

TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2011 PROED
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CREATING A
CULTURE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING IN SCHOOLS IN
THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

DEBRA L. S. PSYCHOYOS

Dr. Phillip Messner, Dissertation Supervisor

MAY 2012

© Debra L. S. Psychoyos 2012
All Rights Reserved

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School,

have examined the dissertation entitled

TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2011 PROED
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CREATING A
CULTURE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING IN SCHOOLS IN THE
REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

Presented by Debra L. S. Psychoyos,

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Phillip Messner

Professor Carole Edmonds

Dr. Melody Smith

Dr. Rochelle Hiatt

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those who have inspired me to teach ... *from the heart.*

To my parents: You told me to be a teacher because my acting career would become a reality “on the classroom stage” everyday.

Some days were award winners.

To my brother and sister: You let me be your teacher when we played school in the basement of our Luddington Avenue home in New Jersey.

I never quit.

To my husband: You coached me on stats and shared your leadership stories, and you always managed to help me see that the finish line was closer than it appeared.

Thank you for seeing me through another marathon.

To my children: You tenaciously taught me the importance of being a teacher who cared for *all* students.

Lessons learned.

And finally...

To my dear Maria Antonietta, thank you for continuing to learn with me everyday. May this be the beginning of many learning journeys we share together. Thank you, Mary.

To the caring educators of the 2011 ProEd PLC, to Rose, and to my DoDDS-Panama colleagues: Your collegial conversations mean more than words could ever express.

Thank you for inspiring me to inspire others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This learning journey began in 2008, thanks to a phone call from Dr. Etilvia Arjona (Etty), who invited me to lunch with a group of educators visiting Panama from Northwest Missouri State University (NWMSU). The serendipity of this invitation led to a pathway for learning and the accomplishment of another life goal. Etty, your passion for education inspires me every day to raise my own bar on teaching and learning. Thank you for lunch... and for your enthusiastic encouragement as I journeyed toward the finish line of my doctoral degree.

A special thanks to Dr. Joyce Pivalar and Dr. Max Ruhl who invited me to participate as a Ploghoft lecturer at NWMSU in 2009. While I was there, you introduced me to the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) opportunity. Thank you for inviting me to share my story and for sharing ELPA with me. My life as a leader is truly transformed.

I sincerely acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Phillip Messner, who told me on several occasions that I was his best student. Thank you for making me believe this, Dr. Messner. Your wisdom, kindness and patience through the “static” of my “SKYPE” calls were appreciated. I am a better leader because of your influence. You have made a difference in my life. Thank you.

A profound thanks to my co-advisor, Dr. Carol Edmonds, who tenaciously read through my writing drafts while enduring a mega-workload over the past few semesters. Thank you, for taking the time to guide me to the next level, Dr. Edmonds. I have enjoyed our conversations and I am proud to be your student.

To my committee members, Dr. Melody Smith and Dr. Rochelle Hiatt, thank you for taking the time to guide me through the defense process. Your experiences have been invaluable and I am grateful to have had you on my committee. Thank you.

To my husband, Nick, thank you for encouraging me to run another marathon. I always

knew you were there, curbside, yelling, “You go girl!”! The sacrifices you made while I studied, wrote, SKYPED [every Wednesday night for two years] and traveled to and from Missouri (MO) were unselfish and appreciated. Thank you for surprising me with delicious snacks and salads during my Wednesday night classes, Nico. I couldn’t have done this without you! *Te amo...*

To my brother, Pete, thanks for making my “back to school” experience so convenient and comfortable. Having a place to stay, a car to drive and an endless supply of veggies and Mr. Goodcents sandwiches made “adult college life” great! I truly appreciated the “together time” we’ve been able to share over the past four years. Thank you, Pete.

To my parents, Pete and Joan, and to my sister, Susan, thank you for always making a special trip to MO from the East Coast when I was at school. Your support and encouragement mean more than I could ever express in words. Thank you for always being there!

To my children, Alex, Nyko and Christy, thank you for being patient when my routine reply became, “Can’t, have class. Can’t, studying. Can’t, writing”. Thank you for secretly cheering me on! I was encouraged by the pride in your eyes and from the comments you posted on Facebook, Christy, “My Mom is a Doctor”! Thanks for believing in me.

To my in-laws, May and Alex, thank you for cheering me on and asking very good questions to stimulate my thinking. You have always been a wonderful source of encouragement. May, here’s to our next ProEd project! Thanks for everything.

To my best friend, Nan, you finished our 1998 marathon in NYC, 4-minutes earlier than I did and our doctoral marathon 3-years before me. Thank you for leading the way, for setting the pace, for believing that I could finish *both* marathons, and most of all for being my best friend. Our YA-YA Weekend in Chumico is almost here! Thank you Nanty.

Special thanks to my Summer Cohort, “A-2 Noodles”, Vida, Carolyn, Scott and Paul.

Thanks for teaching me how to be a student again. I enjoyed learning with you. Also, thanks to my Liberty-friends, Mary, Tammy, Eric, Stephen and Stephanie. Thanks for helping me stay connected during class time on Wednesdays. I appreciated your patience when technical difficulties were beyond our control. I also appreciated our “happy hours” when I was on campus. Thanks for that! Here’s to cheering you *all* on as you cross the ELPA finish line!

A BIG thanks to Mary and Tammy who took the time to get me focused during Comps. I totally enjoyed our Panera meetings! Warm thanks especially to you, Mary for checking in weekly while I was “learning home-alone”. Your outreach was both comforting and appreciated. Thank you for your collegial care and friendship, Mary.

To my outstanding ProEd Team, sincere and heartfelt thanks. Maria Antonietta (Mary), you walked with me through the entire journey of this research. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Your collaboration and enthusiasm for learning were inspiring. I could not have done this without you.

A special thanks to Tina, Diana and Eda, your extra time on task and unselfish efforts to pick up the slack while I was buried in books and in my writing were truly appreciated. Thank you, girls.

A big collegial shout out to the MIZZOU Summer IT for your wisdom and energy. My skills are upgraded and refined because of your lessons on leadership. Thank you.

And finally, but never least, to my circle of girlfriends: Manal, thank you for sharing your amazing research and for helping me see through the lens of a constructivist paradigm to frame my work. Your support was genuinely appreciated. To Zeena, Donna and our eclectic girls’ happy hour group, thanks for your patience while I was away on this learning journey. *Girls, happy hour has officially started!*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
ABSTRACT.....	xii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
Overview – Who is Educating Panama?	
Background	
Problem Statement	
Purpose of Study	
Grand Tour Research Question	
Research Questions	
Theoretical Framework	
Conceptual Underpinnings	
Implications for Collegial Leadership Models	
Study Design, Methods, Limitations and Assumptions	
Definitions of Key Terms	
Significance of Research	
Summary	
2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	26
Introduction	
Organizational Learning	
Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing	
Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice	
Empowerment	

Knowing-Doing Gap Summary	
3. METHODOLOGY.....	46
Introduction	
Problem Statement	
Purpose of Study	
Grand Tour Question	
Research Questions	
Approach, Design and Methods	
Participant Information	
Data Collection Procedures	
Data Analysis	
Dependability and Trustworthiness	
Ethical Principles	
Role of Participant Researcher	
Anticipated Limitations and Assumptions of Study	
Summary	
4. DATA COLLECTION.....	65
Introduction: Conversations from Classrooms	
Revealing a Phenomenon and Defining a Purpose	
The Researcher's Story	
Chronology: <i>An Educator in the Making</i>	
The 2011 ProEd PLC:	
<i>The Setting</i>	
<i>The Development Process</i>	
<i>The Participant Researcher</i>	
<i>The Cast</i>	

Target Schools Interview Settings

The Interview Process: *Three Steps*

Analysis and Reduction of Data

Research Findings: Emerging Themes

Knowledge and Information Sharing

Collaboration

Empowerment

Knowing-Doing Gap

Digging Deeper: ProEd Teacher Perceptions

Gatekeepers at the Top: Hierarchy in the Process for Change

From the Director's Desk: *A Short Story about Learning in Panama's Schools*

Adding Value: Triangulation Methods and Findings

Focus Groups

School Participation Empowerment Survey (SPES)

Monthly Accountability Sheets

Teacher-Made Artifacts, Feedback and Testimonies

Walkthrough Observations

Summary

5. DISCUSSION..... 113

Introduction

Overview of Case

Participant Researcher

Revealing a Phenomenon and Defining a Purpose

Purpose of the Study

Making Meaning

Tapestry and Transformation: <i>When Teachers Teach Teachers</i>	
Threads of Transformation: <i>The Tapestry of a Learning Culture</i>	
Discussion of the Findings	
<i>Reification</i>	
Threads of Organizational Renewal and Transformation	
<i>Informed Optimism</i>	
<i>Teamwork and Trust</i>	
<i>A Different Mirror</i>	
<i>Causes and Commitment</i>	
Implications for Future Research	
Final Thoughts	
REFERENCES.....	132
APPENDIXES	
A. THREE-STEP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.....	139
B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – PROTOCOL TEMPLATE	140
C. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST.....	143
D. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS – PROTOCOL TEMPLATE	145
E. SCHOOL PARTICIPATION EMPOWERMENT SCALE (SPES).....	147
F. PROED MONTHLY ACCOUNTABILITY SHEETS	148
G. ARTIFACTS	149
H. IRB INFORMED CONSENT	151
I. IRB SIGNATURE AND PERMISSION CONSENT FORM	154
J. PROED 2011 PLC SETTING	155
K. THE CAST: PERSONAL DESCRIPTIONS	156
L. TARGET SCHOOL DESCRIPTIONS: TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS.....	173

M. COLORED-CODED TRANSCRIPTIONS	182
N. MONTHLY ACCOUNTABILITY SHEETS WITH POST-IT FEEDBACK...	183
O. TEACHER FEEDBACK / TESTIMONIES	184
VITAE.....	188

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

1. Education Progress Report [Panama 2002]	3-5
2. School Profiles.....	51
3. Teacher Profiles	52-53
4. Self Description Statements: The Cast	75-77
5. Claims & Evidence: Underpinnings & Supporting Statements	83-84
6. Perceptions: Teacher Roles Compared to ProEd Teacher Roles	92
7. School Participant Empowerment Scale	105-106
8. Monthly Accountability Sheets	108-109

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE

1. Data Collection Process: Three Step Interview 56
2. Data Collection and Triangulation Process 59
3. The ProEd Foundation's 2011 PLC Development Plan 73
4. Tapestry and Transformation Analogy: When Teachers Teach Teachers..... 119

TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2011 PROED
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CREATING A
CULTURE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING IN SCHOOLS IN
THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

Debra L. S. Psychoyos

Dr. Phil Messner, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

While evidence of organizational learning through empowered teacher collaboration has been established in many international school studies, no such relationship has been investigated in public and/or low-middle socioeconomic private schools in the Republic of Panama. This observation provides a framework for exploring how schools in Panama learn. This qualitative ethnomethodological case study was driven by the void in empirical knowledge and the guiding question that asked: How and to what extent does participation in the monthly 2011 ProEd Professional Learning Community influence a culture for organizational learning in schools in Panama. Data were collected in a three-step interview process conducted with a sample of 25 randomly selected 2011 ProEd PLC teachers from 5 low-middle socioeconomic public and/or private schools in Panama. Data analysis included open coding of emerging themes from the interviews and field notes. Walkthrough observations of ProEd PLC teachers and focus groups with non-2011 ProEd PLC members were conducted to triangulate for trustworthiness of this study. This study sought to discover how participation in monthly PLCs supports teacher collaboration and empowerment; and to understand how and to what extent these conditions influenced organizational learning in schools in Panama. The participant researcher of this study was involved as lead facilitator and coach of all monthly PLC workshops and in data collection during the interview process. Emerging themes surfaced from conversations with teachers who created meanings from stories shared about their roles as educators in a developing nation.

Key Terms: Organizational Learning, Collaboration, Empowerment, Communities of Practice, Professional Learning Communities, Knowing-Doing Gap

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“Panama improves its country ranking... but education is one principal factor detracting from overall score” (Panama Guide, 2011).

“Panama ranked a dismal 129 out of 139 on quality of primary education despite ranking 26th overall on primary education enrollment rate [i.e. they go to school, but they don’t learn anything!]” (Panama Guide, 2011).

“... in fact, in the World Competitiveness Ranking, Panama gained a position around 70 but in the educational level it has the position of 120. This means that the education issue punishes the country” (Nationmaster.com, 2003-2011).

UNESCO. “Panama ranked 8th out of 11 countries evaluated. Who is to blame? Certainly it is the qualifications of the educators...” (Panama Investor Blog, October 29, 2009).

These are the headlines that fill local newspapers, magazines and blogs in the Republic of Panama. In an era that finds this developing nation endeavoring rapid commercial growth and transformation as a bustling economic bridge of the Americas, education in Panama seems to lag behind in student gains and technological advancements. Within every five-year term of each new government, education remains the focus for reform and involvement. Millions of dollars are spent on projects intended to increase competencies in English, computers and scientific inquiry; and many qualified leaders work tirelessly to increase student learning and to improve the conditions for learning in Panama’s public schools. So what’s the problem? If financial and intellectual resources are available for educational initiatives, why is Panama’s education system still far from making the grade?

Some may argue that government egos interfere with continuity of educational initiatives and that when a new government comes into power their first priority is to

create their own new wheel. This usually requires a rapid discarding of current initiatives and proverbial wheels from the past regime. Others blame the deficits in education on the deterioration of home life and the lack of community support. While there may be truth to both of these arguments, a third perspective is never far from the surface of public voice. The third argument focuses on the quality of teacher preparation, asking: “*Who is educating Panama?*” It was to the acknowledgement and understanding of this question for which this study sought to contribute.

In 2002, *The Challenge to Advance, Education Progress Report of Panama* [Panama 2002] was published (CoSPAEE, 2002). Panama 2002 was the result of an extensive study of the national educational reality in the Republic of Panama. It was made possible by the technical support of the Promotion of Educational Reform in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREAL); a joint project of the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, DC and the Corporation for Development Research (CINDE), based Santiago de Chile (CoSPAEE, 2002). PREAL was created in 1995 to promote informed debate on issues of educational policy and educational reform as well as search-based agreements that included intellectual and technical support to address endemic problems of education. To this end, the PREAL is sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Avina Foundation, the GE Fund, the Tinker Foundation and the Global Development Network among other donors (CoSPAEE, 2002).

These studies included statistics from the Ministry of Education (MEDUCA), the Ministry of Economics and Finance, the Population Census 2000, the Comptroller General's Office, documents of international agencies like the "UNDP, UNICEF,

UNESCO", and interviews with officials from the MEDUCA, educators, students, politicians, parents and others who anonymously provided the information for the publication of this progress report (CoSPAEE, 2002). Some recommendations from the results of the Panama 2002 study included: increasing the number of preschool education programs throughout the rural and marginalized areas of Panama; standardizing exit competencies for students; decentralizing the distribution of school finances and resources nationwide; professionalizing teaching practices to improve initial and in-service teacher training; and linking teacher evaluation to performance in the classroom and with non-wage incentives. Additional results from the Panama 2002 education progress report are illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1

Education Progress Report of Panama 2002

Area	Grade	Progress	Comments
Result of National Exams	D	NP	A majority of students from public schools could not answer 50% on tests of Math and Social Science. <i>[They did not participate in international exams.]</i>
Equality	F	NP	In general the poor and indigenous children of public schools in Panama receive 7-9 years less education than children of the same age in different socio-economic situations; and the quality of their education is also more deficient.

Table 1 (cont.)
Education Progress Report of Panama 2002

Area	Grade	Progress	Comments
Access & Coverage	B	P	A majority of poor children have access to primary school; about ½ do not go on to high school and a little more than ½ go on to middle school. About ¾ of the poorest populations do not have access to primary education and university education for the indigenous population is almost non-existent.
Standards & Evaluation	D	NP	National standards and competencies for students have not been established or implemented that define what students should know and be able to do upon completion of their educational program, nor is there an institutionalized system of quality assessment to measure what students know. There are also no quality indicators for the educational system in Panama. <i>[They did not participate in the international exams.]</i>
Autonomy & Accountability	D	P	The process for decentralization has been reinitiated, however there have not been systems of accountability established.
Investment in Education	C	P	More funds have been appropriated for school and education expenses, however, distribution remains inequitable among

Table 1 (cont.)
Education Progress Report of Panama 2002

Area	Grade	Progress	Comments
			educational levels and across socioeconomic distributions.
Career Development & Evaluation of Educators	D	NP	No law has developed a teaching career. The evaluation of teacher performance is bureaucratic and is not linked to the promotion of position and better salaries.

Grades: A = Excellent / B = Good / C = Average / D = Deficient / F = Very Deficient
 Progress: NP = No Progress / P = Progress / R = Reverse Progress
 (Education Progress Report: Panama 2002 - CoSPAE, 2002)

The grim results from the Panama 2002 education progress report, identifies areas that need urgent attention if public education in Panama is expected to thrive. An important insight to note from the recommendations in the Panama 2002 report suggest that teachers were not qualified to administer the testing instrument to their students (CoSPAE, 2002). Again, teacher preparation rises to the surface in a *call to action*.

Research identifies positive results for school efficacy when organizational learning is consistent and continuous (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The qualitative research guiding this ethnomethodological case study sought to discover what happened when teachers were provided monthly opportunities to participate in the ProEd Professional Learning Community (PLC), a place where support, collaboration and *teachers teaching teachers* is encouraged and celebrated. ProEd PLC training modules incorporate the implementation design of Joyce and Showers (2002): providing teachers with current pedagogical theory; demonstrations about how to use new tools and strategies; time to

practice and apply new learning within a safe and supportive environment; and peer feedback and mentoring/coaching from ProEd PLC facilitators. These professional development workshops are held on continuous basis during the 10-month school year. Each 4-hour monthly module provides time for peer collaboration, personal reflection and collegial knowledge sharing. By encouraging all members of the ProEd PLC to critically reflect and ask questions about their own learning, it is believed that individual members will become multipliers of organizational learning through collaboration and knowledge sharing when they return to their schools in Panama. Additionally, this study intended to understand how and to what extent these PLC conditions influenced a culture for organizational learning in schools in Panama.

Octavio Mendez Pereira (as cited in Cespedes, 1985) concludes in his *History of Public Instruction in Panama*, written in 1915, with this thought:

When we have realized all of the throbbing aspirations in the souls of our educators ... when systems of national education are implemented harmoniously and free ... when teachers work in union with each other... then the Republic will progress with the ideas of its people and shine on the beloved homeland a radiant day with healthy, enlightened and good people of Panama. (p. XIII)

Background

Professional development for teachers in the Republic of Panama, is typically a once a year event, organized and funded by the MEDUCA. The annual MEDUCA training takes place in an auditorium at a regional office, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., usually one week prior to the opening of the new school year. Content objectives for these training initiatives include highlights of national education

reforms and amended regional and school policies. The lack of research-driven instructional practices and current pedagogical methods limit authentic professional development for teachers. The lecture-style format and auditorium seating arrangement of MEDUCA's yearly training program restricts interaction between participants, which limits collaboration and collegial support between teachers.

Collegial support and consistent follow up from MEDUCA is not a standard practice during the school year for Panama's teachers. This isolation indicates that there is little attention given to knowledge sharing, collaboration or continuous learning throughout the year in Panama's schools. Pfeffer and Sutton (1999; 2000) suggest that without collaborative learning, a knowing-doing gap exists. Learning organizations are "structured in such a way that its members can learn and continue to learn within it" (Emery, as cited in Prieto, 2009, p. 513). Without collegial support from MEDUCA or between teachers and administrators within a school community, the creation of learning cultures within schools in Panama is limited.

The lack of learning organizations in Panama's schools contributes to school cultures that are often more coercive than collegial. This is a problem because workplaces that defeat collaboration and empowerment are unproductive (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Peterson and Deal (1998) conclude that collegial cultures rely on team capacity building to improve schools. When individuals learn, teams and schools learn. When schools learn student achievement increases and student learning improves. Transformation of schools into learning communities requires educators to understand that traditional models of education are no longer effective for the "post-industrial, knowledge-based society" we live in today (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 20). In a developing nation, like the Republic of

Panama, breaking traditional paradigms in education is especially challenging because there is little evidence to support the practice of continuous professional development for educators or the concept of organizational learning.

A glimpse into traditional public and most low-middle socio-economic private school classrooms in Panama will find students sitting in uninviting, rows of wooden-arm-framed desks with little or no interaction between students or their teachers. The teacher's desk will most likely be the central focus at the front of the classroom and the teacher will be instructing from the desk in a seated position. The students will most likely be observed copying from the board. This description illustrates Taylor's "industrial model", which schools imitated in the late nineteenth century (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 20). Taylor argued, "one best system could be identified to complete any task or solve any organizational problem" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 20). This efficiency model motivated efforts to create schools in the image of a factory (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) a metaphoric machine for the purpose of "information processing" (Nonaka, 2007, p. 164). Schools, however, are not factories that mass-produce identical products for the purpose of serving communities. It is believed that schools are learning communities whose purpose it is to produce diverse intellectual power, which supports continuous development and evolution of our global societies.

Problem Statement

Panama schools lack knowledge to transform their traditional education systems into learning organizations for the purpose of improved student learning. While evidence of organizational learning through empowered teacher collaboration has been established in many international schools studies, no such relationship has been investigated in public

or low-middle socioeconomic private schools in the Republic of Panama. We still know very little about how a culture for learning is influenced in Panama's schools. PLCs and communities of practice provide support to all teachers who aim to continuously improve student learning (Sergiovanni, 2004a). Communities of practice and PLCs are not integral structures in Panama's schools. Systemic, continuous support and professional development is not an observable practice in public and low-middle socio-economic private schools in Panama. Therefore, this observation provides a framework for this study, which seeks to explore how a culture for learning is influenced when systemic professional development is implemented in schools in the Republic of Panama.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of K-12 teachers to discover how they observed and may have influenced organizational learning at their schools. Following Creswell's (2009) guidelines for a qualitative purpose statement, the intent of this case study was to understand the phenomenon of organizational learning for the purpose of: (a) describing what happened when teachers returned to their schools after participating in monthly ProEd PLCs; (b) explaining how and to what extent ProEd PLC teachers shared information and knowledge with teachers and administrators [at their schools] who did not participate in monthly ProEd PLCs; (c) exploring how knowledge sharing and teacher collaboration within a structured, supportive PLC influenced organizational learning to bridge the knowing-doing gap in schools; and (d) contributing to the knowledge base about how and to what extent teacher empowerment influenced organizational learning in schools in the Republic of Panama.

Grand Tour Question

How and to what extent does teachers' monthly participation in the ProEd Foundation's 2011 PLC influence a culture for learning in schools in the Republic of Panama?

Research Questions

The following research questions will support this study:

1. How and to what extent does participation in ProEd's monthly PLC empower teachers to collaborate and share knowledge with other teachers at their schools?
2. How and to what extent does knowledge sharing and collaboration influence a culture for organizational learning in schools in Panama?
3. How and to what extent does organizational learning influence the Knowing-Doing Gap in schools in the Republic of Panama?

