher, described some of the common practices that existed at Jude School:

> I know we do it with DRAs, we do the assessments. If you look at last year's, we check in and when we see somebody's at risk, they're IEP'd. I'll adapt each term with the [Resource teacher]. The other teachers are well aware. . . . And then we

> make sure that, especially in grade 8, because they're moving on to high school. Now we're getting into contacting the high school's Guidance Department to make sure they know who's at risk with the transition. It could be anything from anxiety to academic problems. We do the IEPs and the school-based team meetings. If it's IPRC [Identification, Placement and Review Committee], obviously we work in collaboration with them [Resource teacher], as well as the French teacher, because everybody's involved in that IEP in some way, shape, or form, as well as parent input. There's a section and we ask for their input . . . I think it's consistency, you know, in sustaining itself toward really well and consistent policies and procedures on our part. Consistency in staff, division-wise, those are all those structural things, but they really do make that learning community work.

Along similar lines, Mark, a grade 8 teacher, described how practices were shared across grades:

> Everybody sees the value in that, so me teaching grade 8, I've had kids who have had that in grade 7, and grade 6, and grade 5, so by the time they come around, it's not new to them. They kind of have the idea a bit. Because everybody's rowing in the same direction, the ship goes fairly smooth.

Implementing consistent practice was not limited by specific division teams, as Mitchell, the school principal, noted:

> The initiative now has spiralled into other divisions–developed rubrics for what students need to know by the end of the grade for Writers' Workshop. The Research Officer suggested the project, and the grade 6 teachers volunteered to

> participate, learned about Math Initiative, which they presented to staff with data. Now it has spiralled into other divisions.

How this initiative was adopted by the members of the grade 3 team in the Primary Division was described by Madison:

> I think that I'm up for change, if change is necessary for the group; so if someone has a different strategy that's going to work, I'm up for that. For example, the three of us are piloting a new Writing Workshop program, which is really exciting, and it's interesting trying to put that into an already existing good writing program and trying to add something else. So I think being open-minded and having a willingness to accept change is really important for a learning community. Especially with new staff coming on board as well.

Consistent practices expanded beyond school improvement and literacy or math initiatives into other areas. Madeline, an ESL teacher, presented a structure that she created to foster consistency in special education practices:

> I have a website that I run for the teachers of the school that they can consult regularly. What is a modification? What is an accommodation? Stages of language acquisition, just things they need to reference. My website is on First Class, not that difficult to set up. So I have done that for my staff. I always touch base with the teachers of my students to see how they're doing in other subjects as well. As a larger thing, my role is board and ministry related as well. We have ESL meetings, and we take turns hosting them, and my turn will come up again next year. An extended learning community. When I first became an ESL teacher, it made me curious how to use a rubric. For example, I had some high-functioning

> and beginning speakers in grade 2, so I came up with a method of how to do that, and I put a group together, and I shared that with [a Ministry of Education group], but I presented to my board first.

Madeline invested a significant amount of time in creating structures that could help teachers to develop consistency in their professional practices. Her commitment to sharing practices within her school extended into the larger community as she worked with her system, board, and ministry teams. Mitchell, the principal at Mountain School, noted that the success of initiatives geared towards creating shared practices was dependent on teachers. He said, "Change initiatives that work here have all been teacher driven. Examples of teacher-driven change initiatives: Intermediate teachers selected Writers' Workshop." One initiative directed to implementing consistent literacy practices was developed by Matt, the grade 7/8 teacher. As Matt explained, "Do the D & T [Design and Technology], getting staff buying into it, getting the whole staff trained. It's never been done before, what I'm doing. We're the first school to take on this SMART goal."

As consistent practices grew and flourished across the schools, conversation and action moved beyond the school walls to include other members of the wider community. Jeff, the principal at Jude School, described how external resources were incorporated into a school-wide set of practices:

> Actually, if you think of all the outside resources that we use, we use children's centres, we use child and youth workers, we use family children services, Contact [co-ordinating organization for student services in the community], behaviour resource people, consultants, superintendents, all those people are just as important in the community. I think when they come here they know that they're

> coming into a place where they have to fit into our community or assimilate into our community, and they do. We've got good people.

Julian, a Special Education teacher, also described how the community extended beyond school borders:

> I think the co-ordination of home, school, church, and community. Like trying to get all that co-ordinated really does work, but what else? We do many, many things that come in. There's always something coming in, and you're trying to incorporate that into lessons, and just trying to teach all those ethical issues in life is a big one too.

As teachers connected with parents and the larger community, it enhanced their understanding of the students in their care. Jane made this point:

> I see it everywhere because I live in this community, I work in this community, I go to church in this community, so I really see it happening. When I go to church on Sunday, I see the kids that I see at school. I see their parents, I see their grandparents, I see their family, and I really begin to see how that all works together as a larger community.

Jeanette, the vice principal, also saw this link from the school to the community and back again. She said,

> I'm also seeing a learning community; you need the collaboration of other team members. I guess that's it, but it's also the community as well. You're looking at parent community, you're looking at the parish community, and you're looking at . . . that all influences everything in our school community, so all of those components work together to build a successful learning community.

Julian, the Special Education teacher, also saw the importance of home, school, and community members working together:

> A definition of the learning community. I think it's something that needs to encompass all parties involved, parents, teachers, all staff. In some cases, it has to be a partnership, church, home. Sometimes we can do so much, but at home, it's not being done there. We can beat our heads to the wall if it's not being reinforced. I think it really works well when we can get the community and the parents involved in that twisting motion.

Although Jeanette agreed that community connections were beneficial for the most part, she observed that they could evoke performance anxiety:

> I can't say it's negative, but there's a pressure. There's pressure placed on teachers here in this community because we're expected to be exemplary. It's not that we can't rise above that, but it's maybe a bit of pressure placed on people by parents. By parents, by staff, by other staff, by other staff in other schools, by principals, it's almost that façade of St. Jude's is a cut above the rest. And yet that pressure might be there, although we are working well together. We have great resources, we have great staff, we have great community, but I think it's just, personally, I have to say, a bit of pressure to perform the best.

At Mountain School, the demographics of the community had led to the development of a much-needed breakfast program. Mitchell described the impetus for this program:

> Took about 2 and a half years for the principal to assess and to understand why approximately 20 % of students were low scoring; [he] identified this factor by examining a graph linking postal codes with data results.

To address the link between community demographics and student achievement, staff and parents inititated a breakfast program to feed students and to prepare them to learn during the school day. Mike, a grade 6 teacher, described the value of community connections to the school:

> You have a lot of involvement from the community through parent council, whether it's through fundraising, being involved in general, having the parents come in, tons of volunteers, and then you look at just the demographics of this school, where you have a lot of high income and you have a lot of low income, and there's a mix. You have things like the Angel Fund, which is for field trips. If a student can't afford to go, the Parent Council puts in for them, and that really contributes to the learning community, because you don't have students that are excluded now.