Theoretical Framework

Organizational Learning Theory

Organizational learning occurs through the dissemination of knowledge and social interchange. Gill (2010) defines organizational learning as "a process of forming and applying collective knowledge to problems and needs" (p. 30). Gill (2010) suggests that organizational learning requires continuous development of leadership. Leadership at all levels can develop capacities that are necessary for sustaining effective learning cultures (Garmston, 2007). "To create a culture in which learning is the rule, not the exception... remove the barriers to learning and reward behaviors that facilitate learning: risk taking, action learning, feedback and reflection" (Gill, 2010, p. 27). By encouraging all members of an organization to critically reflect and ask questions about their own learning,

individuals become responsible for supporting organizational learning through knowledge and information sharing.

Conceptual Underpinnings

Knowledge / Information Sharing

We live in a “knowledge society” (Drucker; Bell; & Toffler, as cited in Nonaka, 1994, p. 14). Nonaka (1991; 1994; 1995; 2007) believes organizations create knowledge and differentiates between two types of knowledge: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is “spreadsheet-like”; formal, measurable, and easy to process once it is obtained. Tacit knowledge is the highly personal “craftsmanship” of knowing something, which is difficult to measure, duplicate, and articulate to others. According to Nonaka (1991), the key to organizational learning is the continuous conversion of knowledge from tacit to explicit and back to tacit through internalization of skills and practices. Nonaka (1995) explains that when this “double-loop learning” becomes a daily practice, reconstructing new knowledge from existing perspectives, will sustain the learning and improvement process (p.46).

Knowledge sharing supports individual and organizational learning. “Single-loop” learning explains observations of day-to-day life within an organization (Argyris, as cited in Gill, 2010, p. 111). “Double-loop” learning promotes growth within organizations through reflective inquiry of needs (Gill, 2010, p.111). Both single and double loop learning involve narratives between colleagues. Narratives feed the knowledge-sharing loop, which contribute to the continuous learning and collaboration of individuals and organizations.

Collaboration

Within collaborative cultures, effective leaders recognize and value the opinions and skills of others, especially those below them in the organizational hierarchy (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). “Collaboration does not happen automatically just because it’s a good thing” (Gideon, 2002, p. 30). Relevancy of information, structured communication and collegial support are the threads that weave collaboration vertically and horizontally to create and sustain a learning community. “Collaboration is widely recognized as the means through which any chance of addressing complex societal issues and successfully reaching essential organizational outcomes is predicated” (Austin; Hesselbein & Whitehead; Hogue; and Preece, as cited in Gajda & Koliba, 2007, p. 26).

Professional Learning Communities / Communities of Practice

When groups of people work together on a daily basis to share concerns, solve problems and celebrate passions, a community of practice exists (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, as cited in Klein, Connell & Meyer, 2005). Knowledge, conversation, emotional involvement and social relationships are “inseparable” dynamics that support learning (Bruffee, 1999, p. 140). Effective learning communities provide supportive environments that promote conversations centered on practice, pedagogy and student learning (Horn & Warren Little, 2010). Learning organizations sustain a culture of inquiry where all stakeholders feel safe to continuously reflect on questions that ask: where are we now and where are we going? (Gill, 2010).

Inquiry and reflection require trust, transparency and systems that work to support collaboration (Leon, & Davis, 2009). Professional learning teams (PLT) and PLCs construct work environments of trust and transparency through decentralized governance

and established school improvement processes (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). When teachers are empowered to create their own pathway for professional development within PLT/PLC, their passion for teaching increases. Empowerment fuels the passion and commitment of teachers, which enhances student learning (Colbert, Brown, Choi & Thomas, 2008).

Empowerment and the Knowing Doing Gap

Loyalty, purpose and commitment obligate people to each other and to their school (Sergiovanni, 2004b). These collegial core values are supported by the practice of distributed leadership, for the purpose of empowering PLCs who foster continuous school improvement and student success (Sergiovanni, 2004a). Teachers who are involved in the planning and development of new program initiatives will be more likely to support those initiatives (Kohm & Nance, 2009). When teachers collaborate with peers and share what they know about their professional practice, they become empowered to create change by closing the gap between knowing and doing.

“Learning comes from doing and teaching others how” (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999, p. 96). Nonaka (1991) claims that redundancy encourages learning through frequent dialogue about observed practice. Identifying best practices is easy, however, transferring that knowledge can be a frustrating process, which often leads organizations to ponder, “If we only knew what we know” (Platt, as cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 79). When too much focus is on information rather than its use, transfer of knowledge does not happen (Fullan, 2001). This backup of information causes gaps between knowing what should be done and doing it (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999).

Creating knowledge requires creating change by closing the knowing-doing gap. “Envisioned change will not happen or will not be fruitful until people look beyond the simplicities of information and individuals to the complexities of learning, knowledge, judgment, communities, organizations and institutions” (Brown & Dugid, as cited in Fullan, 2001, pp. 78-79). Knowing is not enough (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Bridging the knowing-doing gap requires individuals to actually do what they know.

Implications for Collegial Leadership Models

Organizational learning and the conditions that support and sustain its practice require transformations from political and structural frameworks to human resource and symbolic models (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This transformation must be supported by collegial leadership practices, which foster distribution of power to empower all stakeholders within the organization. Collegial leadership models assume common values and norms, and shared decisions made through consensus (Bush, 2003). “Collegial theorists argue that active support for change is more likely to be forthcoming where teachers have been able to contribute to the process of policy formulation” (Bush, 2003, p. 85). Collegial leaders aim to cultivate collaborative cultures (Gideon, 2002). Collegial leaders understand the importance of collaboration and are mindful of setting high expectations for collegiality to be an integral practice within their school culture.

Bolman and Deal (2008) explain that rituals, traditions and celebrations of an organization and its people breathe meaning into a culture through the continuous loop of storytelling, support and knowledge sharing. These symbolic events often foster a larger narrative to build meaning into collaborative practice for the purpose of strengthening the learning community. Within the collegial leadership model, “participative leadership”

must be demonstrated (Yukl, 2010, p. 87). Participative leaders implement power sharing, democratic management and decentralization to empower stakeholders (Yukl, 2010). Collaborative practices create collegial cultures, which promote professional learning for both individuals and organizations.

Collaborative efforts depend on behaviors of teachers (Kohm & Nance, 2009). If teachers collaborate, school success is likely (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Collaborative partnerships between principals, teachers and parents shape school culture (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Kohm and Nance (2009) suggest that principals who support a culture of collaboration understand that they are shifting their roles from decision-makers and goal setters to facilitators who set the conditions for shared decision-making. These shifts toward collaborative leadership allow cultural changes to occur (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Peterson and Deal (1998) conclude that in schools where the culture is positive and healthy, leadership emerges from every level within the community.

Study Design, Methods, Limitations, Delimitations and Assumptions

The approach of this study will address both a program and a problem of practice (Creswell, 2007). The program is the 40-hour ProEd PLC. The problem of practice is to understand the quality of collaboration through knowledge sharing for the purpose of empowering teachers to influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

Design

The ethnomethodological case study will guide the data collection and analysis to determine, “how individuals recognize, describe, explain and account for their everyday lives” (Gubrium & Holstein, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 240). This ethnomethodological case study is a “bounded system” by place and time (Stake, as cited

in Creswell, 2007, p.244). A constructivist paradigm will frame the interpretation of perceptions that describe “everyday knowledge” in this qualitative case study (Schwandt, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 14). It is believed that the reality of organizational learning is “socially constructed” and the researcher’s goal was to “understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge” of schools as learning organizations (Mertens, 2005, p. 14).

Methods

Data collection for this qualitative case study came from interviews of a convenience sample of 25 Pre-Kinder through 12th grade teachers who were available to participate in a “Three-Step Interview Process” at their schools (Dolbeare & Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006, pp. 16-19). These teachers were selected from five low-middle socioeconomic public and/or private schools that had at least five or more teachers participating in ProEd’s 2011 PLC. The schools in this study were selected on the basis of their location in Panama and the demographics of their school population to represent a larger sample. One semi-private, public Pre-Kinder through sixth grade catholic school was located in the province of Colon on the Atlantic Coast of Panama. The other four schools were located in the province of Panama on the Pacific Coast of the Republic. The demographics of the four schools in the province of Panama include: a) a private, low-middle socio-economic Pre-Kinder through 12th grade catholic school; b) a private, middle socio-economic, Pre-Kinder through 12th grade bilingual school; c) a private, nonprofit catholic Pre-Kinder through 12th grade school for orphan girls and low-income community boys; and d) a low-socio-economic public high school.

The “Three-Step Interview Process” was conducted during a three-week period of time in July of 2011 (Dolbeare & Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006, pp. 16-19). Three separate interviews were conducted within one week of each other to maintain a fluent connection between the interview and the interviewees (Dolbeare & Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006). This interview method was selected because “putting experience into language is a meaning making process” (Vygotsky, as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 19). When participants are asked to tell stories about their experiences they “frame some aspect of it with a beginning, a middle and an end and thereby make it meaningful...” (Seidman, 2006, p. 19). Wenger (1998) claims that stories are the rhythms of daily community life and common threads of communities of practice. These interviews were administered to elicit stories about how teachers perceive their role in supporting a culture for learning in their schools.

The researcher translated the audio taped interviews from Spanish to English, which were then “transcribed and open coded” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 239-240). The researcher used the original audio recordings and field notes to validate the accuracy of the translations. The researcher categorized emerging themes to determine “saturation of surfaced events, incidents or activities” from the data analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 240). Additionally, the researcher conducted three walkthrough observations using an observation checklist to collect data from teachers who were interviewed and other 2011 ProEd PLC teachers.

To address dependability and trustworthiness of the data, the researcher conducted focus groups in September 2011, with teachers and administrators who were not participants in ProEd’s 2011 PLC in four of the five schools where the random

qualitative interviews were conducted (Krueger & Casey, 2009). It should be noted that the fifth school where individual interviews were conducted did not participate in the focus groups because all teachers and administrators were 2011 ProEd PLC participants, and therefore, there were no non-participants to participate in the focus group at that school. Additionally, the researcher collected artifacts, which included any teacher-made educational resource, material or training opportunity that were reproduced as a result of participation in the monthly ProEd 2011 PLC. Occasional journal entries from ProEd's PLC teacher trainers and monthly accountability sheets from volunteer participants who wanted additional coaching on their progress in ProEd's 2011 PLC were reviewed to triangulate the data for validity of the study. In addition to the previously mentioned methods of triangulation, Paula M. Short and James S. Rinehart's, School Participant Empowerment Scale [SPES] was administered in pre-post-post interval [February, May and October 2011) to all 2011 ProEd PLC members who attended sessions I, V and X.

Limitations

Three limitations of this study were identified. The first limitation included the 10-month training schedule. The program under study was the ProEd 2011 Teachers Teaching Teachers Professional Learning Community, which ran from February through October 2011. The 10-month time frame for data collection of qualitative interviews, walkthrough observations and field notes was considered a limitation because during the process for change, people experience "two kinds of problems... social-psychological fear of change; and the lack of technical know-how or skills to make the change work" (Fullan, 2001, p. 41). Within a 10-month time frame the participants may not know what they know or they may not be able to do what they know (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999). A

second time limitation included the fact that teachers were only available for one class period (approximate 30-45 minutes) for each of the three interviews conducted for data collection. Dolbeare and Schuman (as cited in Seidman, 2006) suggest a 90-minute format to allow participants to "... reconstruct their experience, put it in the context of their lives, and reflect on its meaning..." (p. 20). The brevity of the interview period is considered a limitation because it does not adhere to the authors' recommendation for running an in-depth phenomenological interview (Seidman, 2006).

A third limitation of the study focuses on the role of the researcher who can be identified as a "third leg on the stool" (P. Messner, personal communication, April 2011). The researcher was an active participant in designing, facilitating and evaluating the monthly ProEd PLC and was an active engaged in the collection and analysis of data for this study. The active involvement of the researcher is considered a limitation because it may potentially bias collection and analysis of data for this study.

Delimitations

Two delimitations were identified in this case study. The first delimitation included the selection of five target schools where five randomly selected teachers would be selected to participate in the interview process for data collection. The criterion for selecting the five schools was based on the fact that they had at least five or more teachers participating in the 2011 ProEd PLC. A second delimitation was the random selection of 25 teachers, a "convenience sample" representing the total population of 125 teachers who participated in the 2011 ProEd PLC (Mertens, 2005, 322).

Assumptions

It is assumed that when teachers are provided monthly opportunities to meet within a PLC, for the purpose of collaboration and knowledge sharing, they will become empowered to lead change in their schools. It is also assumed that this newly empowered leader will influence schools transformation into learning organizations through collaborative knowledge sharing and support of each other. Communities of practice support the exchange of knowledge, which builds individual capabilities of members (Klein, Connell & Meyer, 2005). Organizational learning assumes the continuous development of individuals and teams for the purpose of advancing effectiveness within an organization.

The ProEd Foundation recognizes that most schools in Panama do not practice collaboration and knowledge sharing on a systemic level; and, therefore, cannot be identified as learning organizations. Schools in Panama operate under traditional top-down management systems where decision-making is not shared and change not readily embraced. Coercion is the leadership practice observed in many schools in Panama. This practice often creates cultures of fear, which seems to isolate teachers and other key stakeholders from each other within the school community. “Educational policy makers and practitioners increasingly call for new ways of reculturing schools into community-like organizations characterized by shared norms and values, a focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, and collaboration” (Scribner, Sunday Cockrell, Cockrell and Valentine, as cited in Gadjia & Koliba, 2007, p. 27). Senge (1991) explains that within learning organizations, members aim high to create and gain desired results. These gains are produced by individuals who understand the importance of

continuous improvement, commitment to a common purpose and the alignment and care of team learning (Senge, 1991). ProEd assumes the responsibility to support and enhance the professional development of teachers in Panama.

The ProEd Foundation and the researcher of this study believe that providing teachers with 40-hours of professional development in monthly PLC, throughout the school year, will increase knowledge sharing and collaboration between teachers. They also assume that increased knowledge sharing and collaboration will empower teachers to lead change in their schools; and that teacher empowerment will increase organizational effectiveness (Lawler, as cited in Short & Rinehart, 1993). Additionally, ProEd assumes that teacher empowerment will influence schools to become learning organizations through increased knowledge sharing and collaboration between teachers who participate in the ProEd monthly PLC and teachers and administrators who do not.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms and definitions support the conceptual framework of this study:

Collaboration. Is generally defined as teams of people who share a common purpose (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Collaboration "...fosters critical inquiry within a culture ... so that novices and experienced professionals alike work to learn from, interpret, and ultimately alter day-to-day life of schools" (Cochran-Smith, as cited in Levin & Rock, 2003, pp. 136-137).

Communities of practice. "Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in

this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, as cited in Klein, Connell & Meyer, 2005, p. 107).

Empowerment. “Empowerment is defined as the opportunities an individual has for autonomy, choice, responsibility, and participation, in decision making in organizations (Lightfoot, as cited in Short & Rinehart, 1993, p. 592). Teacher empowerment is identified as autonomy and competence to affect outcomes for increased student learning (Short & Rinehart, 1993).

Knowing-doing gap. “Learning comes from doing and teaching others how” (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999, p. 96). Knowledge is the “know what” information, that people share with others (Seeley Brown & Duguid, 1998, p. 29). “It is know how that embraces the ability to put know-what into practice” (Seeley Brown & Duguid, 1998, p. 29).

Learning organizations. Organizational learning enhances a school's ability to cope with change and the discipline to focus on the mission of educating students (Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy, & Mackley, 2000). A learning organization “works efficiently, readily adapts to change, detects and corrects errors, and continually improves its effectiveness” (Argyris & Schon, as cited in Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy, & Mackley, 2000, p. 248).

Professional learning communities (PLC). A community of learners who share a common vision, mission and purpose; and who practice collective inquiry and collaboration (Du Four & Eaker, 1998). Focus is action and results oriented for the purpose of continuous improvement (Du Four & Eaker, 1998). Effective PLC enlist all stakeholders to ask “why before how” in the process for continuous improvement (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 89).

Significance of the Research

This ethnomethodological qualitative case study is a first of its kind to be conducted in the Republic of Panama in collaboration with the National Director of Evaluation at the University of Panama. This study may contribute to the literature for creating professional development models through yearlong PLCs for teachers and administrators. This study may also serve as a resource for policymakers and leaders in MEDUCA and the University of Panama as they endeavor to identify school improvement and reform initiatives for schools in Panama.

“Around the world, the importance of education to individual and societal success has increased at a breathtaking pace...” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 22). Focus on educational reform, especially through improvement of teacher education is universal and “essential to political and economic survival” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 22). “In an economy where the only certainty is uncertainty, the one sure source of lasting competitive advantage is knowledge” (Nonaka, 2007, p. 162). Panama schools lack knowledge to transform their traditional education systems into learning organizations for the purpose of improved student learning.

Organizational learning and the conditions that support and sustain its practice require transformations from political and structural frameworks to human resource and symbolic models (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This study will focus on the implementation of a monthly PLC for the purpose of transforming teachers into leaders who are empowered to influence organizational learning in schools in Panama. This transformation must be supported by collegial and “participative leadership practices”, which foster distribution

of power to empower all stakeholders (Yukl, 2010, p. 87). ProEd's PLC encourages participative leadership at all levels.

Participative leaders implement power sharing to empower stakeholders (Yukl, 2010). Collaborative partnerships between principals, teachers and parents shape school culture (Peterson & Deal, 1998). These shifts toward collaborative leadership allow cultural changes to occur (Kohm & Nance, 2009). The results from this research may serve to identify significance of ProEd's PLC programs as a means of influencing a culture for learning in Panama's schools. It is assumed that this significance may also support future funding for, and therefore, advancement of The ProEd Foundation in their endeavors to educate educators.

Summary

This introductory chapter presented background information to frame the qualitative case study that sought to discover how and to what extent teacher participation in a monthly PLC influenced organizational learning in schools in the Republic of Panama. Research questions were provided to guide the theoretical framework and conceptual underpinnings, which were also introduced. Additionally, the design and methods of this study were presented, including a discussion of the limitations, assumptions and definition of key terms. The significance and contributions of this study and implications for collegial leadership models were also discussed.

Chapter two will present a comprehensive review of literature aligned to the topic of this study. Chapter three will outline the methods and design of this qualitative ethnomethodological case study. Chapter four will present the results of emerging themes, which surfaced from recorded narratives and the researcher's field notes

collected during the three-step interview process. Chapter five will present additional methods of data collection used to triangulate for trustworthiness and reliability of the study. Chapter six will discuss the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this study. It is the desire that these findings will provide sustainable PLCs as a professional development model for educators to assist the MEDUCA and the National University of Panama as they explore school improvement initiatives that can be measured by organizational and student learning in schools in the Republic of Panama.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter will present a review of literature to support the theoretical framework and conceptual underpinnings of this study. This literature review will reveal that organizational learning enhances a school's ability to cope with change and the discipline to focus on the mission of educating students (Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy, & Mackley, 2000). Organizational learning provides consistent and continuous professional development opportunities for all community stakeholders (Gill, 2010). These opportunities are founded on collaboration and knowledge sharing (Gideon, 2002; and Gill, 2010). Collaboration empowers teachers to enhance professional practice (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2004b; Hord, 2009; and Kohm & Nance, 2009), which increases student learning and school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; and Sergiovanni, 1987; 2004a). This review of literature is intended to develop the theory of organizational learning and the following conceptual underpinnings that create and sustain its practice: collaboration; knowledge and information sharing; professional learning communities (PLC); communities of practice; empowerment; and bridging the knowing-doing gap.

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning occurs through the dissemination of knowledge and social interchange. Gill (2010) defines organizational learning as “a process of forming and applying collective knowledge to problems and needs” (p. 30). The ProEd PLC is created for the purpose of empowering teachers through continuous development to enhance their

professional practice. ProEd's mission is to provide teachers with the essential skills of an effective pedagogical knowledge base that empowers teachers to lead change in their schools. When teachers are equipped with current methods and strategies, their pedagogical knowledge base is strengthened, which may foster an increase in student performance. Organizational learning requires continuous development of leadership (Gill, 2010). ProEd aims to develop the leader in all teachers through knowledge sharing and collaboration. ProEd's purpose is to support teachers as they lead their schools in the learning process. Garmston (2007) claims that leaders at all levels can develop capacities that are necessary for sustaining effective learning cultures. "To create a culture in which learning is the rule, not the exception... remove the barriers to learning and reward behaviors that facilitate learning: risk taking, action learning, feedback and reflection" (Gill, 2010, p. 27). Organizational learning in Panama's school will encourage collective inquiry, collaboration and knowledge sharing between teachers.

By encouraging all members of an organization to critically reflect and ask questions about their own learning, individual members become responsible for organizational learning. ProEd's PLC utilizes personal and collaborative reflection as basic elements for knowledge sharing within its organization. This type of organization embraces diversity and multiple contributions and provides support to unify the contributions into a shared and common purpose (Prieto, 2009). Within learning organizations, members aim high to create and gain desired results (Senge, 1991). These gains are produced by individuals who understand the importance of continuous improvement, commitment to a common purpose and the alignment and care of team learning (Senge, 1991). Individual learning fosters and maintains organizational learning.

Learning organizations are “structured in such a way that its members can learn and continue to learn within it” (Emery, as cited in Prieto, 2009, p. 513). When individuals continuously “create, organize, store, retrieve, interpret, and apply information” organizations learn (Gill, 2010, p. 31). ProEd PLC teachers are taught how to evaluate current conditions at their schools and propose ways for advancing progress within their organization. Gill (2010) explains that learning organizations sustain a culture of inquiry where all stakeholders feel safe to practice on-going reflection about where they are presently and where they are going. ProEd teachers are encouraged to continuously reflect upon their professional practice. Schools that focus on continuous professional development for teachers yield increased learning for students.

Schools that do not learn are often places where a shift in focus turns toward the gains of adults and away from the achievement of students (Peterson and Deal, 1998). Effective learning organizations thrive on consistent collaboration and knowledge sharing between stakeholders who hold themselves accountable for school improvement that is measured by the success of their students. ProEd’s teachers are accountable for implementation of new methods and instructional strategies. Schools that know how to identify and solve problems and remain active rather than passive about continuous improvement will develop the necessary skills for capacity building (Stringer, 2009). Continuous professional development, involving students in the teaching and learning process, collaboration, distributed leadership and coordination of internal and external stakeholders will tap into the capacity of teams, both individually and collectively (Stringer, 2009). Organizational learning within the ProEd Foundation thrives on

collaboration to create the elements of a collegial culture, supporting capacity building for both the individual and the organization.

The core concept of organizational learning relies on trust as a basis for capacity building to increase collaboration, teacher change, and the support of school-wide reforms that focus on student achievement (Cosner, 2009). Teambuilding is an important activity in ProEd so that trusting relationships evolve and a sense of shared leadership emerges. Organizational learning is sustained when shared governance is practiced (Del Favero, 2003). Frameworks for shared governance are founded on the premises of mutual reward, relationships of goodwill, patterns of communication and collaborative partnerships (Del Favero, 2003). Teachers in the ProEd PLC are celebrated for their knowledge sharing. Organizational learning in schools is fostered by partnerships between administrators and faculty who are accountable to their community (Del Favero, 2003). Teachers and administrators in ProEd's PLC network are encouraged to work together to create a strong school community. This interdependence of ideas and efforts between teachers and school leaders constructs the foundation for collegial school cultures through enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing that supports school improvement and student learning.

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Collaboration

Effective leaders, who influence collaborative cultures, recognize and value the opinions and skills of others, including those players who are below them in the organizational hierarchy (Preskill and Brookfield, 2009). Relevancy of information, structured communication and collegial support are the threads that weave collaboration

both vertically and horizontally within a learning organization. ProEd's PLC attempts to foster support through collaboration between teachers for the purpose of building a collegial culture. Collaborative cultures contrast top-down cultures (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Senge (1991) claims that if "you are having trouble motivating your troops... rethink top-down management" (p. 7). In ProEd all teachers take the lead to learn and to teach something new. Kohm and Nance (2009) identify collaborative cultures as supportive environments where shared responsibility overrides blame and isolation; and where experimentation, reflection and inquiry is the norm to destabilize the status quo and foster growth within an organization. "Collaboration does not happen automatically just because it's a good thing" (Gideon, 2002, p. 30).

John-Steiner, Weber and Minnis (as cited in Levin and Rock, 2003) define collaboration:

The principles in a true collaboration represent complementary domains of expertise. As collaborators, they not only plan, decide, and act jointly, they also think together, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks. Also, in a true collaboration, there is a commitment to shared resources, power, and talent: no individual's point of view dominates, authority for decisions and actions resides in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants' contributions (p.146).

Collegial work environments practice collaboration to enhance positive attitudes and strengthen cohesive relationships (Cipriano & Madonia, 2006). ProEd's PLC is based on the belief that collegiality is the key to improving schools. Hatfield (2006) claims that all dimensions of collegial cultures rely on the ability of people to work together for a shared

common goal. Additionally, Hatfield (2006) suggests the notion that collegial organizations support positive social interaction between stakeholders. “Nearly all major educational institutions, foundations, bargaining units, accrediting bodies, and educational sponsors at all levels of schooling openly endorse interpersonal practitioner collaboration as the most powerful strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement” (Gajda & Koliba, 2007, p. 27). The ProEd PLC believes that all educators are capable and responsible for creating change to support student learning; and that change is a result of social interaction and collegiality.

The lack of social interaction would result in isolation and dissatisfaction in the workplace (Hatfield, 2006). ProEd PLC participants work together to end isolation. Working in isolation limits collaboration, which is essential to collegial practices in schools. Effective collegial practices encourage collaboration and builds trust within the organization. Trust between members of a learning organization is nurtured through the capacity building of each individual (Cosner, 2009). Within the ProEd PLC, each participant is expected to practice collegiality by sharing opinions and expressing doubts about teaching and learning. Positive school cultures are supported by collegiality. Collegiality supports teacher transformation, which yields school-wide reform that focuses on student achievement through enhanced collaborative practice (Cosner, 2009). Kohm and Nance (2009) conclude that collaborative cultures build teachers’ confidence to lead; and that school reform should be done with teachers, not to them.

Collaborative efforts depend on behaviors of teachers (Kohm & Nance, 2009). If teachers collaborate, school success is likely (Kohm & Nance). Collaborative partnerships between principals, teachers and parents shape school culture (Peterson &

Deal, 1998); and the term collegial moves beyond the idea of belonging to encompass behaviors that include collaboration, cooperation and compromise (Hatfield, 2006). ProEd workshops are designed for interaction between participants who work together to discuss community challenges that sometimes impede school improvement. When rising pressures in the community become too threatening, teachers may abandon collaboration for top down management in order to get fast results (Kohm & Nance). These fast results, however, are often unsustainable in schools under fire because teachers are not involved in the process for change (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Kohm and Nance (2009) suggest that principals who support a culture of collaboration understand that they are shifting their roles from decision-makers and goal setters to facilitators who set the conditions for shared decision-making. Shared leadership is a topic often visited within the ProEd PLC. These shifts toward collaborative leadership allow cultural changes to occur (Kohm & Nance). Peterson and Deal (1998) conclude that in schools where the culture is positive and healthy, leadership emerges from every level within the community. ProEd teachers are encouraged to take the lead by sharing what they know with other colleagues at their schools.

Sergiovanni (2004b) suggests "...collaborative cultures work when each person has a role that defines his or her obligations and is part of a reciprocal relationship that spells out mutual obligations" (p. 18). An organization that has a flexible and adaptable structure evolves through the collaboration of its members (Prieto, 2009). Collaboration is observed as the sharing of domains of expertise (John-Steiner, as cited in Levin & Rock, 2003); and is supported by the idea that everyone gains from collaboration even though everyone is not doing everything (Clark, Moss, Goering, Herter, Lamar, Leonard,

et al., as cited in Levin & Rock, 2003). Organizational collaboration recognizes diversity and multiple contributions and seeks to unify the contributions of all stakeholders into a shared and common purpose (Prieto, 2009). DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2010) conclude:

Collaboration is not a virtue in itself, and building a collaborative culture is simply a means to an end, not the end itself. The purpose of collaboration - to help more students achieve at higher levels - can only be accomplished if the professionals engaged in collaboration are focused on the right work. What is the “right work” that would occupy the collaborative efforts of a team committed to higher levels of learning for all students? (p. 119)

The right work focuses team collaboration on the guiding questions posed by DuFour, et al.:

1) what is it we want our students to learn; 2) how will we know if each student has learned it; 3) how will we respond when some students do not learn it; 4) how can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency (p.119).

Collaboration is most effective when teachers and administrators work together to identify common goals that will require and positively reinforce information and knowledge sharing for the purpose of improved professional practice that yields student and organizational learning.

Knowledge Sharing

Within professional development schools, teacher leaders work collaboratively to assume the roles of mentors and designers of training programs to support new teachers

(Cooner & Tachterman, 2004). This process provides opportunities for knowledge sharing between new and veteran colleagues. Cooner and Tachterman explain, "... educators recognize their experiences in terms of stories. They live stories, tell stories of those lives, retell stories with changed potential and experience again the changed stories" (p. 185). Teachers become the characters in the tales they share and disclose stories of practice, which create relationships between the teller and the listener (Cooner & Tachterman, 2004); and, therefore, knowledge is shared through the stories told (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka, 2007).

Knowledge sharing supports individual and organizational learning. "Single-loop" learning explains observations of day-to-day life within an organization (Argyris, as cited in Gill, 2010, p. 111). "Double-loop" learning promotes growth within organizations through reflective inquiry of needs (Gill, 2010, p.111). Both single and double loop learning involve narratives between colleagues. Narratives feed the knowledge-sharing loop, which contribute to the continuous learning of individuals and organizations.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explain that when "double-loop learning" becomes a daily practice, reconstructing new knowledge from existing perspectives, will continue the learning and improvement process (p.46). Double loop learning challenges the "beliefs and assumptions that underlie our actions" (Argyris, as cited in Gill, 2010, p. 111). Both single and double-loop learning provide avenues for knowledge sharing, which promote learning and change within an organization. According to Nonaka (1991), the key to organizational learning is the continuous sharing of single and double loop conversations and narratives between peers.

Nonaka (1991) and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) believe organizations create knowledge and they differentiate between two types of knowledge: explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is formal, measurable, and easy to process once it is acquired (Nonaka, 1991; and Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Tacit knowledge, however, is a highly personal craft of knowing something, which is difficult to measure, duplicate, and articulate to others (Nonaka, 1991; and Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). When explicit knowledge is internalized it becomes tacit (Nonaka, 1991; and Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explain:

The assumption that knowledge is created through the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge allows us to postulate four different modes of knowledge conversion. They are as follows: 1) from tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge, which we call socialization; 2) from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, or externalization; 3) from explicit knowledge to explicit knowledge, or combination; and 4) from explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge, or internalization. (p. 62)

When tacit knowledge becomes explicit knowledge, it contributes to the creation of organizational knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). “Organizational knowledge creation is a continuous and dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge ... shaped by shifts between different modes of knowledge conversion, which are in turn induced by several triggers” throughout the learning process (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 70).

Elements that trigger knowledge conversion include: 1) field interaction in the socialization stage, facilitated when individuals share experiences; 2) meaningful

dialogue or collective reflection, which surfaces as metaphors or analogies to help team members communicate in the externalization stage; 3) networking in the combination stage that creates new products by crystallizing new and old knowledge; and 4) the learning by doing trigger that signals the internalization stage of knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, pp. 70-71). This cycle of continual learning becomes the self-renewing lifeline of organizational learning. Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) conclude "... you learn by observation... and from doing together with someone who's done it before..." (p. 96). Individual learning becomes organizational learning when shared knowledge is distributed consistently and continuously throughout the organization. PLC can provide opportunities for sharing knowledge.

Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice

Professional Learning Communities

Knowledge, conversation, emotional involvement and social relationships are "inseparable" dynamics that support learning (Bruffee, 1999, p. 140). Effective learning communities promote conversations centered on practice, pedagogy and student learning that take place within a supportive environment (Horn & Warren Little, 2010). Learning organizations sustain a culture of inquiry where all stakeholders feel safe to continuously reflect on where they are and where they are going (Gill, 2010). Professional learning communities continuously work together to discover what outcomes are desired for students and staff as a result of participation in professional development; and how the organization will know when these outcomes are achieved (Knight, Wiseman and Cooner, 2000).

Inquiry and reflection require trust, transparency and systems that work to support collaboration (Leon, & Davis, 2009). Professional learning teams (PLT) and PLC construct work environments of trust and transparency through decentralized governance and established school improvement processes (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). When teachers are given autonomy to create their own pathway for professional development within PLT or PLC, their passion for teaching increases. It is this passion that enhances student learning (Colbert, Brown, Choi, and Thomas, 2008). DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggest,

While schools should certainly pay attention to the ideas that are presented to staff and the strategies used to help teachers master those ideas, schools should focus primarily on creating a context or culture that is conducive to professional growth and development. (pp. 274-275)

Additionally, it is important to consider the ideas of O'Neil (as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998)

Learning is always an on-the-job phenomenon. Learning always occurs in the context of where you are taking action. So we need to find ways to get teachers working together; we need to create an environment where they can continually reflect on what they are doing and learn more and more what it takes to work as a team. (p. 274)

Critical reflection to determine if hard work equates productive work is essential to effective team function (Mohr & Dichter, 2001). Wasley, Hampel and Clark (as cited in Mohr & Dichter, 2001) identify four conditions that foster teacher learning: 1) adequate time and appropriate conditions for adult learning; 2) a culture of collegiality rather than

of individuality and isolation; 3) analytical capacity to determine whether changes are effective; and 4) a readily available support system of knowledge experts (p. 747). Effective PLCs create and maintain conditions that support and encourage teacher learning.

PLC are not prescriptive; rather, PLCs embrace interdependent work among colleagues who share a common goal and a bond of collaborative relationships (Leon and Davis, 2009). When teachers are involved in the planning and development of initiatives, they will be more likely to commit to and support the implementation of the initiative (Kohm and Nance, 2009) . Gajda and Koliba (2007) state, "...interpersonal collaboration has become a key feature of school restructuring efforts... staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district" (p. 28). PLC invite teachers to grow together to enhance professional practice for the purpose of increased student achievement and continuous school improvement.

Hord and Sommers (2008) claim:

One of the components of PLCs suggests that identifying the beliefs that the staff shares about the mission or purpose of the school is foundational. Developing a clear and shared understanding of the school's purpose across the entire staff provides the basis for encouraging and persuading staff in continuous and collegial learning in order to serve students well – that is true if the staff articulates that their purpose is to serve students through effective instructional content and practices. (p. 24)

PLCs resist the status quo and maintain a constant pursuit of better ways to achieve goals and accomplish their common purpose (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many 2010). ProEd's PLC endeavors to gather evidence through learning and the implementation of new strategies; and by analyzing process and progress when applying new knowledge to provide the frameworks that support its effectiveness (DuFour, et al., 2010).

PLCs focus on cultivating learning and interaction among teachers and administrators to improve teaching and learning outcomes for students (Roberts & Pruitt, 2009). The goal of high functioning PLCs is not just to learn new strategies, but also to perpetuate conditions for continuous learning opportunities for all members of the organization (DuFour, et al., 2010). "It is through interactions among teachers that professional relationships are developed that encourage teachers to share ideas, learn from one another, and help their colleagues" (Roberts & Pruitt, 2009, p. 7). Roberts and Pruitt (2009) refer to this phenomenon as the "deprivatization of practice" encouraging teachers to open their classroom doors for observation that foster collaboration (p. 7). Knowledge sharing is important in a learning community (Fullan, 2001).

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are everywhere (Wenger, 1998). When groups of people work together on a daily basis to share concerns, solve problems and celebrate passions, a community of practice exists (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, as cited in Klein, Connell & Meyer, 2005). Communities of practice can be as formal as a mentoring program or as informal as sharing a lesson plan (Sergiovanni, 2004a). The mission of a community of practice is to provide support and help to all teachers who aim to continuously improve student learning (Sergiovanni, 2004a). Wenger (1998) explains that focusing on

participation helps to understand and support the rethinking of learning: (a) for individuals, it means that learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities; (b) for communities, it means that learning is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members; (c) for organizations, it means that learning is an issue of sustaining the interconnected communities of practice through which an organization knows what it knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization (pp. 7-8).

Within a school [community] of practice, this understanding requires that a commitment to students and their learning becomes embedded into the cultural values where teachers invest in the learning of their students and continuous development of their own professionalism (Sergiovanni, 2004a). Learning commitments include “absorbing and becoming absorbed” in the learning process (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95). Members of a community of practice actively participate as a way of learning within the “culture of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95).

The nature of purpose and autonomy of teacher teams within a community of practice can influence the social distribution of leadership and group function (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson & Myers, 2007). Communities of practice emerge as a cooperative result of interdependence between teachers (Sergiovanni, 2004a). This collegial interdependence supports the emergence of collaborative cultures from the deliberate actions taken by school leaders (Sergiovanni, 2004b). Wenger (1998) refers to “thingness”, or the process of giving form to something we know from our experiences, as “reification” (p. 58). Reification allows individuals to negotiate meaning and to create a certain understanding about practice during the learning process (Wenger). Mutual and

shared histories of engagement can become resources for the negotiated meaning to support the knowing and doing of purposeful practice (Wenger). Purpose, autonomy and a model of discourse to negotiate meaning within communities of practice, results in collaboration and shared leadership (Scribner et al., 2007); and, therefore, the emergence of collegial cultures.

Collegial cultures harvest communities of practice where collaboration enhances positive attitudes and strengthens cohesive relationships (Cipriano & Madonia, 2006). In a collaborative culture, teachers perceive that their voices are solicited, heard and valued in the decision-making process of continuous school improvement (Sergiovanni, 2004b). Teachers work together to set goals and monitor their progress in achieving these goals (Sergiovanni, 2004b). Communities of practice provide support to all stakeholders. This support influences change and suggests learning that is personalized and responsive to teacher needs; promoting authentic and meaningful learning through a sense of empowerment for teachers (Fullan, as cited in Wenzlaff & Wieseman, 2004). Wenger (1998) concludes, “As a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises, such communities hold the key to real transformation – the kind that has real effects on people’s lives” (p. 85).

Empowerment

“When teachers feel that they can make a difference, they do...” (Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 1998, p. 17). Empowerment is defined in the “educational context as a teacher’s opportunities for autonomy, choice, responsibility and participation in decision-making in organizations” (Edwards, et al., 1998, p. 1). Teacher empowerment has been linked to improved teacher morale, increased communication between teachers and

augmented student motivation because of enhanced teacher opportunities to influence their students and their school (White, as cited in Edwards, et al., 1998). When individuals do not feel valued, toxic cultures may result, which sabotage any form of collaborative empowerment (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Contrary are the positive school cultures that embrace a sense of shared purpose, norms of collegiality, desire for improvement, rituals and traditions, and the celebration of heroes through storytelling (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 1998). Teacher empowerment is strengthened when: a common language is shared; professional development is focused and data driven; collaborative interaction is nurtured; and when there is predictability and reciprocity within the organization (Little, 1985). Empowered organizations ask what outcomes are desired and how the organization will know when these outcomes are achieved (Knight, Wiseman and Cooner, 2000).

Unlike unproductive workplaces that defeat empowerment, collegial cultures rely on team capacity building to improve schools (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Principals who support a culture of collaboration understand that they are shifting their roles from decision-makers and goal setters to facilitators who set the conditions for decisions and change to occur (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Research suggests that empowered teachers hold themselves accountable for continuous individual and organizational learning. Teachers who are involved in the planning and development of new program initiatives will be more likely to support those initiatives (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Teachers were found to be more empowered when their decision-making opportunities were increased that allowed them to have more control over their schedule and professional development (Rinehart & Short, as cited in Edwards, Green & Lyons, 1998, p. 5). “To the extent that

teachers and principals together can make important school decisions... they become colleagues... they become professionals” (Barth, 1990, p. 36). When teachers and administrators collaborate and share what they know about their professional practice, they become empowered and confident.

Collaborative cultures empower teachers and build their confidence to lead; therefore school reform should be done with teachers, not to them (Kohm & Nance, 2009). Warren Little (as cited in Barth, 1990) upholds basic elements of collegiality to support the empowerment of teachers: (a) adults in schools talk about practice... frequently, continuously, concretely and precisely; (b) adults in schools observe each other engaged in the practice of teaching and administration. These observations become the practice to reflect on and talk about; (c) adults engage together in work on curriculum by planning, designing, researching and evaluating curriculum; (d) adults in schools teach each other what they know about teaching, learning and leading. Craft knowledge is revealed, articulated and shared (p. 31). Organizations that hinder collaborative empowerment are disjointed and discouraging (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Research suggests that empowerment transforms teachers by increasing accountability for doing something that will increase student achievement and improve schools. When teachers experiment with new instructional practices to enhance student performance, they may close the gap between knowing and doing.

Knowing-Doing Gap

“Learning comes from doing and teaching others how” (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999, p. 96). “Learning is a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.15). Nonaka (1991) claims that redundancy

encourages learning through frequent dialogue about observed practice. Identifying best practices is easy, however, transferring that knowledge can be a frustrating process (Fullan, 2001); which often leads organizations to ponder, “If we only knew what we know” (Platt, as cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 79). Creating knowledge requires organizations to create change by closing the knowing-doing gap. Closing the knowing-doing gap requires individuals to do what they know.

Knowledge creation within organizations is “the capability of a company as a whole to create new knowledge, disseminate it throughout the organization, and embody it in products, services and systems” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, as cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 80). “Envisioned change will not happen or will not be fruitful until people look beyond the simplicities of information and individuals to the complexities of learning, knowledge, judgment, communities, organizations and institutions” (Brown & Duguid, as cited in Fullan, 2001, pp. 78-79). “Learning is a process, not an answer” (LeFauve, as cited in Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999, p. 95). Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) conclude that learning from diffusion of information is a slow process within organizations; and that knowledge management experts may in fact cause the knowing-doing gap to exist by withholding information for their personal benefit, rather than the benefit of all stakeholders.

Knowledge is a “social phenomenon” (Brown & Duguid, as cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 78). “Information is machines. Knowledge is people. Information becomes knowledge only when it takes on a social life” (Fullan, 2001, p. 78). When too much focus is on information rather than its use, transfer of knowledge does not happen (Fullan, 2001). This backup of information causes gaps between knowing what should be done and doing it (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999). Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) state that the knowing-doing gap

exists because organizational leaders may have difficulty implementing what they say and conclude, "... the gap between knowing and doing is more important than the gap between ignorance and knowing" (p. 87). Knowing, however, is not enough (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Bridging the knowing-doing gap requires individuals to actually do what they know.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to provide a review of related literature that would frame the phenomenon of organizational learning theory and explain the conceptual underpinnings: collaboration, knowledge sharing, PLCs, communities of practice, empowerment, and the knowing-doing gap; which provide the conditions to support the creation and sustainability of organizational learning. Collaboration and knowledge sharing were discussed as a means of empowering teachers to demonstrate enhanced professional practice, for the purpose of increased student learning and school improvement. Chapter three will provide a detailed description of the methods, design, approach, and participants of this ethnomethodological case study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Research identifies positive results for school efficacy when organizational learning is consistent and continuous (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This case study is driven by the void in empirical knowledge about organizational learning in schools in the Republic of Panama. The qualitative research guiding this ethnomethodological case study will focus on the phenomenon of organizational learning (Gubrium & Holstein as cited in Mertens, 2008). It is believed that by creating monthly opportunities for teachers in the Republic of Panama to come together for the purpose of knowledge sharing, reflection on practice and continuous professional learning they will become empowered to influence change in their schools. It is also believed that this influence will support organizational learning in schools in the Republic of Panama.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) and communities of practice provide support to all teachers who aim to continuously improve student learning (Sergiovanni, 2004a). Transformation of schools into communities of practice requires educators to understand that traditional models of education are no longer effective for the “post-industrial, knowledge-based society” we live in today (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 20). In a developing nation, like the Republic of Panama, breaking traditional paradigms in education is especially challenging because there is little evidence of systemic support, which encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing within PLCs and communities of practice. This observation provides a framework for exploring how schools in the Republic of Panama learn.

It is anticipated that this study will identify conditions that support organizational learning in public and low-middle socioeconomic private schools in the Republic of Panama. It is also expected that this study will help understand the significance of communities of practice when teachers are provided monthly opportunities to meet within a PLC, for the purpose of collaboration and to share knowledge. This study was also intended to add to the field of knowledge about how schools in the Republic of Panama can be transformed into learning organizations.

The underlying assumptions for this study include the premise that collaboration and knowledge sharing will empower teachers to lead change in their schools; and that collaboration and knowledge sharing are conditions that conceive and sustain organizational learning. Organizational learning assumes the continuous development of individuals and teams for the purpose of advancing effectiveness within an organization. The results of this study may contribute to the literature for creating a model PLC; and may serve as a resource for policymakers and leaders in the Ministry of Education and the National University of Panama, as they endeavor to identify improvement reforms and initiatives for schools in the Republic of Panama.

This chapter will present the problem and purpose of this case study. A grand tour question and three research questions will guide the conceptual framework, intended to discover how participation in The ProEd Foundation's monthly 2011 PLC supports collaboration and knowledge sharing to increase teacher empowerment; and to understand how and to what extent these conditions influence organizational learning in schools in the Republic of Panama. The research design will be discussed and a rationale for selection of the design provided. The population and sample of the study will be

identified and developed. In the methods section of this paper, data collection tools and data analysis strategies will be discussed. Additionally, methods for considering dependability and trustworthiness of the study will be illustrated. Anticipated limitations and biases of the study will also be presented in this chapter.

Problem Statement

Panama schools lack knowledge to transform their traditional education systems into learning organizations for the purpose of improved student learning. While evidence of organizational learning through empowered teacher collaboration has been established in many international schools studies, no such relationship has been investigated in public or low-middle socioeconomic private schools in the Republic of Panama. We still know very little about what may influence a culture for learning in schools in the Republic of Panama.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of K-12 teachers to discover how they observed and may have influenced organizational learning at their schools. Following Creswell's (2009) guidelines for a qualitative purpose statement, the intent of this case study was to understand the phenomenon of organizational learning for the purpose of: (a) describing what happened when teachers returned to their schools after participating in monthly ProEd PLC; (b) explaining how and to what extent ProEd PLC teachers shared information and knowledge with teachers and administrators [at their schools] who did not participate in monthly ProEd PLC; (c) exploring how knowledge sharing and teacher collaboration within a structured, supportive PLC influenced organizational learning in schools; and (d) filling the gap in knowledge about

how and to what extent teacher empowerment influenced organizational learning in schools in the Republic of Panama.