According to Mitchell, parents were involved in various aspects of school life:

> We present the SEP [School Effectiveness Plan] to the School Council. We have a really great School Council right now, and they're really supportive. They ask hard questions sometimes, but that's fair ball. They're really sort of getting involved. They're very supportive of us, and encouraging the teachers to take risks both monetarily, and how they, you know, there's lots of offers of, if you need help and that kind of thing. They volunteer huge amounts, and so more and more it gets broadened, and you try to hook them in. At the first School Council meeting, I handed out articles on boys and literacy and the D & T tie-in. And I did that because I want them to understand that this isn't just a wild idea. There's a rationale for it, and that we've thought it through, and we want to involve them in

> it. And when they go through–they work all day, and then they go do fundraisers for you. It's not, "Thanks for the money, and we'll spend it how we see fit." It's, you gotta let them know that you appreciate that, and that this is why we need this. And this is the rationale behind it, and this is what we're trying to do, so as much as you can get the message out is good.

According to Mitchell, the school's respect for parental involvement was reflected in the staff's willingness to explain the reasons for school purchases related to various change initiatives.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Five presented two levels of inductive analysis that were conducted to determine how teacher competencies developed and grew at Jude and Mountain Schools. Phase Two examined the external influences that shaped competencies of educators, while Phase Three explored teachers' intrinsic characteristics. In Phase Two the analysis revealed four external influences: professional learning, social bonds or teacher cohesion, resistance, and school administrators, which had many effects on teachers. Specifically, professional learning facilitated educators in enhancing their practices and pedagogy, social bonds or teacher cohesion provided teachers with work satisfaction and promoted continued professional development efforts, resistance gave teachers time to learn about and implement desirable initiatives into daily practice or to abandon faulty ones, and administrators encouraged and supported teachers in their quest for continued professional growth.

Phase Three, which sought to identify how teachers at these two schools differed from other teachers, revealed three key qualities: identification as professionals, investment in others, and institutional affiliation. From these themes grew an understanding that educators at Jude and Mountain Schools were dedicated professionals who contributed to school life, who pushed their practices beyond familiar routines to meet student needs, and who reflected on their practice to continue enhancing their skills. Educators invested heavily in students and colleagues and worked to create a culture of caring. Staff took collective responsibility for all students, participated in school-wide planning and problem solving, created consistent school-wide practices, and extended those connections through all levels of the school and beyond into the community. All of these characteristics and action patterns revealed educators who were committed to developing as professionals, who invested time and effort in members of the community, and who were closely affiliated with all aspects of school life.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers develop professional competencies and function as competent professionals in a learning community within an elementary school context. It is important to understand how teachers develop their competencies, because it is the means for improving teaching and learning. Currently, the model in place for teacher professional development in many school boards in Canada is the learning community model, which was the focus of this study. This chapter will provide a summary of the study that outlines briefly the methodology and the major findings of the investigation, followed by a discussion of the contributions to the teacher development and learning community literature, and finally presents the implications for practice, theory, and further research.

Summary of the Study

The study employed a qualitative methodology of case study with a participant-observer approach. Using descriptors of viable learning communities, through processes of nomination and self-identification, two elementary schools were selected as study sites, one public and one Catholic. Nineteen educators across the two sites agreed to participate in the study. Observations occurred during the school day over a 3-month period, with selected teachers being tracked through all phases of school life (e.g., staff meetings, division meetings, classroom teaching, team teaching, community presentations, assemblies, and so on). Observing participants daily in their natural work setting facilitated exploration of how teachers' abilities and competencies led to improved teaching and learning in each school. Detailed field log notes and research journals were kept of these observations. Two sets of interviews were conducted, one at the beginning and one at the end of the study, to discuss with the teachers how they developed professional competencies and functioned as competent professionals within their learning community. During the time between the two sets of interviews, informal conversations and observations took place with the participating teachers.

After completion of data collection, the process of organizing and reviewing the data began. The first level of deductive analysis was conducted to identify the sets of competencies that teachers at both schools participated in to improve their pedagogy as they worked and learned together. The deductive analysis yielded three categories: professional competencies, interpersonal competencies, and organizational competencies. It also provided a detailed, picture of school members' actions, interactions, and responses that showed ways in which participants expressed these competencies. To move beyond the descriptive level, interpretive and inductive analyses were subsequently conducted. The interpretive analysis was conducted to identify the influences on teacher competencies, and the inductive analysis was used to understand the qualities and patterns of action that made the teachers at the two study schools different from teachers at typical schools.

The descriptive analysis in Phase One yielded many learning events and daily operations at both Jude and Mountain schools that were focused on professional matters. The teachers participated actively in these events as they searched for methods to improve teaching and student learning. Teachers expressed their personal competencies through a student-growth focus, self-reflection, action research, role awareness, and role shift, which were all activities that assisted them to enhance their own pedagogic practices. Educators also improved their pedagogy by interacting and working together.

The expression of interpersonal competencies included supportive relationships, collective interests, a comfortable, safe environment, and professional sharing. Teachers worked at various levels throughout the school and used structures to provide opportunities to work and learn together. The organizational competencies were expressed through communication, professional growth, common focus, and distributed leadership. The data yielded school contexts where teachers felt safe, supported, and comfortable enough to engage in activities that allowed them to try new practice, to share what they knew with others, to collaborate, to take on leadership roles, to enhance professional skills, and to focus on shared goals. In each school, the context was focused on improving teachers' pedagogy in order to enhance students' learning.

In the interpretive analysis, the ways in which these competencies emerged and developed was examined. This analysis identified four categories of influence on teachers' competencies: professional learning, social bonds or teacher cohesion, resistance, and school administrators. These influences had a number of internal and external effects on teachers' practice and pedagogy. For example, when teachers participated in professional learning, they were exposed to new ideas, which helped them to move beyond the comfort zones and to question and examine ideas in some depth. As teachers worked through these questions, they found new ways of implementing ideas. Professional learning also helped colleagues to develop some shared understandings about pedagogy, practices, and student learning and to generate strong social bonds. The social bonds provided a sense of professional security, professional confidence, professional well-being, and professional belonging. Resistance also emerged as an influencing factor. This influence had negative effects when teachers did not participate in change or when they missed opportunities, but it also had positive effects when teachers stopped the change process to examine all sides of an issue, to identify faulty initiatives, and to focus on those that benefited staff. It also gave staff time to settle before engaging in the change process, which helped them find their own direction in teaching. The final influence was the school administrator, who acted as facilitator, vision builder, encourager, and supporter in the learning community context. Administrators kept a close watch on the progress of the learning community and ensured that teachers remained true to the school vision and goals. Principals also helped by creating a vision; modelling it; supporting and mentoring staff to achieve that vision; and encouraging them to adopt initiatives that enhanced their practices, pedagogy, and student learning.

An inductive analysis was subsequently conducted to identify the patterns of actions and qualities of the teachers. This analysis yielded three key themes: identification as professionals, investment in others, and affiliation with the institution. Teachers at both schools considered themselves professionals with valuable contributions to make to the learning community. Because they had a student-first focus, teachers participated in thoughtful, reflective practice and actively pushed craft boundaries to identify newer and better ways of teaching. The results also showed a unique kind of teachers' collegial relationships at the two schools. These teachers were not just interested in the well-being of all members of the group; they were actively invested in them. For example, because teachers had a shared understanding that students' learning and well-being were of key importance, they invested heavily in student success and adopted a collaborative approach to achieve this end. The student focus also provided the impetus for teachers to become heavily invested in one another and in the team, which spurred teachers to adopt leadership roles, even though they did not self-identify as leaders. The teachers' investment in the success of their team and students created a culture of care and of service that extended into the school community. This investment in the community also created boundaries of belonging, which were held together by a common commitment to creating the culture they wanted, to participating with the community at times, and to operating as an individual at other times. This level of investment yielded specific action patterns: a sense of collective responsibility for all students' learning, school-wide planning and problem-solving activities for student success, communication daily to promote problem solving, consistent practices, and connections into the community to enhance their understanding of students.