Grand Tour Question

How and to what extent does teachers' monthly participation in the ProEd Foundation's 2011 PLC influence a culture for learning in schools in the Republic of Panama?

Research Questions

The following research questions will support this study:

1. How and to what extent does participation in ProEd's monthly PLC empower teachers to collaborate and share knowledge with other teachers at their schools?
2. How and to what extent does knowledge sharing and collaboration influence a culture for organizational learning in schools in Panama?
3. How and to what extent does organizational learning influence the Knowing-Doing Gap in schools in the Republic of Panama?

Approach, Design and Methods

Approach

The approach of this qualitative ethnomethodological case study addressed both a program and a problem of practice (Creswell, 2007). The program studied was the 40-hour ProEd PLC. The practice was collaboration through knowledge sharing for the purpose of empowering teachers to bridge the knowing-doing gap, which may influence organizational learning at their schools in the Republic of Panama.

Ethnomethodology approaches of qualitative studies focus on "reality-constituting practices... to discover the meaning of the world experienced by the individual"

(Gubrium & Holstein, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 240). This “ethnographic” approach involved a detailed study of a group of ProEd 2011 PLC participants through interviews and observations (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 237). This approach was selected to understand how teachers who participated in ProEd’s 2011 PLC perceived their roles in influencing learning at their schools.

Design and Methods

The ethnographic lens that guided data collection and analysis of this case study was intended to determine, “how individuals recognize, describe, explain and account for their everyday lives” as teachers in the Republic of Panama (Gubrium & Holstein, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 240). This case study is a “bounded system”. It was bounded by place from sampling within only five schools in the Republic of Panama and by a timeframe that was limited to a 10-month program of study (Stake, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p.244). A constructivist paradigm fostered the interpretation of perceptions that described “everyday knowledge” of teachers as they unfolded narratives about their personal and professional experiences (Schwandt, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 14). It is believed that the reality of organizational learning is “socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 14). Constructivism proposes that knowledge is created through the making of meaning and engaging the learners in interpretation of personal experiences (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2001). The researcher’s goal in conducting this study was to “understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge” by exploring how teachers perceive their

influence on creating a culture for organizational learning at their schools in the Republic of Panama (Mertens, 2005, p. 14).

Participant Information

A convenience sample of 25 Pre-K through 12th grade teachers, from five public and/or low-middle socio-economic private schools was selected for this case study. The selection of five teachers from each of the five target schools represented a larger population of approximately 125 teachers who participated in the 2011 ProEd PLC. During one of the monthly PLC meetings, the researcher announced they would be conducting interviews at five schools and would appreciate the support of selected teachers from each school.

Table 2

School Profiles

School	Location	Demographics	Total Teacher Population	Total Teachers in ProEd's 2011 PLC
School A	Province of Colon Atlantic Coast	Semi-Private Low SES PK- 9 th grade Catholic School Private Low-Middle SES	28	10
School B	Province of Panama - Center	PK-12 th grade Bilingual/Vocational Catholic School Private Middle SES	52	12
School C	Province of Panama - East: San Antonio	PK – 12 th grade Bilingual Non-Denominational Private Low SES	90	10
School D	Province of Panama - West: Arraijan	Nonprofit PK-12 th grade Catholic	32	32
School E	Province of Panama - East: San Miguelito	Public Low SES 9 th -12 th grade	212	20

SES = Socioeconomic level

The schools in this sample were selected on the basis of having five or more teachers who participated in the 40-hour 2011 ProEd PLC. Their locations in Panama and the demographics of their school population represent the larger population of schools with participants in the 2011 ProEd PLC. The five schools selected for data collection included (a) one semi-private Pre-Kinder through ninth grade Catholic School located in the province of Colon on the Atlantic Coast of Panama. The other four schools are located in the province of Panama on the Pacific Coast of the Republic. The demographics of the four schools in the province of Panama include: (b) a private, lower socio-economic Pre-Kinder through 12th grade Bilingual Catholic/Vocational School; (c) a private, middle socio-economic, Pre-Kinder through 12th grade bilingual school; (d) a private, low-socioeconomic, nonprofit Catholic Pre-Kinder through 12th grade school for orphan girls and low-income children of the surrounding community; and (e) a low-socioeconomic public high school serving 9th – 12th grade students. Teacher profiles are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Teacher Profiles

Teacher (Pseudonyms)	F/M	School	Grade/Subject	Total Years Teaching	Years in ProEd PLC
Ana	F	A	Kinder	18	1*
Beatriz	F	A	2 nd	12	1*
Carmen	F	A	7 th -9 th Spanish	12	1*
Dorita	F	A	7 th -9 th Music	9	1*
Elvira	F	A	1 st -3 rd English	11	1*
Federico	M	B	8 th Industrial Arts	10	1*
Guadalupe	F	B	4 th -5 th Spanish/Mathematics	5	1*
Humberto	M	B	12 th Electronics	19	1*
Isabel	F	B	Kinder / 7 th -10 th & 12 th Computers	9	1*
Juanita	F	B	9 th -12 th English	19	1~
Karla	F	C	1 st English	5	2
Leticia	F	C	2 nd Math/Spanish/Social Studies	5	2

Maria	F	C	10 th -12 th Biology	25	2
Nicolas	M	C	7 th -8 th English	1	1*
Olivia	F	C	6 th /10 th -12 th Mathematics	11	2
Pilar	F	D	2 nd Spanish/Mathematics	4	1*
Querida	F	D	4 th Grade/All Subjects	4	1*
Rita	F	D	10 th -12 th Business	2	1*
Sergio	M	D	10 th -12 th Physics	5	1*
Tina	F	D	10 th -12 th English	6	1*
Ursula	F	E	10 th Social Studies	15	1*
Veronica	F	E	7 th Geography	28	1*
Wanda	F	E	7 th -12 th English	8	1~
Xiomara	F	E	10 th -12 th Orientation/Values	11	1*
Yannis	M	E	10 th -11 th English	25	1*

1* = First Year in ProEd PLC

1~ = Former student of Researcher

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this qualitative case study drew upon multiple sources of information, which included observational field notes, audio and written recordings of interviews and other documented and visual artifacts from teachers in 2011 ProEd PLC (Creswell, 2007). Data collection included interviews of 25 randomly selected Pre-Kinder through 12th grade teachers who were available to participate in a “three-step interview process” at their schools (Dolbeare & Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006, pp. 16-19). These teachers were selected from five public and/or low-middle socioeconomic private schools that had at least five or more teachers participating in ProEd’s 2011 PLC. When participants are asked to tell stories about their experiences they “frame some aspect of it with a beginning, a middle and an end and thereby make it meaningful...” (Seidman, 2006, p. 19). Wenger (1998) claims that stories are the rhythms of daily community life and common threads of communities of practice. The importance of understanding teachers’ identities, which include, emotions, values,

histories, and knowledge, shape how they participate in professional development and practice in their classrooms (Batty & Franke, 2008).

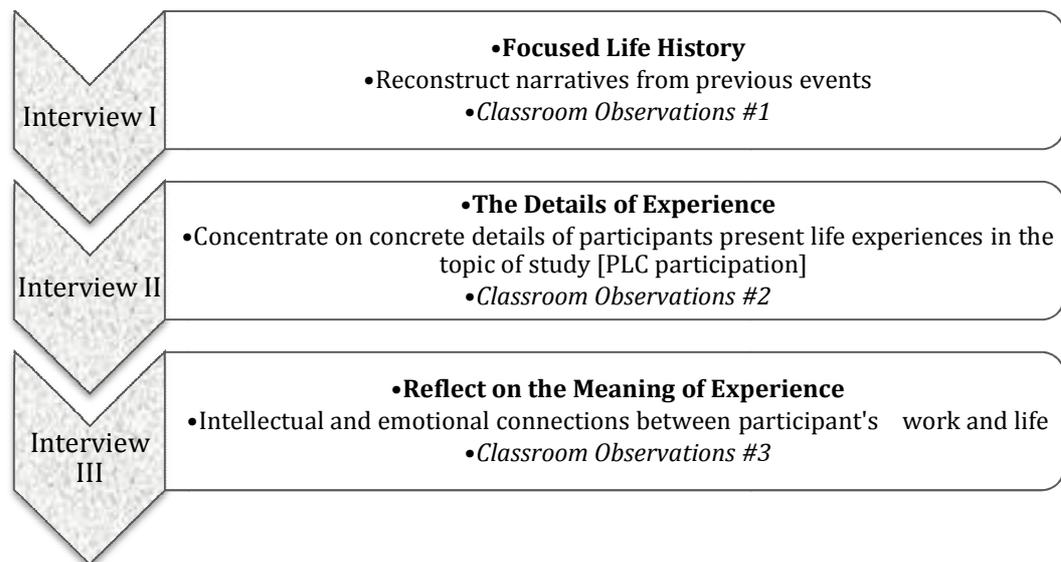
Individual Interviews

The “Three-Step Interview Process” (Appendix A) was conducted to collect data for this case study. During a three-week period of time from the end of June to the middle of July 2011 the researcher and ProEd’s Executive Director visited 25 randomly selected teachers in the “natural setting” of their schools to conduct interviews (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Each of the three interviews lasted from between 30 to 45 minutes to respect the teachers’ timeframe during the school day. A “90-minute” format was recommended for these in-depth ethnographic interviews. This option, however, was not realistic given the structured timeframe of a teacher’s workday in Panama schools (Dolbeare & Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 20). It should be mentioned at this time, that teachers in Panama schools are required and expected to cover each other’s classes when a colleague is absent or called away from their classroom. Substitute teachers are not contracted and school administrators usually do not take responsibility to cover for absent teachers. It was, therefore, necessary to conduct these interviews in compliance with the teacher’s free time to avoid additional stress to the teachers.

The first interview focused on the life history of the interviewees for the purpose of reconstructing and connecting past to present experiences (Seidman, 2006). Interview two asked interviewees to concentrate on the details of their current experiences as a teacher and the third interview asked the participants to make meaning of those experiences with projections toward their future (Seidman, 2006).

This interview method was selected because it required the participants to make meaning of their experiences through narratives and "...conversational analysis, which have at their core the qualitative study of reality-constituting practices" as teachers in Panama schools and as participants in ProEd's 2011 PLC (Gubrium & Holstein, as cited in Mertens, 2006, p. 240). "The very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process" (Vygotsky, as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 19). The purpose of this study was to explore what meaning teachers made of their roles as teachers and ProEd PLC participants; and how to what extent these roles influenced organizational learning in their schools.

During each of the three interviews, the researcher and the Executive Director of ProEd recorded written notes for each of the "open-ended" interview questions (Appendix B) for the purpose of collecting additional details and observations during the interview process (Creswell, 2009, p. 181; Seidman, 2006, p. 15). Audio-recordings of each interview were also made. The researcher "transcribed" data using the audio recordings, personal jottings and the notes recorded by the ProEd Director (Creswell, 2007, pp. 239-240). The researcher used the transcriptions to identify and categorize emerging themes (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009). This process was continued until the point of "saturation" when no new information surfaced (Krueger & Casey, 2009). At the conclusion of each of the three interviews, small tokens of appreciation: an apple, a chocolate bar and an apple candy jar were given to each interviewee. The Three-Step Interview process is presented in Figure 1.



Dolbeare & Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006, pp. 16-19.

Figure 1. Three-Step Interview Process

Walkthrough Observations

During each of the three-scheduled interviews, and prior to each of the focus group sessions, the researcher and ProEd's Executive Director conducted walk through observations for the purpose of collecting classroom observations of teachers who were participants in the 2011 ProEd PLC. The purpose of these four observations was to collect data using the Walkthrough Classroom Observation Checklist (Appendix C) and other anecdotal field notes to validate if new practices were being implemented as a result of participation in the ProEd 2011 PLC. The observations were conducted school-wide, which included both PLC participants and non-participants, to add reliability to the study.

Data collection from the interviews and field notes were guided by the following questions: (a) what are people doing? (b) what specific means and/or

strategies do they use? (c) what do I see going on here? and (d) what did I learn from these notes? (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p.146). The purpose of these walk-through observations was to identify and record what, if any, new strategies, tools and/or activities were being implemented in classrooms as a result of participation in ProEd's 2011 PLCs.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this qualitative ethnomethodological case study began with transcriptions of an “enormous amount of text” from in-depth audio recordings and written notes collected from 25 teachers during three separate interviews (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). A total of 75 interviews were conducted over an approximate three-week period of time. The researcher simultaneously translated and transcribed the verbatim interviews from Spanish to English to create a first working draft for data analysis. Using the English transcriptions and Spanish audio recordings and field notes, the researcher began the process of data reduction and data analysis to identify information that was most interesting and significant to this study (Seidman, 2006).

Data analysis for the qualitative research of this case study was an “emergent design” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). The researcher consciously worked to maintain an open mind when reading through transcriptions and listening to the audio recordings to let emerging themes surface. The researcher, worked “back and forth between themes and the database until... a comprehensive set of themes” emerged (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). Once thematic categories were identified, the researcher made interpretations of what was seen, heard, and understood (Creswell, 2007). These interpretations were used as a coding process for “...sorting and integration” of data collected during interviews

(Weiss, 1994, p. 154). The researcher made “margin” notes of the transcriptions from comments made during conversations in the interview processes (Weiss, 1994, p. 155). Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) conclude that qualitative research is inductive and that qualitative coding extends inquiry through continued reflection and integration of data.

Data reduction for qualitative research is a unique process that builds patterns, categories and themes by organizing the data into “chunks” of meaningful information (Creswell, 2007; Marshall, as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 117). The researcher began data reduction by carefully reading and “bracketing” phrases and pertinent pieces of information from the transcriptions (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Seidman, 2006), explain the importance of data reduction for qualitative research:

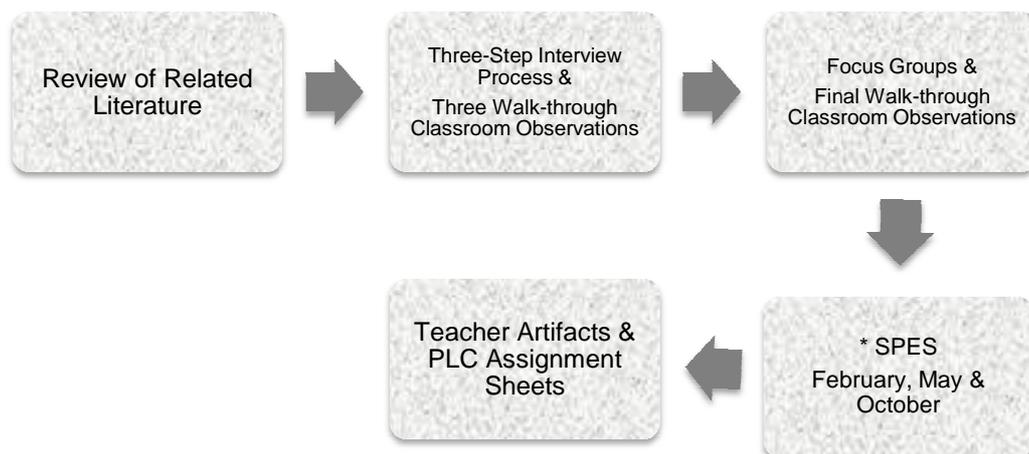
Most important is that reducing the data be done inductively rather than deductively. That is, the researcher cannot address the material with a set of hypotheses to test or with a theory developed in another context to which he or she wishes to match the data (p. 117).

Using the constructivist paradigm to frame the collection and analysis of data, the researcher accepts “that reality is not absolute, but is defined through community consensus... multiple realities exist that are time and context dependent” (Mertens, 2005, p. 231). Through the ethnographic lens, the analysis of data attempted to “describe and analyze practice and beliefs of cultures and communities” (Patton, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 235). As an active participant in the collection and analysis of data, the ethnographic researcher accepts the ontological assumptions in attempting to

identify the motivation, beliefs and behaviors of the participants in this study (Mertens, 2005).

Dependability and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, credibility parallels internal validity of quantitative research studies (Mertens, 2005). “In qualitative research, the credibility test asks if there is a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints” (Mertens, 2005, p. 254). Utilization of Creswell’s (2009) credibility methods for a qualitative case study included: (a) “rich, thick descriptions to provide meaning; (b) clarification of researcher bias; (c) prolonged time in the field with participants; and (d) peer debriefing to increase accuracy of reported information (pp. 191-192). These credibility procedures were intended to add value to the findings of this case study. Multiple methods of triangulation were also implemented for trustworthiness of this study. These methods are illustrated in Figure 2.



* SPES = School Participation Empowerment Survey (Short & Rinehart)

Figure 2. Data Collection Process – Triangulation

The researcher in this case study incorporated several mixed-method strategies to seek credibility and address the research questions guiding this investigation. The following sections will discuss how each of the selected triangulation methods was intended to add credibility and value to this case study.

Literature Review

The review of related literature presented in Chapter Two guided this research by providing an informational framework to support the concept of schools as learning organizations. The review of literature explained the phenomenon of organizational learning and the conceptual underpinnings that support the creation and sustainability of this phenomenon including: collaboration and knowledge sharing, PLCs and communities of practice, empowerment, and the Knowing-Doing Gap. The literature review revealed that organizational learning enhances a school's ability to cope with change and the discipline to focus on the mission of educating students (Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy, & Mackley, 2000). Additionally, the literature review provided information about how organizational learning provides consistent and continuous professional development opportunities for all community stakeholders. These opportunities are founded on collaboration and knowledge sharing, which empower teachers to demonstrate enhanced professional practice to increase student learning and school improvement.

Focus Groups

To increase dependability and trustworthiness of the data collection, focus groups were conducted in September 2011, in four of the five ProEd PLC schools with 8 to 10 non-ProEd 2011 PLC participants [teachers and/or administrators]. Only four of

the five schools were selected for focus groups because the fifth school, School D (Table 2) did not have any non-ProEd PLC participants. All 28 teachers in School D participated in the ProEd 2011 PLC. The purpose of these focus groups was to provide insight on organizational learning at the school level as a result of ProEd's 2011 PLC intervention (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Mertens, 2005). The researcher and the Director of ProEd recorded written data using open-ended questions on a record sheet (Appendix D) during each focus group. Audio and video recordings were also used. Focus groups were conducted in the participants' natural setting of their own school environment.

School Participant Empowerment Survey (SPES)

The School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES) developed by Paula M. Short and James S. Rinehart (Appendix E) was administered on three separate occasions, to all participants of the ProEd 2011 PLC. Additionally, the SPES was also administered to the 25 randomly selected interview-participants during the third interview for the purpose of comparing perceptions about personal empowerment with the emerging themes of the interviews.

Monthly Accountability Sheets and Journal entries

Monthly accountability sheets (Appendix F) from volunteer participants in ProEd's 2011 PLC were also reviewed for data triangulation. Additionally, random journal entries from ProEd PLC facilitators were reviewed along with occasional electronic feedback and other written commentary made by PLC participants.

Teacher-Made Artifacts

Visual artifacts (Appendix G) that demonstrate "transference of value" were collected throughout the 10-month period of investigation for this study (M. Smith,

personal communication, October 17, 2011). Artifacts are defined as any teacher-made educational resources that were produced or reproduced and applied at the school site, as a result of participation in monthly ProEd 2011 PLC workshops.

Walk-through Observations

The researcher and the ProEd Director conducted three walk-through observations in the five target schools that participated in the ProEd 2011 PLC. This data collection process was added for comparative purposes of “enhancing validity and reliability of the observational data...” (Adler & Adler, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 385).

Ethical Principles

The research and data collection for this case study was conducted in the Republic of Panama. To address ethical issues, when working with human subjects, the researcher adhered to all requirements of the Internal Review Board (IRB) by using an IRB form (Appendix I). All participants in the study were asked to sign a Permission and Signature Consent (Appendix J) prior to the conclusion of the study. “A researcher protects the anonymity of the informants...” (Creswell, 2007 p.141). All participants in this study will remain anonymous and data confidential.

Role of Participant Researcher

The qualitative researcher was a “key instrument” as facilitator of the PLC workshops and in gathering and analyzing data for this case study (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). The researcher collected “multiple sources of data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38); including audio and written recordings using a protocol template with open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) during the Three-Step Interview process (Dolbeare &

Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006). Additionally, the researcher conducted walk through classroom observations using the Walkthrough Classroom Observation Checklist (Appendix C) to gather field notes.

Anticipated Limitations and Assumptions of Study

Limitations

Three limitations of this study were identified. The first limitation included the 10-month training schedule. The program under study was the ProEd 2011 Teachers Teaching Teachers Professional Learning Community, which ran from February through October 2011. The 10-month time frame for data collection of qualitative interviews, walkthrough observations and field notes was considered a limitation because during the process for change, people experience “two kinds of problems... social-psychological fear of change; and the lack of technical know-how or skills to make the change work” (Fullan, 2001, p. 41). Within a 10-month time frame the participants may not know what they know or they may not be able to do what they know (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999).

A second time limitation included the fact that teachers were only available for one class period (approximate 30-45 minutes) for each of the three interviews conducted for data collection. Dolbeare and Schuman (as cited in Seidman, 2006) suggest a 90-minute format to allow participants to “... reconstruct their experience, put it in the context of their lives, and reflect on its meaning...” (p. 20). The brevity of the interview period is considered a limitation because it does not adhere to the authors’ recommendation for running an in-depth phenomenological interview (Seidman, 2006).

A third limitation of the study focuses on the role of the researcher who can be identified as a “third leg on the stool” (P. Messner, personal communication, April 2011).

The researcher is an active participant in designing, facilitating and evaluating the monthly ProEd PLC and was actively engaged in the collection and analysis of data for this study. The active participation of the researcher could potentially bias the study.

Delimitations

Two delimitations or identified boundaries were identified in this case study. The first delimitation included the selection of five target schools where five randomly selected teachers would be selected to participate in the interview process for data collection. The criterion for selecting the five schools was based on the fact that they had at least five or more teachers participating in the 2011 ProEd PLC. A second delimitation was the random selection of 25 teachers who best represented the total population of 125 teachers who participated in the 2011 ProEd PLC.

Summary

This chapter presented an introduction to the problem and purpose of this ethnomethodological case study. A grand tour question and three research questions were presented to guide the theoretical framework, and methods and rationale for selection of the design were provided. Participant information was introduced in detail. Data collection tools and data analysis strategies were discussed. Additionally, multiple-methods for adding credibility to the study were illustrated and anticipated limitations and biases of the study were presented. This case study sought to discover how participation in ProEd's monthly 2011 PLC supported teacher collaboration and empowerment; and to understand how and to what extent these conditions influenced a culture for learning in schools in the Republic of Panama.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA COLLECTION

Introduction: Conversations from Classrooms

This chapter will provide results from analysis of data collected from three separate interviews of 25 teachers in five participating ProEd 2011 Professional Learning Community schools. The first part of this chapter will present an historical account that lead to revealing a phenomenon and defining a purpose for this study. Given an extensive review of related literature focused on PLCs, communities of practice, collaboration, knowledge sharing, and empowerment and given the fact that the researcher has provided professional development opportunities to educators in a developing nation for the past two decades; the following grand tour question guided this study: *How and to what extent does teachers' monthly participation in the ProEd Foundation's 2011 PLC influence a culture for learning in schools in the Republic of Panama?* Through a lens focused on conditions for creating change through teacher collaboration and knowledge sharing, motivators and barriers to organizational learning will be identified. The role of participant researcher in the gathering of data for this study will also be discussed.