The learning community context of Jude and Mountain Schools revealed teachers whose professional identities, professional competencies, and school activity created a unique learning environment. The culture of care that resulted from teachers' deep respect for one another and for students resulted in a positive and trusting climate that enabled them to push their craft and practices further, to address questions and solve problems of teaching and learning, and to develop the whole student. The dedication to the school as a whole promoted continued professional growth and development by all members. The administrators maintained teachers' focus on identified school goals to ensure that members developed at their own pace and that they moved forward in the same direction. Teachers wanted to belong to the team, but the boundaries of belonging were such that members could be individuals at times to explore their own ideas about learning. It was teachers' identification as professionals and their acknowledgement that they had something valuable to contribute to the team that made them different in their professional working lives. Their work as competent professionals was dedicated to developing themselves, their team members, and their students to the fullest potential.

Discussion

This study contributes to the question of how educators define themselves as professionals. Luehmann (2008) states that "identity has been defined by scholars in a number of different ways" (p. 293); she defines teachers' professional identity "to mean *being recognized by self or others as a certain kind of teacher*" (p. 293). Gee (2001) extends this definition to include recognition occurring within a particular context where interpretations take place during common everyday experiences. Gee (2003) explains how teachers' identities change and evolve within a social context:

> We each have a core identity. . . . But as we take on new identities or transform old ones, this core identity changes and transforms as well. We are fluid creatures in the making, since we make ourselves socially through participation with others in various groups. Social practices and social groups are always changing, some slowly, some at a faster pace. (p. 4)

This description supports the formation of teachers' professional identities at Jude and Mountain Schools as they interacted socially within their particular contexts. Specifically, teachers' professional identities arose from their belief that they had a valuable role to play in the school and a contribution to make to the group.

By dedicating their energies and efforts towards teaching and learning, the participants found a focus for developing their professional identities. Novak (2002) believes that teachers want to "create a total school environment where people want to be and want to learn meaningful and important things" (p. 108). At Jude and Mountain

Schools, the teachers' persistent attention to their learning and the learning of their students enabled them to create a space where the teachers and the students wanted to be. These teachers were demonstrating the behaviours and sending the messages that Horowitz, Darling-Hammond, et al. (2005) believe will "influence the development [for students] of a positive sense of identity and an academic self-concept" (p. 112). The teachers in this study defined their professional roles through a holistic focus on the growth and development of their students.

With the persistent focus on learning, the teachers developed their professional identities through a search for newer and better ways of responding to students' learning needs. Luehmann (2008) argues that the process of identity development is facilitated by participation in educational discourse, with discourse being defined by Gee (2005) in the following way:

> I use the term "Discourse," with a capital "D," for ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity. Thinking about the different Discourses a piece of language is part of is another tool for engaging in discourse analysis. (p. 21)

Luehmann states, *"It is in the interpretation or **recognition** of that participation, by self or others, that identities are actually formed"* (p. 293). Although Luehmann sees recognition as a key factor, this was not the case for the teachers in this study. They used professional discourse as a means to hone their craft, but there was no evidence of a search for recognition. Their identity was implicitly formed as they participated actively with each other in examining practice questions, in pushing their skills, and in participating in professional conversations at every opportunity. The development of their professional competency through interaction and dialogue with other teachers enhanced their commitment, confidence, and competence.

The student-first focus of the professional identities gave these teachers a different way of looking at assessment. As early as 1996, Stoll and Fink warned that external assessments do not necessarily improve the quality of education, and in fact there are "many examples of 'teaching to the test', where test content drives what is taught" (p. 166). Stoll and Fink argue that educators and researchers have "never demonstrated to ourselves, let alone anyone else, that schools make a difference to pupils' learning, knowledge, skills and attitudes which will enable them to be successful citizens in the twenty-first century" (p. 166). Their observation of misplaced focus by government agencies is echoed by Volante (2004), who contends that because of "increasing pressure from politicians, school district personnel, administrators, and the public, some teachers have begun to employ test preparation practices that are clearly not in the best interest of children" (¶ 5). These scholars' concerns confirm this study's findings that focusing solely on increasing standardized test scores is not the central mission of teachers and schools. Although the teachers at Jude and Mountain Schools used data to plan for student success, they defined success by student learning, and they based their plans on the particular learning profiles of particular students. These educators looked beyond standardized test scores because they were concerned with a broader set of indicators that gave them a sense of the child as a whole person.

A means for achieving identity has been termed "affinity groups" by Gee (2001), where people are bonded through participation in shared practices, goals, and endeavours.

In this study, shared practices and goals emerged as the teachers worked together to solve common problems. Garet et al. (2001) argue that teachers grow as competent professionals as they engage in meaningful planning, discussion, and practice.

> Meaningful discussion can be linked to Buber's (1947) concept of dialogue where no matter whether spoken or silent–where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them. (p. 37)

In developing relationships with one another, participants established contact through the use of dialogue. This relationship-building or "living mutual relationship" that Buber describes supports the idea that investment in others is a valuable exercise for implementing change in practices at the school level. Gee describes this process of creating social bonds in the following way:

> It is not just businesses that seek to create affinity groups. A popular wave of school reform has called for creating classrooms as "communities of learners" (e.g., Brown, 1994; Brown et al., 1993). Such classrooms stress collaborative (group, team) learning, distributed knowledge (i.e., knowledge that is not in any one person's head, but distributed across the group, its practices, and the tools and technologies it uses), and a variety of other sorts of distinctive learning practices (e.g., collaborative research, use of the Internet). These practices and the ways in which learners share and co-participate in them are meant to create a distinctive identity for learners (together with others, for example university scientists, who may share in the community of learners from afar on e-mail), an identity in terms

> of which they are proactive inquirers and responsible for each other's learning. (p. 107)

Relationship building occurs in the context of a school community as teachers build their school through conversations. This process is described by M. K. Smith (2000, 2009) as the heart, or the active centre, of the school, where special people build the school by living a dialogical life. According to M. K. Smith, teachers bring the community to life as they express and symbolize their professional commitments and investments. This kind of school-building activity is essentially a process of active mutual learning. Carey and Frechtling (1997) describe active learning as a process of observing expert teachers, being observed teaching, reviewing student work in the topic examined, and planning how new curriculum and teaching methods will be used in the classroom. For the teachers in this study, building their school through shared reflective practice had both cognitive and affective aspects. These educators became reflective about their professional practice with a critical friend. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986), a critical friend helps "those involved in the educational process to improve their own educational practices, their own understandings, and the situations and institutions in which they work" (p. 161). This type of reflective practice was a regular occurrence at both Jude and Mountain Schools, as the educators relied on the strong affective bonds to move into new cognitive understandings.

According to Darling-Hammond (1997), sharing knowledge as a means for making responsible decisions is important because "workers in any organization must have a steady flow of information about their work and its outcomes" (p. 166). She contends that teachers willingly give up some personal autonomy to gain collegial feedback because the feedback offers more success for their students and more growth for themselves. It was exactly this type of learning and growth that was observed at Jude and Mountain Schools as teachers shared knowledge and teaching strategies with colleagues, provided one another with feedback, and moved forward in their teaching practices.

The importance of strong affective bonds for school improvement has been a key component of the educational change literature for a long time. Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, and Manning (2001) argue that

> educational change efforts affect teachers' relationships with their students, the parents of those students, and one another. Teachers make heavy emotional investments in these relationships. Their sense of success and satisfaction depends on them. . . . Virtually all aspects of teachers' work–the ways they teach, the timetable structures they prefer, and even how they plan–are affected by the importance they attach to the emotional goals and relationships of their jobs. (p. 136)

In short, these authors highlight the emotional component of the professional bonds teachers form with one another. In this study, teachers formed close personal bonds that extended beyond professional interactions and out into the community. Teachers at both schools cared about one another and had a respectful approach to colleagues. The close ties and relationships went deeper than the norm, which helps to explain why members had a great investment in the success of colleagues and students.

The relationships that teachers formed with each other at both schools involved participation in mentoring activities. Blank and Kershaw (2009) suggest that "mentoring is a key strategy that must maintain high expectations for the learning of *all* students as its central focus" (p. 17). At Jude and Mountain Schools, as teachers regularly mentored one another, they shared their knowledge and skills with other staff members. This willingness to devote planning time and free personal time to the development of colleagues stood out as a key element to teachers' being able to reach all students as they enhanced their professional competencies.

In order to move forward with change, teachers at Jude and Mountain Schools developed a shared vision, which is a common recommendation in the school improvement literature. Hammerness (2006), for example, has found that vision-building is usually a top-down process; in conversation with a veteran mathematics teacher, Hammerness was told that no one asked teachers about their vision. Hammerness argues against the top-down process because,

> while teachers' vision serves as a productive guide for future practice, it also provides a means of reflecting on past activities and experiences in the classroom. Like a mirror, teachers compare daily practice to their vision and recognize successes as well as identifying areas for improvement. In that sense, teachers' vision looks back and sees forward, encompassing past efforts in order to move closer to future aims. (p. 3)

The benefits that Hammerness describes were evident at Jude and Mountain Schools. The vision created by the teachers at these schools was meaningful to them because it emerged through daily conversations rather than through hollow vision–building paper exercises. Because the vision and goals were meaningful to them as a group, it guided their individual and collective work. Unfortunately, the level of meaning observed at Jude and Mountain Schools is missing in many goal-setting or vision-building exercises.

Their common commitment to team members led teachers at both schools to create the culture they wanted. Hargreaves et al. (2001) describe this type of process:

> Organizations and workplaces are prime sites in which adults experience and learn to express their emotions in particular ways. Central to this cultural dimension of emotions is the idea of emotional understanding. . . . Importantly, emotional engagement and understanding in schools (as elsewhere) requires strong, continuous relationships between teachers and students so that they learn to read each other over time. (pp. 137-138).

Hargreaves et al. argue that, where the professional bonds are stifled by a focus on standardized testing, this misplaced focus disrupts the culture that teachers want to create. At Jude and Mountain Schools, teachers created a culture that addressed the individual learning needs of students rather than focusing on standardized test scores.

Teachers at Jude and Mountain Schools were building and using school structures to foster teaching and learning. Darling-Hammond (1997) argues that teachers can achieve this goal by building work structures that "take advantage of distributed expertise as teachers fill in gaps in one another's base of knowledge and experience" and "serve as sounding boards for ideas" (pp. 166-167). At Jude and Mountain Schools, the teachers' work within collaborative structures gave them a sense of collective responsibility. According to Stoll and Seashore Louis (2007), the sense of the collective broadens teachers' focus so that

> focus is not just on individual teachers' learning but on (1) professional learning; (2) within the context of a cohesive group; (3) that focuses on collective

> knowledge, and (4) occurs within an ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders. (p. 3)

What Stoll and Seashore Louis describe is a process of genuine interest in the individual learning needs of students and staff members. At Jude and Mountain Schools, this sense of collective responsibility for all students' learning, for school-wide planning, for daily communication for problem solving, and for student success compelled the teachers to adopt consistent practices, to extend connections into the community, and to enhance their understanding of students.

At these two schools, the collective work unfolded in an environment of respect and care for students and members of the community. This environment was characteristic of a culture of care, which Mitchell and Sackney (2007) describe as

> places of collaboration that link people at the classroom, the school and community level to a shared vision and a common purpose. As such, caring and respectful schools are places where people work together to improve learning outcomes for students and families. (p. 37)

According to Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006), "the primary purpose for school structures is to make possible the development and maintenance of cultures that support the work of teachers and the learning of students" (p. 97). This brief description sums up the way in which teachers at Jude and Mountain Schools used school structures to build a culture that would support teachers working together to help students learn.

However, teachers are not the only ones who influence the culture of a school. The principal to a certain extent also shapes the culture, as Goldberg (2006) points out:

> The most important thing you can do [as principal] is hire excellent people: teachers, [and other staff] with whom you can work well and who will fit the developing view of a culture that you share with your staff or encourage as part of your school's renewal. . . . Over a period of several years, these are the people who will assist you in putting your stamp or notion of culture on the organization, to the reasonable extent that you can and wish to change the organization. (p. 5)

Goldberg's argument supports the notion that although it takes a team of leaders to run the school and to create the culture, the principal has an impact on that culture building process. Similarly, Schlechty (2005) posits,

> *I would argue that the first steps any leader who is anticipating installing a disruptive innovation must take are those designed to ensure the presence of a cadre of leaders who understand and embrace the idea of continuous improvement, for without such a cadre the difficulties certain to be confronted in the change process simply cannot be surmounted.* (p. 39)

Massey (2009) extends the principal's role in this way: "When principals ensure that there is a continuous school focus on student achievement and makes everyone accountable for student learning, the conditions for a collaborative culture are created" (p. 24). This role was evident in the study schools as the principals provided teachers with opportunities, kept things moving forward, and put learning at the center of everything. These principals were interested in getting "the right people in the right seats" (Collins, 2001, p.3) to shake up the school and to get the learning teams working together towards the identified collective goals and vision. They were acting as both the cultural glue and the grease in these schools.