The second part of this chapter will introduce the cast of 25 teachers who participated in three separate interviews. Their stories will be told through the casual classroom conversations that took place during the interview process. The teachers will explain who they are, how they perceive their roles as educators, to provide descriptions of their school environments and their working relationships with members in their learning community. Emerging themes from data transcriptions of this case study will be identified and discussed; and data coding and reduction procedures used to surface

emerging themes will be presented. The last part of this chapter will present strategies used to add value and reliability to this ethnomethodological study.

Revealing a Phenomenon and Defining a Purpose

“Learning is always an on-the-job phenomenon. Learning always occurs in the context of where you are taking action. So we need to find ways to get teachers working together; we need to create an environment where they can continually reflect on what they are doing and learn more and more what it takes to work as a team” (Senge, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 274).

The following historical account will provide a premise for revealing a phenomenon and defining a purpose for study. Along this 30-year journey as an educator, I have learned the importance of *we* instead of *me*. I have learned that the effectiveness of any organization is the *sum of its people*; and I have learned that *together, we are truly better*. I have had the great fortune of being a life-long learner both in and out of classrooms. My knowledge is built not only on theory, but also on shared practice within a collegial community. I understand how impacting learning organizations can be in supporting individual and group growth. I also understand the amount of effort that is needed to sustain effective learning organizations and communities of practice. The following section, *Chronology: An Educator in the Making* is intended to identify how the phenomenon for organizational learning was revealed and how the development of a PLC in the Republic of Panama defined a purpose for this study.

The Researcher’s Story

Chronology: An Educator in the Making

In 1981, I graduated Magna Cum Laude from Glassboro State College in Glassboro, New Jersey with a B.A. in Elementary Education. I had just completed a successful student teaching experience in a brand new elementary school in suburban

South Jersey. I proudly waved my diploma with great hope of finding a teaching position near my hometown in Northern New Jersey. It was a promising time, *almost*. With budget cuts in education threatening layoffs of tenured teachers across the United States, my options to teach near home became more and more limited. Returning once again to my summer waitressing job in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, I realized that perhaps after four years of college, I might have chosen the wrong career. It seemed nobody was willing to ‘invest’ in *a good teacher*.

About mid-summer of my graduating year, I received a phone call that there was a second grade teaching position available in an inner city school district in Dallas, Texas. Not wanting to waste anymore time, I packed two suitcases, one with my personal belongings and the other with my books and treasured learning centers from my student teaching experience. I headed south to finally do what I was prepared to do; be *a good teacher*.

It did not take long for me to figure out that I was not prepared for this experience. My second grade students needed much more from me than phonics and math instruction. Truancy, child abuse and working with at-risk students were overwhelming daily challenges. I felt isolated, scared and very incompetent. When I approached other colleagues, it seemed that they too were looking for options to *make it through the day*. I looked for support from my school administrators, who reminded me to use ‘the paddle’ that was included in the box of teaching supplies they had handed me on the first day of school. I began to realize that this *teacher* did not have the necessary skills to make it a *good school year*.

In 1982, I relocated to the Republic of Panama. At that time, the U.S. Military had a large presence in the Canal Zone of Panama. I quickly sought a teaching position and to my delight was given an immediate opportunity to teach for the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS). I was very excited to begin my new teaching career. I was also a bit apprehensive. What if I had the same kind of experience I had during my first year of teaching? I didn't learn how to teach children with challenges. What if I wasn't *a good teacher* after all?

My teaching experience for the DoDD-Panama Schools began when I was assigned a mentor named *Rose*.¹ Rose was an experienced teacher who became my collegial coach and personal mentor. Rose was by my side full-time, everyday, for about one month. Rose taught me how to make a lesson plan, how to select and write learning objectives, how to fill in required paperwork and how to find time to share a conversation with colleagues. Rose and I visited the classrooms of other experienced teachers and then, together, Rose and I spoke with the teacher about the lesson that we observed. Rose demonstrated lessons in my classroom with my students, so that I could see how they responded to her prompts and instruction. Rose taught me many things, like how to teach routines for effective management and run reading circles where students transitioned from one activity to another with deliberate accuracy. She modeled a variety of strategies to teach reading and math and she tutored me on how to keep my students engaged in the learning. I shadowed Rose until she thought I was ready to demonstrate what I had learned; and then Rose became my shadow. She let me teach. She filled in the places where I fell short, and *she never let me fail in front of my students, their parents or our*

¹A pseudonym.

colleagues. Rose extended my thinking through personal and peer reflection. Our conference time became collegial conversations with questions and answers that went both ways. And through this process of peer coaching and support, Rose became my on-site professor in a continuous learning ‘investment’ that has led to my 30-year career as an educator. Indeed I had become *a good teacher*.

From 1983-1993, my career was sculpted through the Synergistic Professional Development Program created by the DoDDs Panama Director and his committed team of professional educators. For ten years, I was immersed in a continuous learning program that included visiting scholars like Michael Fullan, David and Roger Johnson, Bruce Joyce, Beverly Showers and Emily Calhoun. We were continuously challenged to inspire change and breathe new life into classrooms. Our shared vision was to provide equal learning opportunities for all students in our region. Together we worked hard to see how data from student scores could be used to improve teachers’ instructional practices. We relied on each other and we held each other accountable for results to improve student learning. It was a decade of intense learning and implementation, and we celebrated our shared team successes. As with everything in life, however, *change happens*. With the drawdown of the U.S. Military from Panama and the closing of bases, the DoDDS learning organization came to a close. This marked the end of an amazing learning era, and the beginning of new educational endeavors for this *good teacher*.

In 2001, motivated by the reconstruction efforts at Ground Zero, I created The ProEd Foundation with a program called, *Students Supporting Students* for the purpose of uniting public and private school students to work together to refurbish public school classrooms in Panama City. As this yearly community service project grew, it became

more apparent that a pleasant classroom environment was not the only need of our public school students. As the physical conditions of Panama's public schools continued to deteriorate, it seemed teacher competencies worsened creating conditions that lead to a national education crisis and *a personal call to action*. It was time to stop trying to find the reasons for poor school performance and 'invest' in the heart of classroom learning - Panama's teachers.

In 2005, ProEd launched its second program called, *Teachers Teaching Teachers* (TTT). We piloted a 5-day, 20-hour summer workshop for a few years. Teachers were motivated, but there was little evidence of any significant change in classroom practice. In 2010, the TTT program was redesigned to include 40-hours of continuous professional development throughout the school year (February through October). It should be mentioned at this time that I was in my second year of the ELPA doctoral program and becoming very interested in creating a sustainable PLC in Panama. During the first year of the newly designed ProEd TTT program, 50 teacher scholarships were granted for participation in the 40-hour PLC. Two years later, the ProEd Foundation received donations to provide scholarships to 125 teachers who participated in the 2011 ProEd PLC. This study was focused on *and dedicated to* the participants of the 2011 ProEd PLC; and to those *who 'invested'* time in teaching this *good teacher - well*.

The 2011 ProEd Professional Learning Community

The following section will provide detailed descriptions of the ProEd 2011 Professional Learning Community (PLC). These descriptions will include: the setting, the PLC development process and plan, the role of the participant researcher, the cast of 25 teachers who participated in the interviews of the data collection process, and the target

school settings. This information is intended to provide what Creswell (2009) refers to as “rich, thick descriptions... to provide the reader with a shared experience” (pp. 191-192).

The Setting

The setting for this ethnomethodological case study takes place in a public school classroom in the center of Panama City in the Republic of Panama. The process for acquiring this model-training classroom for teachers began in November 2010, when the ProEd Founder [researcher of this study] and the ProEd Executive Director visited the Minister of Education to ask for permission to create a teacher-training center. The purpose of this training center was to provide public and private school teachers with an *innovative-safe-haven* for teachers to learn. Having a place where teachers could share knowledge and information within a collaborative professional learning community throughout the school year was a new phenomenon in Panama. The 40-hour PLC called TTT (Maestros Apoyando Maestros in Spanish) incorporated the implementation design, which included: theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching to approximately 125 PreKinder through 12th grade teachers from five selected public and or private low-middle socio-economic schools in Panama (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

The Minister of Education suggested that permission be sought directly from the school director, stating: “If permission is granted, the Ministry approves” (L. Molinar, personal communication, November 2010). This was a great achievement for ProEd. Bureaucracy in Panama is a gatekeeper to innovation. The Director of the public primary school where the model classroom was located agreed to lend the ProEd Foundation the facility for their 2011 PLC (renewable upon request for a second consecutive year). Upon receipt of the model classroom from the school director, the ProEd Director and the

researcher of this study [ProEd Founder] offered scholarships to all teachers of this public school. Two teachers took advantage of this scholarship: the English teacher who came to half of the workshops (there are 10 workshops in a yearlong ProEd PLC) and a second teacher who came to the final three workshops of the 2011 PLC.

The ProEd Model Classroom, which was in much need of repair, was refurbished with several coats of fresh paint, some soundproofing with corkboard walls, air conditioning and new white boards. ProEd also received a donation to resurface the floor of the model classroom. New tables and chairs were provided to break the traditional row-seating patterns typically used in Panama schools (Appendix K). The purpose of this classroom transformation was to create a model that would provide ProEd 2011 PLC participants with a different kind of learning experience during their 10-month training program. Remembering that most teacher training in the Republic of Panama takes place in an auditorium conference setting, this classroom design would break traditional paradigms for learning by inviting teachers to collaborate and share ideas in a safe and professional community of learners. The idea to house the 2011 ProEd PLC in a public school classroom was intended to send the message that if one public school classroom could be transformed into an effective learning environment, it could be repeated in other public and private schools throughout Panama.

The Development Process

The development of the 2011 ProEd PLC began in November when the ProEd Founder (researcher) and ProEd's Executive Director met with the Minister of Education to ask for a classroom to use for a PLC. In December 2010, scholarships from private industries and personal donations were distributed to 125 teachers in five low-middle

socio-economic private and public schools in Panama. In January 2011, the researcher, the ProEd Executive Director and the ProEd Volunteer Teaching Team developed the academic objectives and content for the 12-hour summer kick-off the ProEd 2011 PLC in February 2011. The 40-hour PLC ran through October 2011. During that time, program evaluation was continuous and school visits to support teacher implementation were made. Over a three-week period of time in July of 2011, the randomly selected teachers were interviewed for this case study. It should also be mentioned that for triangulation purposes to add reliability to this study, the School Participant Empowerment Survey (SPES) was administered in February, May and October 2011.

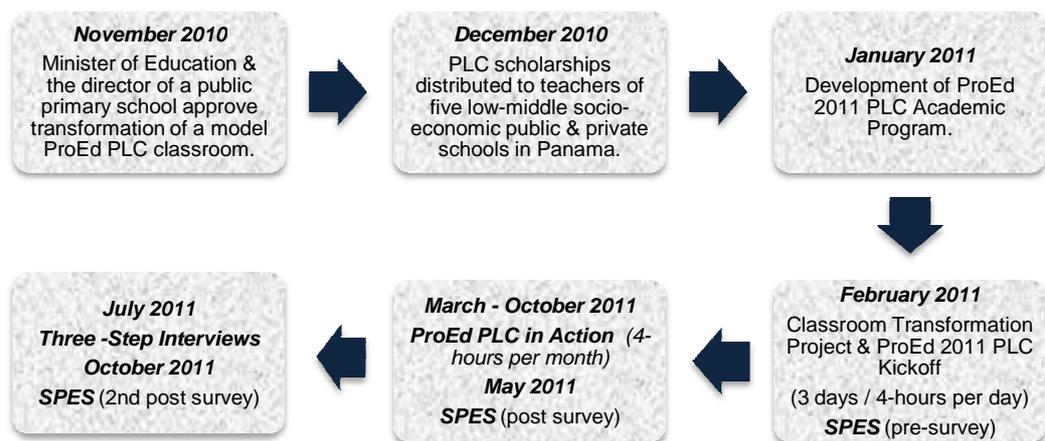


Figure 3. The ProEd Foundation's 2011 PLC Development Plan

The Participant Researcher

The qualitative researcher was a “key instrument” in gathering and analyzing data for this case study (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). The researcher collected “multiple sources of data” including audio and written recordings using a protocol template with open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) during the Three-Step Interview process (Creswell, 2007, p. 38); and video recordings during the focus groups. Additionally, the

researcher conducted walk through classroom observations using the Walkthrough Classroom Observation Checklist (Appendix C) to gather additional anecdotal field notes.

The researcher, creator of the ProEd Foundation in 2001, maintains an active role as CEO and in the design, facilitation, and evaluation of the monthly ProEd 2011 PLC workshops. The researcher's involvement in the data collection, analysis and coding for this study, and as facilitator of the ProEd 2011 PLC may influence bias in the study, which is presented in the Limitation section in Chapter Three of this paper.

Throughout the 10-month study, the researcher worked to maintain conscious control about impartiality during data collection and analysis processes. Building trust with the PLC participants was a priority, therefore, a personal relationship was inevitable with the members of this study and all PLC participants. However, maintaining a professional relationship and relying upon the use of protocol templates (Appendix B) during the data collection processes helped to keep the process fair and to keep bias in check during this study.

The Cast

The introductions of the cast and descriptions of the interview settings at each school are intended to create a relationship between the reader and the cast from the presentation of data collected during casual classroom conversations during the interview process. The researcher attempts to provide "rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings" (Creswell, 2009, p.191). According to Creswell (2009), "When qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting... or many perspectives about a theme, the results become more realistic and richer" (p. 192). Additionally, the researcher

presents comprehensive descriptions of the cast (Appendix L) and the school settings (Appendix M) using personal perceptions and first person narratives from the teachers who were interviewed for this study.

Twenty-five Pre-Kinder through 12th grade teachers, from five public and/or low-middle socio-economic private schools who participated in the 2011 ProEd PLC were interviewed for this case study. “Convenience sampling” of five teachers from each of the five schools represented a larger population of approximately 125 teachers who participated in the 2011 ProEd PLC (Mertens, 2005, p. 322). During one of the monthly PLC meetings, the researcher (ProEd Founder/ CEO and lead facilitator in ProEd PLC) and ProEd’s Executive Director announced they would be conducting interviews at five schools and would appreciate the support of the teachers who were selected upon availability at each school. All participants accepted the invitation to participate in the interview process, which was also supported and logistically facilitated by school administrators. The following table will provide a brief introduction of each teacher interviewed for this study.

Table 4

Self-Description Sample Statements of the Cast

Teacher (Pseudonym)	School	Interview I - Question 1 <i>Tell me about yourself.</i>
Ana	A	<i>“I am a specialist in Kinder”.</i>
Beatriz	A	<i>“I want to improve. I like to learn. I look for ways to learn”.</i>
Carmen	A	<i>“I like to know and learn and read.”</i>
Dorita	A	<i>“I love what I do. I love teaching... I realized I had a gift to teach music and art.”</i>
Elivira	A	<i>“A very happy person... loves teaching English to children... they get much knowledge.”</i>
Federico	B	<i>“Alumni of School B. I like to be happy in the face of crisis. I try to bring positivism and smiles to my day. I do not like injustice.”</i>
Guadalupe	B	<i>“Collaborative... likes to work with adolescents.”</i>

Humberto	B	<i>"Alumni of School B. I came to teach in this school for three years. I'm still here, 18 years later."</i>
Isabel	B	<i>"Happy, cooperative... I like innovation and learning new things."</i>
Juanita	B	<i>"Happy grandmother of eight grandchildren. Something I enjoy is teaching English."</i>
Karla	C	<i>"I like to challenge myself in the present and for the future."</i>
Leticia	C	<i>"I didn't start my career in education. In my third year of studying Public Relations, I had a desire to work with children so I began my study in the Faculty of Educational Science at the University of Panama."</i>
Maria	C	<i>"I am happily married. I like to work directly with the students."</i>
Nicolas	C	<i>"I am a first year teacher. I describe myself as sociable and talkative... I like what I do, which is work with teens."</i>
Olivia	C	<i>"I am a caring person with my family and my students. It is important that my students like my classes and that they are not bored. I like to treat my students well."</i>
Pilar	D	<i>"I am a successful teacher because I give 100% to my job. I am responsible, punctual and organized. I am very on top of things."</i>
Querida	D	<i>"I wanted to teach so that I could take care of my 4 children. I graduated with a Pharmacy degree, but the hours were not good for me to raise my family. I went back to the University of Panama for a teaching degree. I tried to teach and work in a pharmacy, but I realized the money didn't matter if I couldn't balance time with my family. I've been working in School D since 2008."</i>
Rita	D	<i>"I am happy, patient, creative and charismatic. I like to work in groups. I support when I can. I share what I know."</i>
Sergio	D	<i>"I am always available to help students, even if they are not my students. I am an example and people/students trust me."</i>
Tina	D	<i>"I'm a humble person who likes to speak a lot and I am funny too. I really like teaching. I am a teacher because I like what I do, not because it was the only thing I could get a job doing."</i>
Ursula	E	<i>"I am a teacher of Modern and Contemporary History and I am willing to give the best of myself to help schools in Panama. I am Pro-Education in Panama."</i>
Veronica	E	<i>"I am a simple person who has learned a lot of techniques and methods to help my students learn."</i>
Wanda	E	<i>"I like what I do. I like to put technology into my teaching. I like to be positive and transmit this to my students and colleagues."</i>
Xiomara	E	<i>"I love my profession and working with adolescents"</i>

		<i>and their parents. I believe we are here to bring peace and guide our students to a better future.”</i>
Yannis	E	<i>“I learned through experience to be as positive as possible with a sense of humor. A sense of humor makes life easier.”</i>

Target Schools Interview Settings

All interviews were held at the school sites of each of the 25 teacher participants. The interviews were conducted as a casual conversation between the ProEd Team [ProEd Founder/CEO/Researcher of this study and ProEd’s Executive Director] and the participating ProEd 2011 PLC teachers. Interviews ran from between 20-40 minutes to accommodate teaching schedules during a 45-minute block of time. The following section will provide a brief demographic description of the five target schools to identify the location, student and teacher populations and the programs offered. The schools in this study were selected based on the criteria of having at least five or more teachers who were participants in the ProEd 2011 PLC. These teachers committed 40-hours to a professional development program, which ran from February through October 2011. To add to the authenticity and richness of the study (Creswell, 2009) images of each target school from teacher responses during the second interview asked teachers to describe their school environment and what it was like to work in their school (Appendix M).

School A

Located in the province of Colon on the Atlantic Coast of Panama, School A is a co-ed, low-income, public, Catholic school, run by the Sisters of Charity. School A targets disadvantaged students in the city of Colon, and is the most sought after model school in the area, because there are no tuition requirements. The Ministry of Education

(MEDUCA) and private donations from individual and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) subsidize the school. School A also provides a boarding school setting for girls from abusive and/or extreme poverty home environments. The 2011 population in School A included 547 Kinder through 9th grade students and 25 teachers. Fourteen of the 25 teachers at School A participated in the 2011 ProEd PLC. All interviews in School A were held either in the computer lab or a vacant classroom.

School B

School B is a co-ed, low-middle socioeconomic, private, Catholic primary, middle and secondary school located in the center of Panama City and run by the Salesian priests of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. School B serves 780 Kinder through 12th grade students in college preparatory and vocational educational training programs. There are 60 teachers employed at School B and 14 of these teachers were ProEd 2011 PLC participants. All interviews were held in a conference room located at the entrance of the school.

School C

In an area of Panama City, called Golf Breezes, School C, a private, for profit, PreKinder through 12th grade school, will celebrate its first graduating class in December of 2011. School C educates, 1,300 students and employs 99 teachers, of which 16 were participants in the ProEd 2011 PLC. Interviews were held in the library of School C.

School D

A public, Catholic community school run by the order of the Sisters of Charity, School D offers a Pre-Kinder through 12th grade program and serves 400 socially at-risk and low-income students. The enrollment of School D draws its population from the

girls' orphanage located on the school grounds and from the low-income community in the surrounding rural area. School D, located southeast of Panama City, employs 29 teachers. Twenty-eight of the School D faculty members participated in the ProEd 2011 PLC. The 29th teacher is also the school director, who did not participate with the other teachers from School D in the 2011 PLC. The interviews of School D teachers were conducted in the office of the high school director.

School E

A public high school in the heart of the urban area of Panama City called, St. Michael, School E is centrally located in a high-crime area known as a *Red Zone* of Panama. The student population of School E is 1,552 with 90 teachers on staff. The school has two shifts to service the large student population. The morning shift runs from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and the afternoon shift runs from 12:30 mid-day to 5:00 p.m. The afternoon schedule is shorter than the morning program to accommodate a safe dismissal from school while it is still daylight. Despite its location in the high crime area of Saint Michael, MEDUCA has named School E as a model school because of students' academic and social accomplishments. Interviews for School E teachers took place in the chapel of the school.

The Interview Process: *Three Steps*

The "Three-Step Interview Process" (Appendix A) was conducted to collect data for this case study. During a three-week period of time from the end of June to the middle of July 2011 the researcher visited 25 randomly selected teachers in the "natural setting" of their schools to conduct interviews (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Each of the three interviews lasted from between 30 to 45 minutes to respect the teachers' 45-minute

teaching schedule during the school day. A “90-minute” format was recommended for these in-depth ethnographic interviews. This option, however, was not realistic given the structured timeframe of a teacher’s workday in Panama schools (Dolbeare & Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 20). It should be mentioned at this time, that teachers in Panama schools are required and expected to cover each other’s classes when a colleague is absent or called away from their classroom. Substitute teachers are not contracted and school administrators usually do not take responsibility to cover for absent teachers. It was, therefore, necessary to conduct these interviews in compliance with the teacher’s free time to avoid additional stress to the teachers.

The first interview focused on the life history of the interviewees for the purpose of reconstructing and connecting past to present experiences (Seidman, 2006). Interview two asked interviewees to concentrate on the details of their current experiences as a teacher and the third interview asked the participants to make meaning of those experiences with projections toward their future (Seidman, 2006). This interview method was selected because it required the participants to make meaning of their experiences through narratives and “...conversational analysis, which have at their core the qualitative study of reality-constituting practices” (Gubrium & Holstein, as cited in Mertens, 2006, p. 240). The interviews intended to explore teachers’ perceptions of their roles as teachers in Panama schools and as participants in ProEd’s 2011 PLC. “The very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process” (Vygotsky, as cited in Seidman, 2006, p. 19).

This study sought to obtain perceptions of teachers for two purposes: the first was to explore what meaning teachers made from their roles as educators and ProEd

PLC participants; and the second to discover how to what extent these roles influenced a culture for organizational learning in their schools. During each of the three interviews, the researcher and the Director of ProEd recorded written notes for each of the “open-ended” interview questions (Appendix B) for the purpose of collecting additional details and observations during the interview process (Creswell, 2009, p. 181; Seidman, 2006, p. 15). Audio-recordings of each interview were also made and used in the translation and transcription processes.

Analysis and Reduction of Data

Data analysis for the qualitative research of this case study was an “emergent design” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). The researcher consciously worked to maintain an open mind when translating the audiotapes from Spanish to English and then transcribed the English translations using the audio recordings, personal jottings and the margin notes recorded by both the researcher and the ProEd Director (Creswell, 2007, pp. 239-240). The researcher used the transcriptions to identify and categorize emerging themes (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009). This “open and axial coding” process was continued until the point of “saturation” when no new information surfaced (Creswell, 2007, p. 160; Krueger & Casey, 2009). Pattern tables were also constructed to aggregate and compare categories that helped to identify natural generalizations and draw meaning from instances, which surfaced from the data (Creswell, 2007).