One of the ways in which principals moved teachers forward was by taking on an instructional leadership role. In that role, they afforded teachers opportunities to grow as professionals through providing professional development, distributing leadership tasks, and providing time to develop new skills and to adopt new initiatives. However, some tensions arose from the ways in which the administrators enacted instructional leadership. At times, they became too directive in the process, which created resistance. According to Schlechty (2005), resistance by teachers can take various forms and usually occurs because teachers feel that an innovation is not valuable and in fact may be detrimental to growth and development of students. In a study of collegiality in elementary schools in Ontario, Canada, Hargreaves (1991) found that “contrived collegiality does not evolve spontaneously from the initiative of teachers, but is an administrative imposition that requires teachers to meet and work together” (p. 1487), and his concern is whether collegial processes will provide teachers with more than “cosmetic empowerment” (p. 1501). The administrators at both study schools were guilty of some of Hargreaves’s complaints because, although teachers were provided with leadership opportunities, the principals monitored their progress closely and brought them back in line when they deviated from the school vision. This enforcement of the school improvement plan might explain some of the observed resistance by teachers. It should be noted that most teachers were fine with the administrators maintaining control, whereas a few teachers felt they did not have enough autonomy.

Although the administrators held control of the reins, which created an imbalance of power, they also tried to reduce resistance by focusing on the school improvement goals. A means for explaining the process they followed comes from Hallinger and

Hausmann (1994):

> [When to move ahead] is an almost daily decision that you have to make because you have to serve as both a catalyst and a facilitator, and those are almost contradictory roles. A facilitator is a person who tries to get everybody to move at a pace that people can handle and come to some kind of consensus. At the same time, you like to put a little fire under them and move a little faster. (pp. 170-171)

This role of catalyst and facilitator aptly describes the administrators at Jude and Mountain Schools, who kept staff members moving in the same direction, each at their own pace. To address the inherent tension and resistance that arose during the process, the administrators worked to build trust with the staff. Novak (2009) contends that "the best way to develop trust is to be trustworthy. This means taking an interest in others, helping them achieve meaningful goals, and respecting confidences" (p. 63). Principals at both schools created trusting relationships one teacher at a time by providing an environment that was appropriately safe and comfortable. At times when the principals felt that teachers were moving away from the plan, they would bring them back to their central purpose and rebuild trust by proposing potential solutions to the issues that arose, by apologizing for any missteps, and by reaching a compromise with which both parties could live.

At times resistance arose not only from the ways in which administrators enacted their roles as instructional leaders but also from the means by which teachers built boundaries of belonging. Members at Jude and Mountain Schools created norms that established expectations for belonging to the community. Sergiovanni (2007) describes the norming process:

> Communities are defined by their center of shared values, beliefs, and commitments. . . . These norms make it possible to promote collegiality as something that is internally felt and that derives from morally driven interdependence. . . . The school community's informal norm system and the internal connection of teachers to it become substitutes for leadership as teachers become increasingly self-managed. (p. 47)

Although Sergiovanni believes this process will reduce resistance, it can also have detrimental effects. At both Jude and Mountain Schools, the teachers created a context where members who occasionally did not want to follow the norms of the group were on the outside looking in. The culture did not always provide flexible boundaries for members who needed some autonomy. Cultural boundaries of belonging can lead to a push to homogenize members, but Marshall (2006, p. 113) argues that, if everyone is the same, then creativity is stifled and the voice of reason is silenced. In the study schools, teachers who felt constrained by the community and desired flexible boundaries showed a variety of responses. At times, they demonstrated the type of contrived collegiality described by Hargreaves (1991), but at other times, they removed themselves from collective work and rejoined when they felt it was appropriate to do so.

Yet in spite of these tensions, the teachers at both Jude and Mountain Schools were remarkably successful at creating excellent learning communities. Sergiovanni (2007) states,

> We know excellent schools when we experience them, despite difficulties in definition. In excellent schools things "hang together"; a sense of purpose rallies people to a common cause; work has meaning and life is significant; teachers and

> students work together and with spirit; and accomplishments are readily recognized. (p. 6)

An explanation for the excellence of the study schools was the collective intelligence and leadership of the members. The focus on teaching and learning became a form of leadership that may be termed "leaders-at-the-side" or "star teachers" (Haberman, 2004). In sharing leadership, principals at Jude and Mountain Schools recognized the teachers' high level of capacity, and teachers were willing to take on leadership tasks. Although teachers did not self-identify as leaders, they moved their team forward for the benefit of colleagues and students.

Implications and Future Research

The interpretation of how teachers' professional competencies are developed and expressed within a learning community revealed the importance of understanding the context and roles of stakeholders in a viable learning community. The implications of study findings indicate the necessity for schools, districts, and colleges of education to create the professional, organizational, and cultural conditions that focus on teacher development for school improvement and enhanced teaching and learning. As the results have shown, teachers who have strong bonds with one another and a shared focus for student improvement develop professional identities to enhance student learning by focusing on the whole child. By creating the culture they want, teachers function in an environment of care and trust that facilitates a sense of belonging. The administrator also had the dual role of catalyst and facilitator in the school improvement process and in teacher development. This study therefore has a set of recommendations for theory and practice as well as some future avenues for research.

Implications for Theory

One implication for learning community theory is to conceptualize and integrate the elements of teachers' personal capacity. Specifically, this study draws attention to the three elements of professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies (see Figure 1). The integration of these three competencies under the overarching concept of personal capacity adds a new dimension to learning community theory, in which personal capacity has been traditionally viewed as a single dimension that interacted with other elements of the organization or the group. The results of this study imply that teachers bring a multidimensional aspect to their interactions within the organization and with a group. Personal, organizational, and interpersonal characteristics are now located within individual teachers themselves and are controlled and influenced by the teachers. It is no longer external factors alone that affect teachers' professional identity and professional development but rather the teachers' own abilities within the professional, interpersonal, and organizational realms. This approach provides teachers with more autonomy and control over how they exert influences in the school, how they work within school structures, how they build professional discourse, how they define professional identities, and how they use their skills to build up their repertoires and those of their colleagues. The interplay of these competencies leads to teachers developing to their fullest potential while creating the schools they want.

A second contribution to theory is this study's description of how learning community implementation unfolds from teacher traits. By taking into account the skills and strengths that teachers bring to the school, researchers may solve the dilemma of how to implement learning communities from the ground up and from the top down in

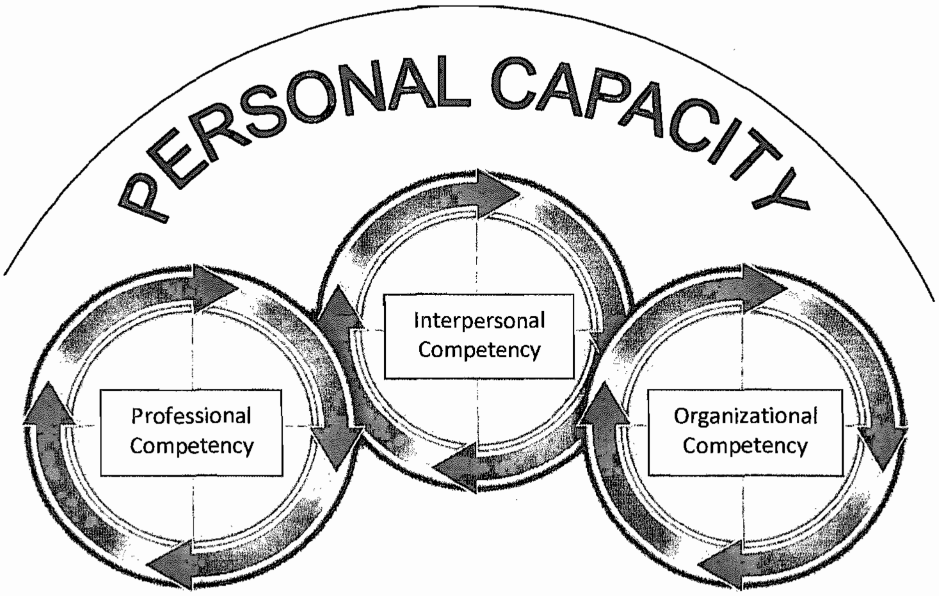
PERSONAL CAPACITY
Interpersonal Competency
Professional Competency
Organizational Competency

Figure 1. An integrated model of personal capacity.