Interview transcriptions were printed on three different colored papers (Interview I was pink, Interview II was yellow and Interview III was white) for easy access to responses of a given interview question during the Three-Step Interview Series (Dolbear & Schuman, as cited in Seidman, 2006). Colored transcription papers facilitated retrieval

of data and allowed for additional highlighting, Post-It note comments and margin jottings on the interview recording templates (Appendix N) were made. This recording process assisted with aggregation of categories (Creswell, 2007). The researcher then, read and reread the translated transcriptions and the written notes and replayed the audio recordings to verify the written transcriptions that would eventually allow emerging themes to surface.

The researcher, worked “back and forth between themes and the database until... a comprehensive set of themes” became apparent (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). Once thematic categories were identified, the researcher made interpretations of what was seen, heard, and understood (Creswell, 2007). These interpretations were used as a coding process for “...sorting and integration” of data collected during interviews (Weiss, 1994, p. 154). Once categories and themes were identified, the researcher highlighted significant statements from each of the 25 teachers by creating tables to identify relationships and patterns between the categories (Creswell, 2007). The pattern tables were useful in identifying specific instances and statements from each participant during all three-interview sessions.

Using “categorical aggregation” the researcher identified a collection of instances from the data to discover “issue-relevant meanings” (Creswell, 2007, p. 163). Additionally, the researcher incorporated “naturalistic generalizations” and “single instance interpretations” to support learning from emerging themes in this study that may apply to other populations (Creswell, 2007). At the end of the data analysis and reduction process, four main themes surfaced. Four of these themes: knowledge/information sharing, teacher empowerment, collaboration and the knowing-doing gap relate to the

conceptual underpinnings of this study. The fifth theme was unexpected and related to political structures and positional hierarchy, which often impede transformation and change in learning organizations.

Research Findings: Emerging Themes

Translation and transcriptions of 75 face-to-face interviews, analysis of field and anecdotal notes from walk through observations and an extensive review of related literature supported data analysis and identification of the following themes in this study: knowledge and information sharing, collaboration, teacher empowerment and the knowing-doing gap. These four themes relate to the conceptual underpinnings of this case study and address the research questions guiding this investigation. A fifth theme also emerged during data analysis. This surprise element identified barriers to change from existing top-down management systems in Panama schools. Emerging themes are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

Emerging Themes: Claims and Evidence

CLAIMS	EVIDENCE
Knowledge / Information Sharing	<i>“A few days back [from ProEd PLC], they [ProEd Teachers] say look what we learned! It injects energy and tools into the classroom.”</i> (Olivia, School C)
Collaboration	<i>“Well, my colleagues who do not go to ProEd ask us what we learned. I don’t have to tell them. They ask! We teach them the techniques that you teach us. We ask each other. How did it go? What are you doing? We come to our own conclusions.”</i> (Federico, School B)
Empowerment	<i>“I graduated 13 years ago and I was stuck. Now things have changed. When they said I would be trained I knew things would be better.”</i> (Beatriz, School A)

The Knowing-Doing Gap	<p><i>“It would be a lie to say we are implementing everything. We can’t. We don’t have the opportunity to see all the teachers. We do share information to be all the same.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Karla, School C)</p>
Top-Down Barriers to Change	<p><i>“We can make change. First we have to work hard with the director and the hierarchy. We study the possibilities and they say go. They like people with initiative.”</i></p> <p>(Carmen, School A)</p>

Knowledge Sharing

“I am not the person who thinks ‘what I know, I know and I’m not going to share with my colleagues because I studied and this information / knowledge is mine. If I see someone against the wall, I help.”

(Rita, School D)

In a developing nation, like Panama, education is a luxury item. Continuing education is a privilege for most, often making a difference between a life of comfort and a life of poverty. For this reason, knowledge is often seen as a powerful commodity for the haves and the have-nots. The mindset is to keep what you know a secret so as not to empower, and therefore, give advantage to the *competitors* who may in fact be on your team. ProEd’s 2011 PLC was created for the purpose of providing teachers with an affordable, continuous and consistent vehicle for learning, grounded upon shared knowledge and collegial interchange. Guadalupe, from School B, explains, “When we return [from a ProEd PLC] we always go over the expectation. Non-ProEd teachers know that we are learning and they ask us what we’ve learned. I do see things happening.” The ProEd PLC environment offers a nontraditional classroom that invites teachers to sit at tables and share casual collegial conversations around a selected theme. ProEd facilitators design activities that incorporate dynamic, active participation and consensus building within cooperative group work.

Within professional development schools, teacher leaders work collaboratively to assume the roles of mentors and designers of training programs to support new teachers

(Cooner & Tachterman, 2004). The PLC offered by ProEd attempts to create teacher leaders who share knowledge with new and veteran colleagues within the PLC and at the school level. Effective learning communities provide supportive environments that promote conversations centered on practice, pedagogy and student learning (Horn & Warren Little, 2010). When Isabel from School B was asked about what she observes at her school when teachers return from monthly ProEd PLCs, she commented, “ Between us, we talk and share and the other teachers are looking on and observing in the teachers’ room. We all have the chance to be workshop facilitators at our school.”

ProEd PLC veteran facilitators use the implementation design when developing monthly workshops (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The implementation design includes the presentation of a concise amount of pedagogical theory, demonstrations of new instructional tools, and practice, feedback and coaching opportunities for the participants within the workshop setting. Coaching sessions are given at the school site to provide support as teachers begin to experiment with new strategies and instructional practices. ProEd participants observed tacit knowledge when veteran PLC facilitators demonstrate current instructional strategies (Nonaka, 2007; 1994; 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). After each demonstration, a reflection period was conducted to breakdown the process into explicit knowledge pieces to help teachers understand how to implement the new practice and, moreover, to share it with other teachers at their school (Nonaka, 2007; 1994; 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). This double-loop learning supported transfer of learning from the workshop setting in the ProEd PLC to classrooms at individual school settings.

At School C, Maria commented, “Before ProEd all of us had our own style. Now there are about 20 of us who share the same language. Even the students say, ‘you had the same seminar as my other teachers’. I have shared what I have learned.” ProEd PLC facilitators endeavor to mentor teachers for the purpose of creating collegial opportunities that could be repeated and shared when teachers return to their schools. The purpose of the ProEd PLC is to construct a pedagogical knowledge base for teachers by providing clear step-by-step processes for enhancing classroom practice. Relying on collegial support from facilitators, ProEd PLC teachers observe tacit practices and reflect upon explicit processes, which strengthen professional competencies that can later be shared with colleagues who do not attend the PLC (Nonaka, 2007; 1994; 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). When the PLC participants shared stories about their PLC workshop experiences, they influenced others to think about new ways to do things in their classrooms. Peer collaboration supports change, which may persuade a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

Collaboration

“Every year we get new teachers. I give my support and teach them how to do things. How we work with these students. Other teachers come with different skills and mindsets. I teach them the ways of School D.”

(Querida)

Collaboration empowers teachers to enhance professional practice (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2004; Hord, 2009; and Kohm & Nance, 2009), which increases student learning and school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; and Sergiovanni, 2004). Within professional development schools, teacher leaders work collaboratively to assume the roles of mentors and designers of training programs to support new teachers (Cooner & Tachterman, 2004). Collaboration comes from stories shared between veteran and new

teachers. Within School C new teachers seek the advice and support from teachers who know how the system works. Nicolas, a first year teacher from School C shared his opinion about how schools work,

“Teachers’ commitment and involvement contributes to the effectiveness of our school. It is important to work as a team, even though we have differences, which tend to happen. At the end we need to know that we have to share a goal.”

Cooner and Tachterman explain, “... Educators recognize their experiences in terms of stories. They live stories, tell stories of those lives, retell stories with changed potential and experience again the changed stories” (p. 185). Veronica from School E, shares her story:

“We try to share and converse voluntarily. They [non-ProEd Teachers] ask and we share and tell them why. They [non-ProEd Teachers] take notes and listen. And they ask questions. Graphic organizers for example, we share and make copies for others who are not in ProEd. I shared with the history teacher. The goal is to have all students passing.”

Teachers become the characters in the tales they share and disclose stories of practice, which create relationships between the teller and the listener (Cooner & Tachterman, 2004). Knowledge is shared through the stories told. “We exchange experiences... I tried this... I practiced this. What about you? How did the students do?” comments, Wanda from School E. Collaboration between teachers includes stories that may create a culture for learning; however, as Gideon (2002) concludes, “Collaboration does not happen automatically just because it’s a good thing” (p. 30). Structuring time during the school

day and empowering teachers to collaborate and share knowledge is essential for the construction and sustainability of a culture for learning in schools.

Empowerment

“We can be effective if all of us take the changes. Even though they [teachers] don’t accept that changes are coming... and to be a teacher we can’t have archaic teaching.”

(Ana, School A)

Teachers who are involved in the planning and development of new program initiatives will be more likely to support those initiatives (Kohm & Nance, 2009). “I like this way of doing things so we can see our weaknesses and where we can advance. We must keep learning to help students. We learn from one another. I like this. This is something new in my life.” explains Elvira from School A. When teachers have the opportunity to return to their schools and share what they know, they become more committed to their work and, therefore, to the learning of their colleagues and students. Isabel from School B explains, “It’s up to the teachers to do their part and try new things. We have to transmit learning to our students. If we all shared and did new things in the classroom, we would be better!” The ProEd PLC initiative was created to help teachers become leaders who could influence school cultures that would transform their schools into learning organizations. “We have to break the way we [teachers] think. We have to combat and confront the teachers to help them change.” commented Ursula from School E. This comment demonstrates teacher empowerment because Ursula speaks to the responsibility of teachers who hold themselves accountable for leading change in schools. Equally, Veronica from School E concludes, “Next year, I would like to see a transformed school.” This addresses empowerment for creating change.

The ProEd PLC endeavors to equip teachers with a common vocabulary that is exclusive to a quality teaching pedagogy. When teachers communicate with each other using precise and concrete vocabulary and concepts, they feel empowered by their knowledge. “I would like all of us to talk the same language. The things we learned can be used at all levels – not just primary. These things [new strategies] can work if you try them. They have to be implemented.” suggests, Maria from School C. Empowered teachers take risks and experiment with new ideas and practices. Risk taking and experimentation are the initial steps in the process for change. When new practices are implemented, the gap between knowing and doing begins to close.

Knowing-Doing Gap

“Training helps us improve our understanding. I also think we are committed to learning, but if I don’t put it into practice, it is not learned.”

(Isabel, School B)

Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) claim, “... the gap between knowing and doing is more important than the gap between ignorance and knowing” (p. 87). When teachers collaborate with peers and share what they know about their professional practice, they become empowered to create changes that may close the gap between knowing and doing. Analysis of data from 25 teachers interviewed in this study surfaced the idea that while teachers gain a general working knowledge about effective instructional practices from their training in the monthly ProEd PLC workshops, implementation of these new practices remains limited for a variety of reasons. Humberto from School B explains, “Some things are easier to put into practice, especially because they are necessary. Mind maps and equal response Popsicle sticks help students show what they have learned.”

When teachers get an immediate response to an intervention, they are more likely to repeat the intervention. Veronica from School E confesses,

“I feel everyday I learn a bit more. I feel sometimes that when we come to school to put things into practice, the time doesn’t let us do a good job of putting things into practice. We only have 38-minute classes. I want to use new things I’ve learned, but I need help.”

Knowing is not enough (Hord & Sommers, 2008). The teachers in this study seem to understand that just because they attend workshops and learn new things, it is difficult to apply this new learning because they are constricted to the traditional systems and structures of teaching in Panama schools. The ProEd PLC teachers expressed concern that time restraints within the working day impedes application of new practices because they just do not have time to prepare new lessons. Bridging the knowing-doing gap requires individuals to rethink the process for learning and what it means to truly understand within a community of practice (Hanks, as cited in, Lave & Wenger, 1991). Creating communities of practice within Panama’s schools will require time and a restructuring of schedules to promote collegial interchange and collaboration among teachers.

If professional development time and peer coaching structures were daily expectations of school cultures in Panama’s schools, teachers would be more likely to support each other as they begin to take risks and experiment with new methods and instructional strategies. “Literature on professional learning communities documents the social, technical and organization conditions that enable them to grow and flourish in schools” (Talbert, as cited Horn & Little, 2010, p. 182). When teachers begin to

collaborate, take risks, experiment with new practices, and receive support from colleagues and school administrators, their individual competencies will flourish. This growth will cause a shift in classroom practice that will increase individual competencies, which may influence a culture for learning.

Digging Deeper: What is your role as a ProEd Teacher?

During the third and final interview of the three-step interview series, the teachers were asked about their roles as teachers. Most continued to focus on the formation and education of students. When the researcher and the Executive Director of ProEd reflected upon these comments, they decided to redirect the question with the remaining eight teachers by asking how they perceived their roles as ProEd teachers. This delving yielded interesting findings from teachers' responses. When asked to comment on their role as a ProEd teacher it seemed that perceptions shifted from classroom teacher to school change agent. This was illustrated by Leticia, from School C, who, when asked about her role as a ProEd teacher, commented, "Continue to apply what I learned as a student in ProEd to become a multiplier with my colleagues and parents to teach them new techniques." It seemed that teachers began to reflect on their role as ProEd teachers as empowered educators who were responsible not only for developing the competencies of students, but also as leaders who were responsible for upgrading teacher practices; and transforming their schools through their own knowledge and information sharing with colleagues. Nicolas, a first year teacher in School C spoke about his role as a ProEd teacher, "You have spoken a lot about relationships that we have to have among ourselves to support each other. My role is to

share with and learn from my colleagues. To create a community with them to offer a better teaching methodology.” Additional comparisons are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6

Perceptions: Teacher Role Compared to ProEd Teacher Role

Teacher	School	Role as a Teacher	Role as a ProEd Teacher
Ana	A	<i>Educate, form and transform the child in a positive way so that he can adapt to real life and solve problems.</i>	<i>To use the techniques that I have learned to capture the attention of my students the best I can, so that they can learn.</i>
Beatriz	A	<i>Form students and orient them towards morals and values in life to add to society.</i>	<i>I have learned a lot from the program. I have changed techniques of instruction and I have almost no failures this semester.</i>
Dorita	A	<i>My role is to support the students.</i>	<i>Innovate! Grow! I like the dynamics! I have applied new things and combined them with my own tools.</i>
Karla	C	<i>Form integrated students with principles. They are little but they need attitudes for success.</i>	<i>Apply skills to make education not boring and monotonous. I learned with ProEd that students need to share ideas.</i>
Leticia	C	<i>More than just give knowledge of curriculum, ensure that kids grow with values.</i>	<i>Continue to apply what I learned in ProEd to become a multiplier with my colleagues and parents to teach them new techniques.</i>
Maria	C	<i>I am a professor of Biology for 10th-12th grade students. I'm also a counselor.</i>	<i>Well my role is to put this mission into practice.</i>
Nicolas	C	<i>Form and teach all students, not only subjects and how to speak, but values and principles.</i>	<i>My role is to share with and learn from my colleagues. To create a community with them to offer a better teaching methodology.</i>
Ursula	E	<i>Bring to the students more than academic teaching but values so that they can be better men and women in the future.</i>	<i>Being a ProEd teacher is a commitment to put into practice what I've learned. I have a vision of what education should look like.</i>

Gatekeepers at the Top: Hierarchy in the Process of Change

“Every three years our Director changes. With some, change is easy. With others its not so easy.”

(Humberto, School B)

“Collegial theorists argue that active support for change is more likely to be forthcoming where teachers have been able to contribute to the process of policy formulation” (Bush, 2003, p. 85). During the second interview, teachers were asked to evaluate how challenging it was to make changes in their school. Using the scale: *not-at-all / somewhat / very*, an interesting and unexpected theme surfaced when teachers were asked to *explain* their responses. “Changes are very difficult because we have a rotating director. The hierarchy is something that we really have to work. They come in with expectations that we have to deal with.” explains, Federico from School B.

Collegial leaders understand the importance of collaboration and are mindful of setting high expectations for collegiality to be an integral practice within their school culture. In a developing nation, like the Republic of Panama, titles and positions remain an important status symbol. School directors are often appointed by seniority rather than competency and, therefore, their word usually becomes the closing argument in the decision-making process. This makes school directors gatekeepers to transformation and organizational learning. Olivia from School C shares a hopeful story about progression at the top in the process for change at her school:

“It’s a little difficult. Before our director didn’t accept anything. Now I see her different. It’s part of the process. She sees the importance of the process to include teachers. She used to make all of the decisions. Now she has sub-directors

who help with decision-making. She is more flexible and that's beneficial to us.

We can give ideas.”

This testimony suggests that attention to shared leadership and bottom-up participation in School C may be on the horizon. It should also be known that the researcher has been working with the Director of School C and some of her staff for the past five years.

School B has a unique leadership situation, which challenges the change process, as explained by Juanita:

“It is very difficult to change. Our present principal would like to see changes, but they rotate him every four years. So the new director comes and has his way of thinking and doing and acting and everything we have done before will be gone.

We go back. We're always starting all over.”

A study conducted by Deal and Nutt reveals that “... When administrators committed to new teaching approaches without faculty input...teachers greeted the news with resistance, criticism and anger” (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 234). The results of this case study show contradictory effects. It was school directors who were meeting new instructional practices and classroom innovations with hesitation and resistance.

Teachers and administrators are invited to learn within the ProEd PLC. Of the five target schools in this study, only one school [School D] had a sub-director attend each of the monthly PLC workshops regularly. When teachers returned to their schools to begin experimenting with new strategies, it was the director who often questioned the changes in classroom practice. The lack of communication and shared core values that support collegiality between teachers and their school administrators contributes to the challenges of creating learning organizations. Kruse, Louis and Bryk explain,

Growth of the school-based professional community is marked by conversations that hold practice, pedagogy, and student learning under scrutiny. . . Rich and recurring discourse promotes high standards of practice, which generates and reinforces core beliefs, norms, and values of the community (as cited in Horn & Little, 2010, p. 182).

Concluding thoughts from School D on the barriers to change from top-down leadership “... our Director has to like the changes. Then we can do it. She will listen to the opinions of others. But she has to like the change.” claims Querida.

From the Director’s Desk: *A Short Story about Learning in Panama’s Schools*

Prior to the first interview at School D, the researcher and ProEd’s Executive Director, met with the school’s director to introduce the purpose of the interview process. During our brief conversation, some interesting comments were shared, which may be relevant to a rebuttal of the section: *Gatekeepers at the Top*. The purpose of presenting this information is to provide a perspective from the top of the hierarchy to balance the data collected from bottom-up players interviewed in the data collection process and from focus group participants. This data may explain why a knowing-doing gap exists in Panama schools, which may add value to the trustworthiness of this study.

“The Ministry of Education gives all public school directors a one day workshop on teacher competencies each year. This workshop includes a very long PowerPoint presentation, which we [the school directors] are expected to use to teach our teachers. If we only receive one workshop, how prepared are we to teach this new learning? How do we measure how much the teacher gets or knows

or has learned to be able to apply it [competencies] to classroom practice? Many of our teachers come with titles attached to their names. You would expect to see some specific skills, but there is no application to classroom practice. Teachers take the MEDUCA training each year to complete their points for salary increases. To me, learning is more than the half-point that teachers get to fulfill a training commitment. To me, learning is applying what you know to help students learn.”

In reflecting upon this short conversation with the Director from School D, it became apparent that systemic learning structures, which support collegial development, were not adequately implemented in Panama schools. Remembering that most training opportunities for public school teachers in Panama take place in auditoriums and include one-way communication from the facilitator to the audience, it can be assumed that knowledge sharing and collaboration, which fosters transfer and implementation of new learning, would be limited. If implementation is limited, the knowing-doing gap will continue to exist in Panama’s schools.

Effective learning communities provide supportive environments that promote conversations centered on practice, pedagogy and student learning (Horn & Warren Little, 2010). ProEd’s PLC endeavors to create collegial communities of practice by redesigning the learning environment to invite participant interaction through the sharing of knowledge and information about personal teaching experiences. Conditions that support school-based communities of practice include norms centered on the following: collaboration; student performance; and mutual accountability between all players in the organization (Talbert, as cited in Little & Horn, 2010, p. 182). ProEd’s PLC attempts to

construct the foundations for these conditions to be practiced so that they may be repeated when teachers return to their schools.

Adding Value: Triangulation Methods and Findings

Examining evidence using multiple methods and data sources was used to support interpretation and conclusion in this qualitative study (Mertens, 2005). Multiple triangulation methods were used to add to the generalizability and validity (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation methods for this study included: focus groups, the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES), monthly accountability sheets, teacher artifacts and testimonies, and walkthrough observations. These multiple triangulation methods (Mertens, 2005) were intended to address the following research questions guiding this study: (a) How and to what extent does participation in ProEd's monthly PLC empower teachers to collaborate and share knowledge with other teachers at their schools? (b) How and to what extent does knowledge sharing and collaboration influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama? and (c) How and to what extent does organizational learning influence the knowing-doing gap in schools in the Republic of Panama?

Focus Groups

To increase validity of the data collection, focus groups were conducted in September 2011. Focus groups draw upon "disciplined inquiry that is systematic and verifiable" in scientific research (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 199). The focus groups were conducted for approximately 45-minutes to one hour, after school, with eight to ten non-ProEd teachers and/or school administrators in four of the five ProEd 2011 PLC schools. Only four of the five target schools were selected for focus groups because the fifth school, School D, had no non-ProEd PLC participants. All 28 teachers in School D

participated in the ProEd 2011 PLC. The researcher and the Executive Director of ProEd recorded written data using open-ended questions on a recording protocol sheet (Appendix D) during each focus group. Audio and video recordings were translated from Spanish to English, by the researcher. The researcher then transcribed the English translations for the purpose of identifying themes that would add value and address the research questions guiding this case study. Focus groups were conducted in the participants' natural settings of their own school environment. Refreshments were provided by ProEd and the focus group participants received an apple key chain as a token of thanks for their time and participation.

The purpose of conducting focus groups for this study was to provide insight (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Mertens, 2005) on how non-ProEd PLC participants perceived how and to what extent a culture for learning was influenced at their school, as a result of teacher participation in the 2011 ProEd PLC. Focus group participants were asked to share their perceptions about school effectiveness; how the process for change works in their school; and about what, if any, observable practices of collaboration and knowledge sharing have taken place at their school during the 2011 school year.

School Effectiveness

Prior to delving into personal practices, it was important to get a general understanding of how focus group participants perceived school effectiveness. To do this, participants were asked to describe an effective school. At School A, the participants expressed the idea that values and integrated education that serves the whole student was important for effectiveness. Continuous learning was the response

given from participants at School B, explaining that when everyone is progressing in the same direction that was a sign of effectiveness. The participants at School C explained that a school is effective when students and teachers can put their knowledge into practice. This, they explained, included discipline in school and in the community. Perceptions from focus group participants at School E included the fact that when students were successful then schools were effective. They also shared that they [School E focus group participants] believed that when the school director was participative and updated in professional practice, when parents were involved, and when teachers worked together, a school would be considered effective. These explanations provided useful information for creating a clear understanding about how school effectiveness was perceived by focus group participants in the target schools of this study.