Note. Taken from Microsoft Word 2003 open source clipart.

schools. Because districts attempt to impose on teachers a recipe approach for learning community implementation, the initiative often fails. If the process grows from the efforts of teachers who are engaged in professional discourses and who take collective responsibility for student learning, then the implementation process can be more authentic and viable. In this study, the efforts of the teachers at Jude and Mountain Schools unfolded within three constructs: professional identity, investment in others, and institutional affiliation. These results indicate that the learning community, once formed, is a complex system in which the three constructs held by each of its members interlink and overlap with one another. These constructs can be thought of as subsystems that are constantly moving and interacting with one another at all levels of the organization, expanding at times and contracting at others. They may exist concurrently at different levels of the organization and at various times in a continually changing cycle and iterative sequence of expressions. This relationship is depicted in Figure 2. However, the flat, two-dimensional shape shown in Figure 2 is not representative of the learning community system. Instead, the figure should be considered as a four-dimensional system of embedded and nested subsystems in which the three constructs are held by each teacher within the learning community, affect others at all levels in the system, and change over time. The figure can be understood as a metaphor for a living organism similar to a DNA helix that winds and unwinds with each component building on and adding to the creation of the molecule. In the learning community, the three themes constitute the building blocks or constructs that connect and reconnect to form the completed system.

Implications for Practice

The study also has several implications for practice. First, changes should be made to the contexts within which professional development is offered to teachers. Specifically, professional development should arise from teacher-identified concerns and addressed at the school level by staff with expertise in the identified areas or by board personnel who work with the teachers on site. In this way, professional development is suited to teachers' school contexts and targets specific skill sets.

Professional learning opportunities should also prepare teachers to work collaboratively in their teams to achieve improved student learning. This study demonstrates that the skills teachers rely on to work together effectively (e.g., mentorship, active listening, conflict resolution, constructive criticism, role play) are not necessarily inherent traits and abilities possessed by all teachers or teacher candidates. Explicit instruction of these types of collaborative team-building skills can equip teachers to address the complex dilemmas faced by educators working in an interconnected learning community.

This study also has implications for principal qualification programs and the preparation of administrators for daily practice in schools. These programs need to focus on developing professional competencies and interpersonal skills that can facilitate principals in building trusting relationships with staff members. Results of this study suggest that leadership preparation programs should shift priorities from promoting a bureaucratic managerial style of leadership to a more participatory type. Most important, a focus on administrators as individuals who themselves have personal capacities comprised of professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies should be

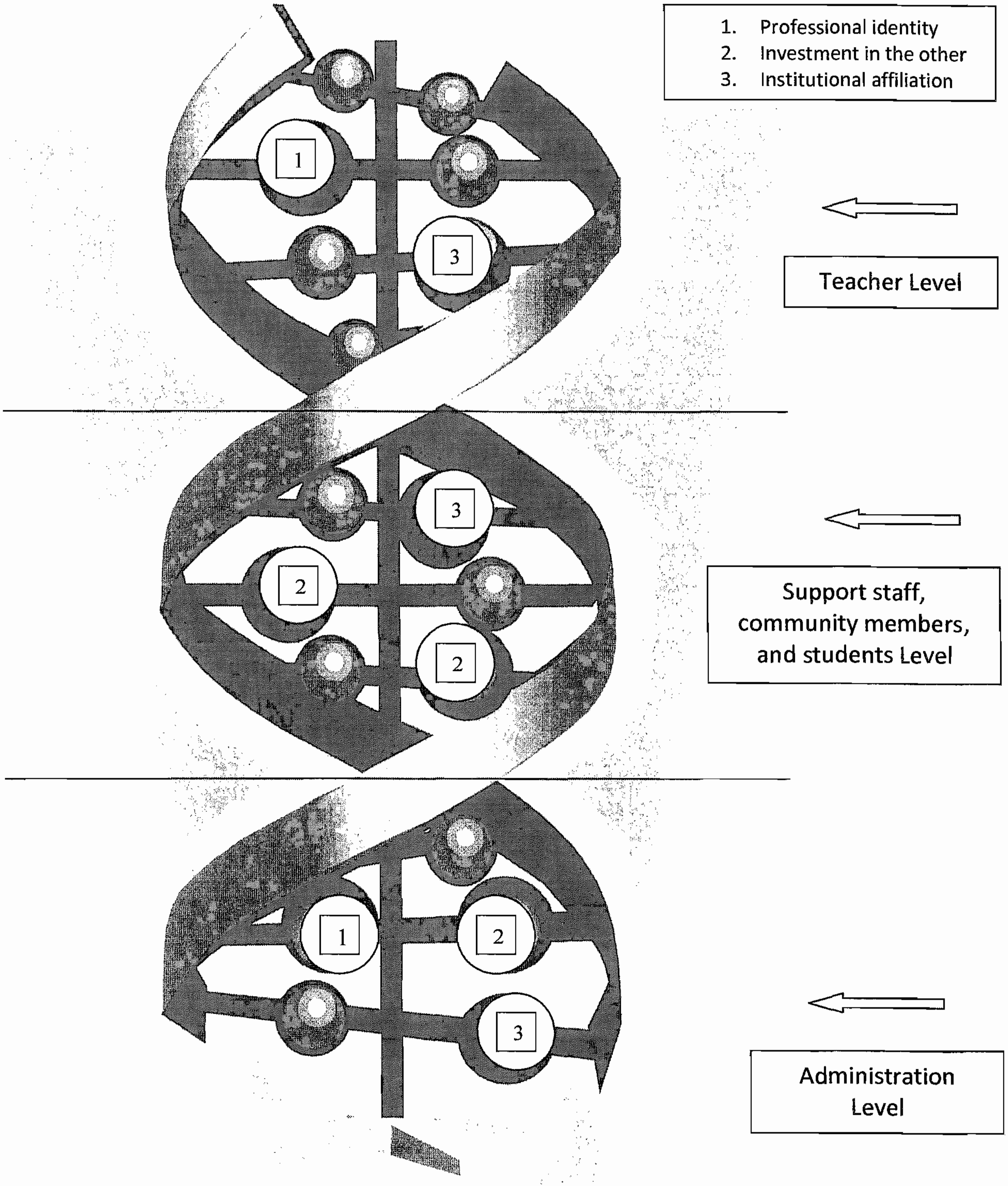
1. Professional identity
2. Investment in the other
3. Institutional affiliation
1
3
Teacher Level
3
2
2
Support staff, community members, and students Level
1
2
3
Administration Level

Figure 2. A model for how teachers' competencies influence learning community functioning.