Next, the focus group participants were asked if they thought their school was effective. Unanimously, all schools responded favorably. Rationale to substantiate their schools' effectiveness included:

School A: "We are a public school that runs like a private school. We have a totally different system for teaching here."

School B: "Yes, we are effective, because 20-years later, our students still come back to say thank you."

School C: "We are effective because we have good parent communication and our students go on to universities after they graduate."

School E: "We have students who are prepared to go on in their careers and we work as a team."

When asked to explain school effectiveness, the participants' espoused ideas that may, in fact, influence a culture for organizational learning. These espoused responses included: a shared vision, maintaining updated professional practices and the application of knowledge. These descriptions, however, were not included in the rationale that participants used to explain why they considered their school to be effective. These incongruent responses may provide evidence to address the research question: How and to what extent does organizational learning influence the knowing-doing gap in schools in Panama? It was perceptible to the researcher that these responses reflected an existing knowing-doing gap in the target schools. The focus group participants did not identify their own schools for implementing practices that may create conditions for influencing a culture for learning as an effective school.

Creating Change

It was also important to understand how focus group participants perceived the process for change in their schools, and if in fact, the participants had observed any changes during the school year. The participants were asked to talk about any changes they had observed during the school year, including anything that their colleagues may have shared with them upon returning to school after participating in monthly ProEd PLC workshops. The purpose of this inquiry was to address perceptions about how and to what extent teachers' monthly participation in the ProEd Foundation's 2011 PLC may have influenced a culture for learning in schools in the Republic of Panama. Additionally, perceptions from focus group participants may also have spoken to a secondary research question guiding this study: How and to what extent does

participation in ProEd's monthly PLC empower teachers to collaborate and share knowledge with other teachers at their schools?

Schools A, B & E reported that teachers were talking about new ways of doing things in the classroom as a result of monthly ProEd PLC workshops. The participants in these schools explained that when their colleagues returned from the ProEd PLC workshops, they taught others how to use the new strategies and methods. Teachers explained that they met by department or by grade levels to share information and to teach each other. These perceptions suggested that collaboration and knowledge sharing did occur as a result of participation in the monthly ProEd PLC workshops.

Some of the new things the teachers learned were how to get students to pay attention using the power listening strategy and how to call on students with equal opportunity response (Popsicle) sticks. One of the participants from School B, commented that after being invited to the *Bring a Friend to ProEd* workshop, which addressed working with learning disability (LD) students, in May of 2011, it became apparent that the need for change was necessary because even the students were asking for new ways of learning. This response provided information that addressed the idea that teachers' monthly participation in the ProEd's 2011 PLC may have influenced a culture for learning in schools. Both ProEd and non-ProEd teachers were asking for new ways to teach. When teachers offer help and provide support to one another collaboration thrives. Collaboration may influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

The sub-director of School C answered the question about change by stating, "Over the past three years there have been many changes." When probed to explain

further, the sub-director said “We’ve had a lot of training over the past three years.” It should be mentioned again at this time, that the researcher has been working with the director and staff of School C for the last five years. These comments provide some evidence that knowledge sharing among colleagues may have influenced change at the four schools where the focus groups were conducted. This evidence may also suggest that participation in PLCs promotes knowledge sharing which may influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

Knowledge and Information Sharing

To address the research question: How and to what extent does knowledge sharing and collaboration influence a culture for organizational learning in schools in Panama? Focus group participants were asked the following questions: 1) When your colleagues return from their monthly training with the ProEd Foundation, do they share what they learned with you? and 2) Do you use any new strategies from ProEd, even though you haven’t participated in the 2011 program? In 3 of 4 schools where the focus groups were conducted, the participants in Schools, A, B and E established that when colleagues returned from monthly ProEd workshops there was an energy that excites the school. This energy, they [focus group participants from Schools A, B and E] explained, permeates the hallways and the teachers’ room. They admit that when time permits, usually during their free time in the teachers’ room they listen as the ProEd teachers are discussing new ideas and strategies. This evidence may suggest that teachers are becoming empowered to share what they know. Empowerment and knowledge sharing may influence a culture for learning in schools.

Teachers explained that non-ProEd teachers who are in the teachers' room would ask their colleagues to explain what they learned from their ProEd workshop. ProEd teachers made copies of graphic organizers and other PLC tools to share with non-ProEd teachers. These actions illustrate that ProEd teachers are taking the initiative to share and collaborate with their colleagues. When the non-ProEd teachers were asked if they used any of the information shared by their ProEd colleagues, they [non-ProEd teachers] were able to list the following strategies and/or tools: power listening, early birds, Popsicle equality response sticks, and having the students work in study buddies. The fact that these non-ProEd teachers could use the defined terminology and explain each tool, demonstrated that there had been knowledge sharing between ProEd and non-ProEd teachers at the target schools. Knowledge sharing may influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

In School C [where the researcher has been working with the director and staff for the past 5-years], however, the focus group participants were very quick to say that their colleagues did not share. They [School C focus group participants] did admit, however, that the classrooms of ProEd teachers included things that they had never heard of prior to this school year. That comment led the researcher to believe that there was some application of new practices in the target school classrooms. This observation may have addressed the question about how a culture for learning bridges the gap between knowing and doing. When the focus group participants of School C were asked if they used any of the ProEd practices, one teacher shared that her colleague had just taught her about power listening with the heart. This comment provided evidence to address the research questions: (a) How and to what extent does participation in

ProEd's monthly PLC empower teachers to collaborate and share knowledge with other teachers at their schools? and (b) How and to what extent does knowledge sharing and collaboration influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama? When teachers share knowledge and information, collaboration is enhanced. Collaboration empowers teachers to create change, which may influence a culture for learning.

School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES)

The School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES) developed by Paula M. Short and James S. Rinehart (Appendix E) was administered on three separate occasions, to all participants of the ProEd 2011 PLC for the purpose of measuring empowerment perception levels during the 10-month study. The decision to use this scale as a triangulation method for adding value to this study was based on the premise that empowerment levels would be influenced by participation in ProEd PLC. "When teachers feel that they can make a difference, they do..." (Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 1998, p. 17). Response options are scaled as: *totally disagree*, *disagree*, *neutral*, *agree*, and *totally agree*. For the purpose of using this scale as a method of triangulation, the researcher focused exclusively on the items in the *totally agree* category to reduce the amount of data. The results demonstrated an increase in the May and October 2011 post-tests, from the pretest given in February 2011.

It appears that overall, teacher empowerment perceptions increased during the 10-month study from February to October 2011. This evidence addressed the research question: How and to what extent does participation in ProEd's monthly PLC empower teachers to collaborate and share knowledge with other teachers at their school? An

“implementation dip” or a drop in performance may explain the slight decline between May and October (Fullan, 2001, p. 40). These results can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7

School Participation Empowerment Scale (SPES): Results in Percent of Totally Agree

ITEM	Results in Percent of Totally Agree FEBRUARY 2011	Results in Percent of Totally Agree MAY 2011	Results in Percent of Totally Agree OCTOBER 2011
I am treated as a professional	53	76	73
I believe I am very effective	40	41	46
I have the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers in my school	53	62	61
I believe that I have earned respect	49	71	59
I believe that I am helping kids become independent learners	17	45	35
I believe that I am empowering students	40	66	62
I have the respect of my colleagues	54	67	66
I am able to teach as I choose	32	59	59
I believe I have the ability to get things done.	38	40	48
I am a decision maker	44	66	59
I function in a professional environment	55	53	65
I have the opportunity for professional growth	47	60	61
I perceive I have the opportunity to influence others	22	38	38
My advice is solicited by others	26	34	32
I perceive I have the opportunity to influence others	31	50	44
I feel that I am involved in an	33	57	52

important program for children			
I believe I am having an impact	15	38	39
I participate in staff development	36	41	48
Principals, other teachers and school personnel solicit my advice	19	33	31
I am given the responsibility to monitor programs	10	26	21
I am given the responsibility to teach other teachers	15	19	27
I see students learn	31	47	44
I am given the opportunity to continue learning	63	66	70

ProEd teachers were involved in a 40-hour, 10-month PLC that provided opportunities for collaborative decision-making through shared knowledge and information. Sharing and collaboration empower teachers (Little, 1985). Teachers were more empowered when their decision-making opportunities were increased (Rinehart & Short, as cited in Edwards, Green & Lyons, 1998, p. 5). Collaborative cultures empower teachers and build their confidence to lead; therefore school reform should be done with teachers, not to them (Kohm & Nance, 2009). The results of the SPES indicate that teachers' empowerment perceptions increased over the 10-month study. Increased empowerment may support teachers to lead change and influence a culture for learning in their schools in Panama.

Monthly Accountability Sheets

ProEd PLC monthly accountability sheets (Appendix F) were initiated in March 2011. It was anticipated that if teachers recorded their observations and handed in an

account of their experimentation with new practices, it would increase the likelihood that teachers would try something new when they returned to their schools after the PLC workshop. This evidence might support the research question: How and to what extent does organizational learning influence the knowing-doing gap in schools in the Republic of Panama?

The monthly accountability sheets were distributed to all participants at the end of every workshop, with the expectation that if they wanted to try something and tell us about it, we would gladly provide feedback. This was a volunteer system. Participants were not obligated to return these sheets to ProEd facilitators. If participants did choose to record their experimentation efforts and turn in their record sheets, the sheets were returned to participants with a positive comment on a sticky note (Appendix N) to provide feedback and encouragement for their experimentation efforts. These monthly accountability sheets were used to triangulate data for this study to verify what if any new practices participants were actually experimenting with in their classrooms, and what sort of feedback they were receiving from students and/or colleagues from their use of the new instructional methods.

Most teachers reported that the students were more motivated and that there were fewer discipline issues in the classroom when the new strategies were used. Teachers also commented that their colleagues would ask them about the new strategies that they were using. This evidence illustrates, collaboration and knowledge sharing which may bridge the knowing-doing gap and influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama. Table 8 presents the number of PLC participants who recorded their trials with a specific ProEd strategy and/or tool during the period of March through June 2011.

Table 8

Monthly Accountability Sheet Trials: Tools and Strategies

Tools & Strategies	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	Total # Participants Who Recorded Experimenting with Specific ProEd Tools & Strategies
Power Teaching	12	4	2	1	19
Mirror Me	1				1
Carousel	3	1	2		6
Theory 1-1-1-4	5				5
Inside-Outside Circle	5	7	1	1	14
Early Birds	3		2		5
Evaluation Tools	1				1
Directed Reading Thinking Activities (DRTA)	1				1
Teambuilding	2	2	2		6
Equal Response Sticks	2	2	4	1	9
Classroom Climate (Physical)	3				3
Power Listening	10	4	1	1	16
Mind Maps	5	6	3		14
Ice Breakers	2		3		5
Scoreboard	3				3
Theory of 10-2	6				6
Routines	3	2	2		7
3" Voices	1				1
Traveling Teacher	1				1
Study Buddies	1				1
Reading Beach Ball		1			1
Take One / Leave One	1				1
Graphic Organizers		1	1		2
Energizers		1	1		2
Bloom's Taxonomy		3			3
Word Splash		3		1	4
6 Thinking Hats			1		1
Ticket to Go			1		1
Rubrics			1		1
Venn Diagram			1		1

PLC Defined				2	2
Alternative Evaluation				1	1
5 Whys			2		2

The most implemented strategies included Power Teaching, Power Listening, Inside-Outside Circle, and Mind Maps. It is believed that these strategies were most used because they follow a step-by-step procedure, which may facilitate ease in implementation. Additionally, these strategies add variety to instruction, which may motivate students to work in new ways that involves creative and active involvement in the learning process. These strategies were demonstrated consistently within the PLC workshops, allowing double-loop learning to occur (Nonaka, 1991; 1994; 1995; 2007; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Teachers participated in these activities during workshop sessions and then each strategy was debriefed with step-by-step procedures for how to implement in the classroom.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explain that when “double-loop learning” becomes a daily practice, reconstructing new knowledge from existing perspectives, will continue the learning and improvement process (p.46). Double loop learning challenges the “beliefs and assumptions that underlie our actions” (Argyris, as cited in Gill, 2010, p. 111). Both single and double-loop learning provide avenues for knowledge sharing, which promote learning and change within an organization. According to Nonaka (1991), the key to organizational learning is the continuous sharing of single and double loop conversations and narratives between peers.

No accountability sheets were handed in after June 2011. This may have been because there were no workshops in July and because the August and September

workshops were designed as preparation and review sessions to help participants prepare for the knowledge fair scheduled for the closing celebration at the October workshop. Accountability sheets may not have been distributed to participants after June 2011. Another consideration that may explain the lack of accountability sheets returned for comment may have resulted from what Fullan (2001) refers to as an “implementation dip” (p.40). A dip in implementation yields a drop in performance and confidence, which may be caused by fear of change or lack of knowledge or skills required (Fullan, 2001). This may have contributed to a continued knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999; 2000) and the lack of experimentation (Fullan, 2001) and record keeping after mid-year in the PLC.

Teacher-Made Artifacts, Feedback and Testimonies

Visual artifacts (Appendix G), defined as any teacher-made educational resources that were produced or reproduced as a result of participation in monthly PLC workshops were also used to determine what if any knowledge and/or information was being applied or shared when PLC participants returned to their schools. “Transference of value” can be observed with the construction of the model classroom in School E and with the facilitation of a teacher-facilitated school-wide workshop in School B using ProEd topics (M. Smith, personal communication, October 17, 2011). These artifacts demonstrate that knowledge is being used when teachers return from PLC experiences. Teacher testimonies (Appendix O) were also considered as a method of triangulation for this case study. The stories teachers told could be used to make meaning of what they know and what they are actually able to do. It became apparent that most teachers enjoyed the 2011 PLC experience. They also realized the need for continuous

professional development and how difficult it could be to implement new practices. Their stories illustrate that while they are empowered with new ideas and instructional strategies, their present operating structures do not support immediate and sustainable experimentation with new practices, which will sustain the gap between knowing and doing.

Walkthrough Observations

During each of the three-scheduled interviews, and prior to each of the focus group sessions, the researcher and ProEd's Executive Director conducted walk through observations. The purpose of these four walkthrough observations was to collect data using the Walkthrough Classroom Observation Checklist (Appendix C) and other anecdotal field notes to validate if new practices were being implemented as a result of participation in the ProEd 2011 PLC. The observations were conducted school-wide, which included both PLC participants and non-participants, to add reliability to the study. Data collection during the walkthrough observations included field notes that were guided by the following questions: (a) What are people doing? (b) What specific means and/or strategies do they use? (c) What do I see going on here? and (d) What did I learn from these notes? (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p.146).

From the walkthrough observations, it was obvious that some concrete practices and tools were being implemented. Some observations included evidence of transfer of learning: power listening posters were up on the walls; students were working in groups and desks were not placed in traditional rows; graphic organizers and mind maps were shared; early bird warm ups were on the board; equal response opportunity popsicle sticks were being used; scoreboards for tallying positive behavior choices were on the

board; teachers were using ProEd terms like: power listening, listen with your eyes, “class-class” [a power teaching prompt]; and plastic shoe cubbies [used in the ProEd model classroom] were being used as material organizers in some classrooms. This evidence reflects that teachers were implementing some concrete instructional strategies and tools that were modeled in ProEd’s PLC workshops. Implementation of specific strategies may conclude that the knowing-doing gap closes when teachers experiment with new practices.

Summary

Supporting the emergence and development of collaborative school cultures, through consistent knowledge and information sharing that increases teacher empowerment within a PLC was illustrated in Chapter Four. Uncovering a phenomenon and developing a purpose for this study was also explained. Descriptions of the PLC, target school settings and the cast of this study were also introduced in this chapter. The ProEd PLC development plan and data collection processes were also discussed. Examination of data collected from conversations held during 75 face-to-face interviews and a second review of literature were presented as themes emerged during analysis of data. The emerging themes presented the following conceptual underpinnings: knowledge and information sharing, collaboration, the knowing-doing gap, and top-down barriers to change. Each of these themes was discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Triangulation methods, which included: walkthrough observations, an empowerment scale, teacher-artifacts and testimonies were presented to add value and reliability to this investigation. Chapter five will provide a summary of this case study, including implications and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction to the Study

This case study sought to obtain perceptions of K-12 teachers for the purpose of exploring the meaning teachers made from stories told about their roles as educators. Additionally, this study attempted to discover how and to what extent this meaning influenced a culture for learning in schools in Panama. To begin filling a gap in knowledge, the research question guiding this study asked, “How and to what extent does teachers’ monthly participation in the ProEd Foundation’s 2011 PLC influence a culture for learning in schools in the Republic of Panama?”

Overview of the Case Study

This bounded ethnomethodological case study took place in the ProEd PLC model classroom in a public school in the Republic of Panama. Convenience sampling of twenty-five teachers, from a group of 125 participants in the 2011 ProEd PLC, were invited to share their perceptions through a Three-Step Interview process that was conducted in the natural school settings of five target schools, over a three-week period of time in July of 2011 (Mertens, 2005). The conversations provided data from 75 interviews, which were translated from Spanish to English and then transcribed for analysis and coding processes. Triangulation methods included multiple data sources (Mertens, 2005) to add validity to this study, including: focus groups in four of the five target schools, monthly accountability sheets, the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES), teacher artifacts/feedback and testimonies, and walkthrough observations.

The five target schools were identified alphabetically A through E and the cast of 25 teacher interviewees assumed alphabetical Hispanic names as their pseudonym to protect their identity and to ensure accuracy in data analysis and reporting. To further protect the privacy of the interviewees, audiotapes only were recorded. These audiotapes were used to support the written field notes and jottings of the Executive Director of ProEd and the researcher (ProEd Founder/CEO) during the interview process. To increase trustworthiness, questions were read from recording protocol templates (Appendix B). Once recordings were translated from Spanish to English, the English translations were transcribed. The researcher independently completed both the translations and the transcriptions in preparation for data analysis and coding.

The analysis process included open and axial coding to allow for the emergence and categorization of themes. To add “confirmability” to the translations and transcriptions, the researcher tracked the qualitative data to the source prior to analysis and interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p.257). Guba and Lincoln suggest, “Confirmability means that the data and their interpretation are not figments of the researcher’s imagination” (as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 257). The participant researcher used the audiotapes, written field-notes and sequential interviews as a “chain of evidence” to maintain objectivity (Yin, as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 257). Although the researcher attempted to remain impartial and objective during data collection and analysis, prior knowledge, personal relationships with the PLC sample participants and other opinions may have biased researcher perceptions.

Participant Researcher

The qualitative researcher was a “key instrument” in gathering and analyzing data for this case study (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). The researcher, created the ProEd Foundation in 2001, and maintains an active role as CEO and in the design, facilitation, and evaluation of the monthly ProEd 2011 PLC workshops. The researcher’s involvement in the data collection, analysis and coding for this study, and as facilitator of the ProEd 2011 PLC may have influenced bias, which is presented in the limitation section in Chapter Three of this paper.

Throughout the 10-month study, the researcher worked to maintain conscious control about impartiality during data collection and analysis processes. Building trust with PLC participants is a basic element of leading an effective PLC; therefore, personal relationships were inevitable with the members of this study and all 2011 PLC participants. The researcher attempted to maintain impartial objectivity by relying on the use of protocol templates (Appendix B) during the data collection processes. This helped to keep the process fair and bias in check during this study.

The researcher collected “multiple sources of data” including audio and written recordings using a protocol template with open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) during the Three-Step Interview process (Creswell, 2007, p. 38); focus group protocol templates (Appendix D) and audio-video recordings. Additionally, the researcher conducted all interviews and walk through classroom observations with ProEd’s Executive Director. Both used the Walkthrough Classroom Observation Checklist (Appendix C) to gather additional anecdotal field notes that would help to facilitate review of data to validate the study.

Revealing a Phenomenon and Defining a Purpose

The researcher was not born an educator. Rather, the researcher grew into a professional educator through the dedication of time to continuous learning and scholarship and through the collaboration and support of colleagues over a 30-year career. The researcher's personal experiences as a life-long learner helped to uncover a phenomenon about how professionalism in education develops and about how and to what extent this personal growth influences organizational learning. When teachers are immersed in a collegial culture where a shared vision for the care of students' well-being and learning is a priority, they [teachers] will uphold practices that foster educational advancement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Effective teaching is not an individual endeavor. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998) attention to the celebration of individual and collective accomplishments is a key factor in influencing a learning culture. Celebrations through ritual and ceremony provide significance to the meaning of community learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). From personal reflection in the section entitled: *Educator in the Making*, in Chapter Four, the researcher identified how mentorship and collaboration uncovered a phenomenon for learning and identified a purpose for this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of K-12 teachers to discover how they observed and may have influenced a culture for organizational learning at their schools. Following Creswell's (2009) guidelines for a qualitative purpose statement, the intent of this case study was to understand the phenomenon of organizational learning for the purpose of: (a) describing what happened when teachers

returned to their schools after participating in monthly ProEd PLC; (b) explaining how and to what extent ProEd PLC teachers shared information and knowledge with teachers and administrators [at their schools] who did not participate in monthly ProEd PLC; (c) exploring how knowledge sharing and teacher collaboration within a structured, supportive PLC influenced organizational learning in schools; and (d) filling the gap in knowledge about how and to what extent teacher empowerment influenced organizational learning in schools in the Republic of Panama.

Making Meaning

ProEd's monthly PLC workshops provide a variety of threads that teachers can use independently or in combination with each other. These threads were taught through the explicit demonstration of tacit knowledge shared between members of the PLC (Nonaka, 1991; 1994; 1995; 2007; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Each thread could stand alone, creating change in the appearance of practice. Together, however, the threads of learning strengthen the fabric upon which instructional practice can explicitly be observed and evaluated. The learning threads within a PLC are mixed with the colors of collaboration, which blend meaning through personal storytelling and hues of professional discourse. It is professional discourse that negotiates meaning and empowers teachers to influence a culture for learning in their schools (Wenger, 1998).

Tapestry and Transformation: When Teachers Teach Teachers

As ProEd PLC teachers began to fill their professional repertoire with concrete and precise knowledge that was anchored on a common vocabulary, discourse and collegial interchange became more available. Availability to knowledge increases the likelihood that collaboration and information sharing will increase (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger (1998) suggests that the common threads of professional communities of practice include:

... working with others who share the same conditions to: create a communal memory; generate terms to accomplish what needs to be done; provide resolutions; and make the job habitable by creating an atmosphere in which the monotonous and meaningless aspects of the job are woven into the rituals, customs, stories, events, dramas and rhythms of community life (pp. 45-46).

When teachers in the ProEd PLC shared what they knew, foundations of collaborative cultures were shaped. These foundations may increase the likelihood that conditions for learning would be created to fashion the threads needed to design the tapestry to transform classroom practice. The uniqueness of each thread adds value to the intricacies of the tapestry design. As teachers continue to strengthen their threads, the design of their tapestry or craftsmanship becomes tacit (Nonaka, 1991; 1994; 1995; 2007; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Care of craftsmanship relies on the continuity of collegial support provided from PLC and communities of practice. The ProEd PLC cares for the craftsmanship of educators by providing opportunities for knowledge sharing that encourages *teachers to teach each other about teaching*.