Note. Taken from Microsoft Word 2003 open source clipart.

included in principal qualification programs and principal continuing development training.

Principal qualification and continuing principal education programs are typically silent on issues of resistance in daily operations, which leaves administrators illequipped to address these issues as they arise in schools. By neglecting to address the issue of teacher resistance, administrators are open to criticism and failure of attempts to implement school improvement initiatives. Further problems arise when administrators try to promote distributed leadership without understanding how to build relationships with teachers prior to taking on this difficult task. If principals are not prepared to address how to share leadership appropriately and how to support and guide staff members in this process, then it is likely that the attempts at distributed leadership will fail and administrators will feel defeated. To understand which staff members are ready to assume leadership roles as well as to understand how best to support different teachers requires a clear understanding of teacher development. Hence principal preparation and continuing education programs need to examine questions of teacher resistance, appropriate distribution of leadership, teacher development within individual school contexts, and trusting relationships. These questions of leadership practice can provide the techniques and strategies to develop abilities to meet the challenges of leaders in 21st century schools.

A final implication for practice arises from examining the issue of tension, because a healthy tension is a natural part of learning communities. Teachers and administrators need to be aware that the collective ideas of the group should be examined carefully and not adopted wholeheartedly. By denying voice to the minority, learning communities limit divergent thinking, which may severely hinder learning progress. Instead, learning communities should consider and attend to the development of flexible boundaries for teachers that do not ostracize members who choose not to belong and that allow them to reintegrate into the group when they are ready. Attention to boundarysetting will promote the development of a more well-rounded group of educators and ideas by adding depth and complexity to the group and the learning.

Implications for Future Research

As the teacher's role in the learning community was explored, some unexpected results surfaced. These results raise a few key issues that have not been thoroughly theorized, critiqued, or investigated and that require further research. These issues centered around leadership, teacher risk-taking and experimentation, trust, group bond purposes, and the normalizing force of the learning community. In the subsequent paragraphs I will describe how these issues provide an impetus for further investigation.

How leadership was understood and enacted in this study raises some important questions about the definition of a leader. It was surprising to hear participants repeatedly deny that they were leaders. Although teachers were aware that they were in formal or informal leadership roles or that they were performing leadership functions, they did not self-identify as leaders and at times even rejected this label. This finding suggests that teachers' enactment of leadership is not linked in their minds with the person of leader. This result has not been clearly described in the learning community literature and requires additional study to delineate what teachers understand a leader to be and why they can perform leadership roles but not consider themselves to be leaders. In addition, learning community theory supports shared or distributed leadership where administrators and teachers share power and leadership roles. However, this study revealed unanticipated findings of principals who held tight control of the organization and teachers who, for the most part, were fine with this situation. This observation indicates that distributed leadership was seen by these educators not as a joint leadership role but as a hierarchical relationship, with principals holding tight control of the ship and teachers following their captain. These results imply that the character of leadership, its definition, the power relationships, and the assumptions about leadership held by teachers and administrators in the learning community warrant further examination.

In learning communities an atmosphere of risk-taking and experimentation is expected and encouraged, but this study raises questions about the degree to which teachers have or do not have the latitude and freedom to take risks and experiment in their classrooms. In this study, some teachers felt a great deal of freedom to experiment with the content of their curriculum, to encourage debate, discussion, and higher order thinking in the classroom. For others, their every action seemed to be under scrutiny and warranted supervisory visits. Furthermore, there was no detectable pattern as to which teachers would take risks and which teachers would be unwilling to experiment. This result suggests the need to investigate risk-taking and experimentation behaviours and decisions in learning community contexts. How much risk is too much? What factors define who takes risks and who does not? These questions require future investigation to understand fully how to encourage risk-taking and experimentation in order to move teachers' pedagogy and student learning forward.

In this research, participants described a high level of trust at both Jude and Mountain Schools. However, the data revealed some instances where trust was broken between administrators and teachers or between teachers and teachers. This finding, which showed that trust was not as embedded and stable as it appeared, raises the question of how sustainable is trust and what happens in the learning community when trust breaks down. Further research is needed to examine the impact of episodes where trust is broken to determine whether the group continues to grow and develop when seemingly strong relationships have been shaken. The effect of these ruptures in relationships can be examined with respect to whether they remain broken or whether they reconnect and evolve into stronger bonds.

In this study, teachers came together in the learning community context to form group bonds that served several purposes. Teachers wanted to provide the best learning environment possible for their students, and they came together at regular intervals during the school day and outside of school to meet, to plan, and to support each other cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Generally, the research literature on group bonds examines the affective elements of social and emotional support that teachers garner from their group. This study calls attention to the impact of group bonds on strengthening teachers' cognitive skills, which is an area that has not been adequately theorized or investigated to date. Studying the ways in which teachers become better professionals and grow their repertoires of skills through their group bonds can yield an understanding of the power and potential of forming cognitive bonds with colleagues.

Finally, the normalizing force of learning communities is another issue of research interest arising from this study. The current research literature attempts to identify and explain the benefits of the learning community model for teacher development. This work, however, suggests that not all aspects of this model are beneficial for teachers. In fact, the normalizing force of the learning community might be detrimental to some members through marginalization, silencing of voice, and unnecessary resistance. Research studies and viable learning communities maintain a delicate balance between building a community of learners and professionals focused and aligned in support of student learning while respecting members who are different, who may be the voice of reason, who may not be ready or willing to adopt group directions and norms, and who do not want to belong to the group at times. The literature is silent as to how learning communities create flexible boundaries that allow teachers to flow in and out of the group more freely without repercussions and being ostracized by members. This work provided a brief glimpse into this process, but more research is required to understand fully the impact of the force the learning community exerts on its members who are different or do not want to follow group norms, especially when those norms may not be in the best interest of student learning and pedagogy development. It is important for researchers and teachers to be aware that the powerful force exerted by learning communities may be a double-edged sword that can create benefits for enhanced teaching pedagogy and improved student learning, but that can also marginalize some of its members, create unnecessary resistance, and silence those voices that may be the only ones speaking legitimately about flawed improvement initiatives.

Final Reflections

This study is centrally concerned with the development of professional identities for teachers. As teachers' professional capacity and professional, interpersonal, and organizational competencies are developed and expressed within a learning community, this process shapes everything that educators do. By working to enhance and use their skills and abilities through discourse, through sharing pedagogy, and through giving time and support to one another, teachers create a distinct identity as professionals engaged and focused on educative matters. With this targeted behaviour, teachers continue to grow into effective professionals for reaching and teaching contemporary youth.

Professionally, as an experienced educator, I have worked to create a culture of respect within my classroom, my department, and my school, which has provided stability for me as a professional and for my students. This study has crystallized the character of this relationship and highlighted its importance for schools and the people in them. When schools are places that demonstrate genuine interest in the collective learning of teachers and students, they are living, viable learning communities. They are places professionals and students want to be.

In conclusion, it is critical that teacher and leadership preparation programs and ongoing professional development initiatives attend to the development of members' personal capacity and competencies, which not only affects their own growth as professionals but also deeply affects the development of colleagues and students. When professionals know what their strengths are and how to develop them further, then the possibilities are unlimited within the learning community. It is only when we unleash the potential of the human mind that we see the collective impact on the growth and development of our future–the students.

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Appendix A

Interview Guides

Prestudy Interview Guide

Topic 1:

- *Tell me about your school assignment.*

Probes:

- *teaching position*
- *primary, junior, or intermediate division*
- *a team leader or a division head*

Topic 2:

- *Describe your perception of yourself as a leader.*

Probes:

- *leadership characteristics*
- *leadership roles*
- *other staff members' perceptions*

Topic 3:

- *As a member of the learning community, describe your contributions.*

Probes:

- *your characteristics*
- *your knowledge*
- *your skills*
- *your abilities*

Topic 4:

- *What are your beliefs about being a viable learning community?*

***Topic 5*:**

- *How do you think teachers create a learning community?*

Probes:

- *major role*
- *minor role*
- *learning community activities*

Topic 6:

- *What do you consider to be the work of your school's learning community?*

Probes:

- *school's vision*
- *school's values*
- *school's beliefs*
- *school's purpose*

Poststudy Interview Guide Teachers

Topic 1:

- *Tell me about your role as a leader within the learning community.*

Probes:

- *describe leadership role(s)*
- *how do you support the LC?*
- *how do you promote the LC?*

Topic 2:

- *Describe your contributions to the learning community.*

Probes:

- *personal capacity*
- *professional competency*
- *interpersonal competency*
- *instructional competency*
- *What knowledge do you bring to the learning community? What skills do you bring to the learning community? What abilities do you bring to the learning community?*

Topic 3:

- *Why do you believe this school to be an identified viable or excellent learning community?*

Probes:

- *describe leadership roles*
- *describe the role of administration*

Topic 4:

- *How is your administrator important to the success of your school's learning community?*

Topic 5:

- *How are teachers at your school primarily responsible for the success of the learning community?*

Probes:

- *What are their roles in the process?*
- *How do they support one another?*
- *What structures have they put in place, if any?*

Topic 6a:

- *What is your definition of a learning community?*

Probes:

- *Who is involved?*
- *What is the work of the learning community?*
- *How does it sustain itself?*

Topic 6b:

- *What is the structure for your learning community?*

Probes:

- *teaching partner*
- *grade team*
- *school community*
- *classroom*

Topic 7:

- *If the teacher leaders at your school left, would the learning community still function well?*

Probes:

- *Who are the teacher leaders?*
- *What are their roles in the process?*
- *How do they support one another?*
- *What structures have they put in place if any?*

Topic 8:

- *If the administrator(s) at your school left, would the learning community still function well?*

Probes:

- *What is his/her role in the process?*
- *How does he/she support staff?*
- *What structures has he/she put in place, if any?*

Topic 9:

- *Describe yourself as a leader.*

Probes:

- *What is your best leadership quality?*
- *What is your worst leadership quality?*
- *Why do people follow you or listen to your ideas?*
- *How did you develop relationships with your learning community members?*

Topic 10:

- *How do learning community members work together?*

Probes:

- *Do you feel that your learning community members collaborate?*
- *Do you feel that your learning community is collegial?*
- *Do you feel that members of your learning community work well together?*
- *Do members of the learning community alternate roles as leaders and then as followers?*

Topic 11:

- *How does learning community work get done?*

Probes:

- *Do you have formal learning community meetings?*
- *Do you meet regularly and, if yes, how often do you meet and when?*
- *Do you have informal hallway chats and staff room discussions on professional issues?*
- *Do staff members share instructional strategies?*
- *Do you work together to develop common lessons and assessments?*
- *Do you discuss student progress and achievement in your learning community?*
- *Do you plan for individual student success in your learning community?*
- *Do staff members exhibit common understanding about professional practice?*
- *Do staff members take collective responsibility for student learning?*
- *Do teachers reflect on their professional practice?*

Topic 12:

- *Has your opinion about my study focusing on teachers changed?*

Appendix B

Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist-Teachers **Participant Code:**____________

Date:____________________ **Context:**______________________________
Who:______________________ **What:**________________________________
Where:____________________ **When:**________________ **How:**__________
____

_____hallway or staffroom chats
_____shared lesson planning
_____takes collective responsibility for student learning
_____team teaching
_____has opportunities to take on leadership roles
_____demonstrates personal capacity
_____demonstrates professional competency
_____demonstrates interpersonal competency
_____demonstrates organizational competency
_____demonstrates leadership
_____collaborates with other staff members
_____appears to change professional practice
_____use A/R to reflect on daily practice
_____participates in PD activities at school
_____experienced PD in LC
_____participates in board-run PD activities
_____leadership qualities evident
_____sees learning community as PD
_____resists change
_____promotes change
_____accepts change
_____promotes the learning community
_____accepts the learning community
_____resists the learning community
_____discusses student progress and achievement
_____shares information
_____shares skills
_____shares knowledge
_____supports members of the learning community
_____does learning community work
_____participates in scheduled LC meetings
_____primary teacher
_____junior teacher
_____intermediate teacher
_____views school as a learning community
_____has a role in the learning community

____builds trust relationships with LC members
_____shared assessment
_____organized teachers to meet
_____cares about LC members
____uses action research in daily practice
_____innovative
_____reflects on teaching practice
_____searches for better ways of doing things
_____knows school vision
_____knows school values
_____knows school beliefs
_____values learning community
____builds members' capacities and competencies
____demonstrates personal capacity
____demonstrates professional competency
____demonstrates interpersonal competency
____ demonstrates organizational competency
_____demonstrates collegial behaviour
_____works well with other staff
_____cares about learning
_____cares about teaching
_____shares instructional strategies
_____plans for individual student success
_____understands curriculum
_____tends to be a follower
_____tends to be a leader
_____formal leader
_____informal leader
_____acts collegially
_____collaborates with LC members
_____respects the opinion of others
_____allows others chance to lead
_____facilitates others to lead
_____cares about students

_____runs learning community activities
_____participates in scheduled learning community activities
_____alternates between being a leader and a follower
_____other members appear to listen or to follow their suggestions
_____works with others to develop common lessons and assessments
_____exhibits common understanding about professional practice

Note: PD=professional development, LC=learning community, and A/R=action research

Appendix C

Ethics Clearance

Brock University
Office of Research Services
Research Ethics Office
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1
T: 905-688-5550, Ext. 3035/4876 F: 905-688-0748
www.brocku.ca

DATE: November 8, 2006

FROM: Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Coral Mitchell, Education
Sonya Pancucci

FILE: 06-075 PANCUCCI

TITLE: Learning Communities: How teachers' capacities inform them

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The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: **Accepted as clarified; however,**

- **Please narrow the statement (in the verbal script sentence 3, paragraph 3,) regarding the benefit of the study as you stated you would in your clarifications "...Enhancing understanding of learning communities as a professional development strategy in Canada..." is, perhaps, an overstated benefit.**
- **Please proofread all participant materials carefully to eliminate non-standard constructions and formatting errors.**

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of November 8, 2006 to August 31, 2007 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms to complete the appropriate form **Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.**

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form ***Continuing Review/Final Report*** is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

LRK/bb