Teacher collaboration fosters a “culture of care” (Von Krogh, Ichijo & Nonaka, as cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 82). Von Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka, suggest, “...a culture of care is vital for successful performance... defined in five dimensions: mutual trust, active empathy, access to help, lenience in judgment, and courage” (as cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 82). ProEd’s PLC demonstrated the threads that support student learning; and provided the support that demonstrated the *power* of care. When teachers teach teachers, they

interweave the threads of social, emotional and professional learning to construct a culture of collaboration through knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is the essential element for transforming school cultures. Fullan (2001) concludes that after years of focusing on the improvement of structural procedures it is time to pay attention to the heart of all enterprise; the human element.

Threads of Transformation: The Tapestry of a Learning Culture

A culture of learning is created when the threads of collaboration and knowledge sharing are interwoven. PLC serve as the canvas for crafting the tapestry of a learning culture. A learning culture fosters communities of practice to enhance personal and professional development. Communities of practice, like PLC, empower and transform teachers (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Wenger 1998). During data analysis and coding of this study, collaboration, knowledge sharing, the knowing-doing gap and empowerment emerged as threads that transformed the tapestries at the five target schools. These threads warrant mention prior to the discussion of findings:

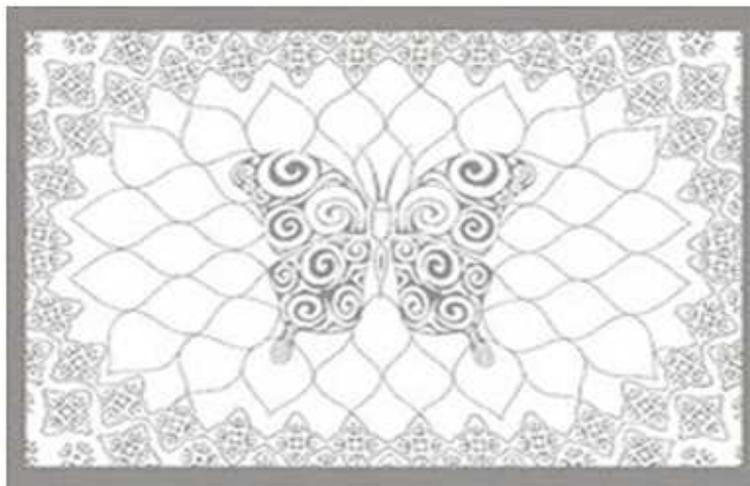


Figure 4. Tapestry and Transformation Analogy: When Teachers Teach Teachers

- ***Knowledge and Information Sharing:*** Teachers demonstrated what they learned in the ProEd PLC. “A few days back [from ProEd PLC], they [ProEd teachers] say, ‘Look what we learned!’ It injects energy and tools into the classroom.” (Olivia, School C). ProEd teachers demonstrated strategies and shared workshop handouts with non-ProEd PLC teachers when they returned to their schools.
- ***Collaboration:*** “Well, my colleagues who do not go to ProEd ask us what we learned. I don’t have to tell them. They ask! We teach them the techniques that you teach us. We ask each other, ‘How did it go?’ ‘What are you doing?’ We come to our own conclusions.” (Federico, School B). Teachers would use new strategies from the ProEd workshops and demonstrate their new tools for their colleagues who did not participate in the ProEd PLC workshops.
- ***Empowerment:*** Teachers were given a *cheat sheet* with ProEd terms and concepts. During the 10-month study, the teachers would refer to this list and identify the strategies and skills that they were using; commenting about observations they made when using them. “The teachers are putting in practice what they learned in ProEd and the students are responding naturally with comments like: ‘Teacher is this the Early Birds?’ They are using the vocabulary. They are putting more attention to their classrooms with plants and posters. We do this with positive competition – we compete for the best classroom. Teachers who do not go to ProEd ask us

about Power Listening, so we explain. They try to do some new things that we are doing. We act as facilitators in the school.” (Ursula, School E).

- ***Knowing-Doing Gap***: Teachers referred to their list of ProEd skills to remind themselves about things they’ve learned throughout the spiraled learning workshops from February through October 2011. Teachers know a lot of words. They have knowledge about these words. There exists, however, a gap between what they know and what they do in their classrooms. “It would be a lie to say we are implementing everything. We can’t. We don’t have the opportunity to see all the teachers. We share and this helps a lot.” (Karla, School C). The gap between knowing and doing remains an obvious phenomenon in classrooms in this study.

Discussion of the Findings

This case study was guided by the grand tour question that asked, “How and to what extent does participation in the ProEd PLC influence a culture for learning in schools in the Republic of Panama?” During a Three-Step Interview, of 25 teachers, 75 face-to-face conversations unfolded perceptions about roles and responsibilities of teachers in Panama schools. A second review of literature was conducted as additional and unanticipated themes emerged during the analysis and coding of data. These unanticipated themes framed the following inquiry: (a) What are teachers actually doing when they return to schools after participating in monthly ProEd PLC workshops? (b) What are non-ProEd teachers observing when ProEd teachers return from monthly PLC workshops? and (c) Do ProEd PLC teachers perceive that their participation in monthly

workshops influence a culture for learning at their schools? This section will discuss both the anticipated and unanticipated themes that emerged during data analysis.

Anticipated Themes

This study sought to obtain perceptions of K-12 teachers by exploring the meaning teachers made about their roles as educators; and to discover how and to what extent these perceptions influenced a culture for learning in schools in Panama. A thorough review of literature that addressed collaboration and knowledge sharing, empowerment, and the knowing-doing provided a lens that would guide this study. Data collected from 75 face-to-face conversations focused on teacher perceptions about their past, present and future roles as educators. Teachers were asked to talk about how they became interested in teaching, what their present daily responsibilities and observations included and to foreshadow where they envisioned themselves in a few years. Each conversation became its own thread in a tapestry that would identify teacher transformation from classroom-bound *maestro* to a school-wide facilitator of change.

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Evidence from classroom conversations with teachers suggested that when ProEd participants returned from monthly workshops, they were energized to try new strategies and to share this knowledge with others at their schools. Participants commented about sharing what they learned in the monthly workshops with both ProEd and non-ProEd colleagues. Teachers explained that they exchanged experiences, and spoke about what they tried and what they observed when they implemented new strategies. When asked what happens when teachers return from monthly PLC workshops, Isabel, from School B concludes, “Between us, we talk and share and the

other teachers are looking on and observing in the teachers' room. We all have the chance to be workshop facilitators." This comment suggests that collaboration and knowledge sharing about PLC information occurred when participants returned to their schools. This evidence may influence a culture of learning in schools in Panama.

Empowerment

When teachers have the opportunity to return to their schools and share what they know, they become more committed to their work and, therefore, to the learning of their colleagues and students. Ana from School A suggests, "We can be effective if all of us take changes... to be a teacher we can't have archaic teaching." This information suggests that empowerment occurs not only when teachers understand that there are new ways to teach, but also when they hold themselves accountable for learning about how to improve student performance. Empowerment fuels the passion and commitment of teachers, which enhances student learning (Colbert, Brown, Choi & Thomas, 2008). Data collected during the interviews suggested that teachers felt empowered to share what they knew, even though current operating structures within the school impeded them from implementing everything they had learned. Teachers reported that while they perceived their roles as teacher to include the integral formation of students, as a ProEd teacher, these perceptions also included collaboration and knowledge sharing with colleagues. This finding supported the idea that teacher empowerment may have increased from monthly participation in ProEd PLC workshops.

Knowing-Doing Gap

Bridging the knowing-doing gap requires individuals to actually do what they know. Evidence from 75 interviews, walkthrough observations and focus group with

non-ProEd participants suggested, that while teachers learned new ways to increase student performance, they have yet to implement this new learning consistently. Humberto from School B explains, “Some things are easier to put into practice, especially because they are necessary.” Teachers were quick to put up new posters and implement concrete tools like equal response Popsicle sticks, however, when it came to identifying practices that created conditions for influencing a culture for learning, the gap between knowing and doing was apparent.

Unanticipated Themes: *Threads of Organizational Renewal*

Creating time for teachers to come together on a consistent basis for the purpose of collaborative learning and professional development encourages organizational renewal (Waterman, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998). School renewal surfaces these characteristics: *reification* (Wenger, 1998); *informed optimism*; *teamwork and trust*; *reflection through a different mirror*; and *causes and commitment* (Waterman, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, pp. 274-275). Data analysis provided evidence that required a second review of literature, identifying that ProEd’s PLC workshops surfaced several school renewal characteristics. Like the conceptual underpinning of this study, these school renewal characteristics may have also influenced a culture for learning in the five target schools of this study.

Reification

Reification gives “thingness” to something by providing form or production of an object of learning to our experiences (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). This object organizes meaningful understanding (Wenger, 1998). ProEd PLC workshops are focused on

knowledge production. PLC facilitators use tacit demonstrations, which are broken down into explicit processes that can be reproduced and repeated both within the PLC environment and at the school site. Processes, names, descriptions and designs provided PLC participants with the tools needed to alter classroom practice (Wenger, 1998). Additionally, perceptions and interpretations of these products became topics for professional discourse, which anchored the learning to create a common knowledge base and language for PLC participants. PLC teachers returned to their schools with a product to share with their colleagues (Wenger, 1998).

Informed Optimism

When teachers believe they have the ability to improve teaching and learning, professional development has an impact (Waterman, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998). It was evident through the data collected from the 75 conversations with teachers, the walkthrough observations and the collection of teachers' artifacts and testimonies, that ProEd's PLC teachers believed they had something to offer that would influence the learning of students and their colleagues. During the second interview, teachers were asked, "What happens when teachers in your school return from their monthly participation in ProEd's PLC?" Their responses indicated optimism, a characteristic of school renewal, which may influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

Leticia, from School C, shared, "Teachers were very animated." Elvira from School A commented,

"I am very, very proud of my colleagues. They are very motivated and using the things that they have learned in ProEd. One colleague, who has been here [in this

school] longer than me is making changes about the way he teaches. He is willing to listen to all of us who go to ProEd.”

Informed optimism results from teachers sharing what they know. When teachers share, collaboration is strengthened and trusting relationships are formed. Trust between colleagues may influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

Teamwork and Trust

Collaboration breaks the barriers of isolation (Waterman, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998). ProEd’s PLC workshops routinely incorporate teambuilding activities as part of each workshop warm-up. Teambuilding efforts help participants to get to know each other on a more personal basis. If participants know each other there is a likelihood that they will share and collaborate more openly with each other during the workshop. When collaboration is consistent, trust is strengthened. Teachers were asked what factors contribute to the effectiveness of their school during the final interview of the data collection process. Ursula, from School E, announced, “Companionship and cooperation between teachers.” For cooperation to work, a degree of trust must be achieved. “Teachers have made this school. I am proud to work here.” concludes Wanda from School E. School renewal is strengthened when teams of people work toward a shared vision and multiple perspectives from all players within a school community are respected and valued.

A Different Mirror

Effective staff development programs welcome multiple perspectives and opinions from parents, teachers and students (Waterman, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998). During the third interview teachers were asked, “What factors contribute to the development of your school?” At School E, Veronica suggested, “Teamwork. We all give. The whole community: we get parental help; and students and teachers are always working together.” The involvement of community renews an organization because there is reflection and consideration of multiple perspectives and opinions that are shared and valued (Waterman, as cited in Du Four & Eaker, 1998). Respect and value of diverse opinions within a school community strengthens individual commitment to a shared vision. Commitment to a common cause may influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

Causes and Commitment

When teachers can make the connection that builds a relationship between programs and practice they can pursue commitments that will improve schools (Waterman, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Providing theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching opportunities during PLC workshops, participants are helped to bridge the gap between knowing and doing (Joyce & Showers, 2002). During the third interview, teachers were asked to reflect upon their roles as educators. Most replied with comments about the formation and integrated education of students. When the researcher and ProEd’s Executive Director probed further asking, “What is your role as a ProEd Teacher?” Ursula from School E commented, “A ProEd teacher means

commitment. To put into practice what I have learned each month. All the skills and tools have helped me to develop a clear vision for what education should be.”

This evidence reveals that commitment increases when individuals perceive that they have something to share with others (Wenger, 1998). Commitment may influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

Recommendations

This study sought to obtain perceptions of K-12 teachers by exploring the meaning teachers made about their roles as educators; and to discover how and to what extent these perceptions influenced a culture for learning in schools in Panama. Data collected from 75 face-to-face conversations focused on teacher perceptions about their past, present and future roles as educators. Each conversation became its own thread that contributed to the tapestry of teacher transformation. A lack of information remains, however, about how and to what extent the threads of transformation influence a culture for learning when *teachers become decision makers to lead change* in schools in the Republic of Panama. From analysis of data, the following recommendations are critical for PLCs to become fully functioning in schools in the Republic of Panama:

1. There are school administrators who are held accountable for becoming the lead instructional learner and coach in their school community; and who participate in on-going professional development programs throughout the school year.

2. There are a team of lead teachers, appointed by the school leader, who are responsible for shared and distributed decision-making and trained, nurtured and given time to practice new skills and reflect upon the outcomes as they work together to enhance student performance.
3. There are school leaders who receive training on how to create and sustain their schools as PLC. PLC include a consistent and continuous in-house professional development program that provides teachers with frequent opportunities to collaborate with colleagues for the purpose of enhanced student learning.
4. There are lead teachers within a school community who participate in external monthly PLC workshops that provide opportunities to collaborate and share knowledge with colleagues from other schools in Panama to renew professional practices that enhance student performance and increase learning.

Implications for Future Study

“Collegial theorists argue that active support for change is more likely to be forthcoming where teachers have been able to contribute to the process of policy formulation” (Bush, 2003, p. 85). Presently, ProEd teachers return to their schools after participating in monthly PLC workshops to experiment with the implementation of new instructional strategies and tools; some of which they share with colleagues. This observation leads the researcher to wonder, “What would happen if ProEd teachers could become lead teachers who were responsible for designing, facilitating and evaluating a monthly in-house professional development program throughout the year at their school

sites?” It would be interesting to explore the idea of teachers as decision-makers who were responsible for providing monthly opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing for the purpose of increasing student learning.

Research identifies positive results for school efficacy when organizational learning is consistent and continuous (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). It would be exciting to find out how and to what extent an in-house PLC, run by teachers for teachers, would influence a culture of learning in schools in Panama. Empowerment fuels the passion and commitment of teachers, which enhances student learning (Colbert, Brown, Choi & Thomas, 2008). There is a lack of evidence to support what happens when teachers become empowered as decision makers in schools in Panama. A culture survey, a satisfaction questionnaire, and/or a student survey reflecting perceptions on classroom climate may be possible methods to support this investigation and provide an area for future study to enhance professional practices in schools in Panama.

Final Thoughts

The word culture can often be misleading when referring to *the way we do things around here*. Protecting individuality and national pride is always a primary apprehension. To illustrate the idea of *educational culture* PLC participants worked with the ProEd Team to collaborate on a shared vision for what they perceived schools in Panama should look and sound like. The teachers of the ProEd 2011 PLC lived a new culture for learning in a model classroom that was as much inviting and entertaining, as it was collegial and scholarly. It was the intent of the researcher and the ProEd Team to provide an enriching and stimulating climate for learning with the hope that PLC teachers would embrace the uniqueness of their monthly experiences to breathe new life into their

own classroom practice. It was also believed that implementation of new classroom practices may in fact influence a culture for learning in schools in Panama. PLC participants were encouraged to experiment with new ideas and strategies and welcomed to share their implementation experiences with others. When *teachers teach teachers*, they weave the threads of transformation into a tapestry that designs a culture for learning that suggests *this is the way we do things around here*.

References

- Applefield, J. Huber, R., & Moallem, M., (2001). Constructivism in theory and practice: Toward a better understanding. *High School Journal*, (8)2.
- Barth, R. (1990). *Improving schools from within: Teachers, parents and principals can make a difference*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Batty, D. & Franke M. (2008). Transforming identities: Understanding teachers across professional development and classroom practice. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(3), 127-149.
- Bolman, L. G. & Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership* (4th Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bruffee, K. A. (1999). *Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge* (2nd ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bush, T. (2003). *Theories of educational leadership and management* (3rd Ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Céspedes, F. (1985). *La educación en Panamá: Panorama histórico y antología* [The education in Panama: Historical panorama and anthology], (2nd ed.) . Panama: Universidad de Panama.
- Cipriano, B. & Madonia, P. (2006, April). Collegiality as selection criterion in the search process. *Academic Leader*, 22(4), 4-5.
- Colbert, J., Brown, R. Choi, S., & Thomas, S. (2008). An investigation of the impacts of teacher-driven professional development on pedagogy and student learning. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 135-154.

- Cooner, D. & Tachterman, S. (2004). Life inside a professional development school: What experienced teachers learn. *The Teacher Educator*, 39(3), 184-195.
- Cosner, S. (2009). Building organizational capacity through trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 45(2), 248-291.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2005, November/December). Prepping our teachers for teaching as a profession. *Education Digest from Phi Delta Kappan*, 87, 237-240.
- Del Favero, M. (2003). Faculty-administrator relationships as integral to high-performing governance systems. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46(7), 902-922.
- DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R. & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Edwards, J., Green, K., & Lyons, C. (1998, April). *Personal Empowerment, Efficacy, and Environment Characteristics*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gajda, R. & Koliba, C. (2007). Evaluating the imperative of intraorganizational collaboration: A school improvement perspective. *American Journal of Evaluation* 28(26), 27-45.
- Garmston, R. J. (2007). Right way to begin depends on where you are right now. *National Staff Development Council*, 28(1), 69-70.
- Gideon, B. H. (October 2002). Structuring schools for teacher collaboration. *The Education Digest*, 30-34.
- Gill, S. J. (2010). *Developing a learning culture in nonprofit organizations*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Hatfield, R. (2006). Collegiality in higher education: Toward an understanding of the factors involved in collegiality. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communication and Conflict*, 10(1), 11-19. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Hord, S. (Winter, 2009). Professional learning communities. *National Staff Development Council*, 30(1), 40-43.
- Hord, S. & Sommers, W. (2008). *Leading professional learning communities: Voices from research and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press/Sage.
- Horn, I. S., & Warren Little, J., (2010). Attending to problems of practice: Routines and resources for professional learning in teachers' workplace interactions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(1), 181-217.
- Informe del Consejo del Sector Privado para la Asistencia Educativa, CoSPA. (2002, December). *Informe de progreso educativo de panama* [Progress report of education in Panama]. Panama, RP: CoSPA.

- Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (2002). Student achievement through staff development. *National College for School Leadership*, 1-5.
- Klein, J. H., Connell, N., & Meyer, E. (2005). Knowledge characteristics of communities of practice. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 3, 106-114.
- Knight, S. L., Wiseman, D. L. & Cooner, D. (2000). Using collaborative teacher research to determine the impact of professional development school activities on elementary students' math and writing outcomes. *Journal of Teacher Education* 51(1), 26-38.
- Kohm, B. & Nance, B. (2009, October). Creating collaborative cultures. *Educational Leadership*, 67(2), 67-72.
- Krueger, R. & Casey, M. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*, 4th Edition. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Leon, R. & Davis, S. (2009, September/October). Great leaders for great schools. *Leadership*, 39(1), 30-33.
- Levin, B. & Rock, T. C. (2003, March/April). The effects of collaborative action research on preservice and experienced teacher partners in professional development schools. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54(2), 135-149.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Little, J. W. (1985, November). Teachers as teacher advisors: The delicacy of collegial leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 43(3), 34-36.

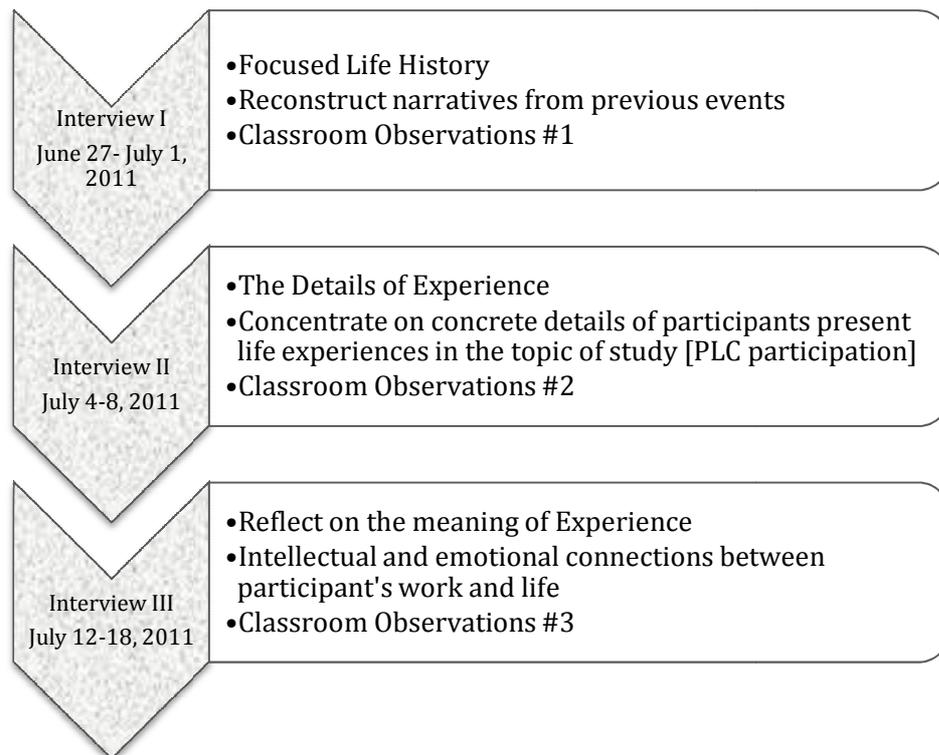
- Mertens, D. (2005). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, 2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mohr, N. & Dichter, A. (2001, June). Building a learning organization. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 744-747.
- Nonaka, I. (1991, November/December). The knowledge creating company. *Harvard Business Review*, 69(6), 96-104.
- Nonaka, I. (1994, February). A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. *Organization Science*, 5(1), 14-37.
- Nonaka, I. & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge-creating company: How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nonaka, I. (2007/ July-August). The knowledge creating company. *Harvard Business Review*, 162-171.
- Peterson, K. & Deal T., (1998). How leaders influence the culture of schools. *Educational Leadership*, 56(1), 28-30.
- Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R. (1999). Knowing “what” to do is not enough: Turing knowledge into action. *California Management Review*, 42(1), 83-108.
- Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R. (2000). *The knowing-doing gap: How smart companies turn knowledge into action*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Preskill, S. & Brookfield, S. D. (2009). *Learning as a way of leading: Lessons from the struggle for social justice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Prieto L. (2009). Some necessary conditions and constraints for successful learning organizations. *Competition Forum*, 7(2), 513-520.
- Roberts, S. & Pruitt, E. (2009). Schools as professional learning communities: Collaborative activities and strategies for professional development, (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Scribner, J. P., Sawyer, K., Watson, S., & Myers, V. (2007). Teacher teams and distributed leadership: A study of group discourse and collaboration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43, 67-100.
- Seeley Brown, J. & Duguid, P. (1998). Organizing knowledge. *Reflections*, 1(2), 28-44.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*, (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Senge, P. (1991). Learning organizations. *Executive Excellence*, 8(9), 7-9.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (2004a, September). Collaborative cultures & communities of practice. *Principal Leadership*, 5(1), 48-52.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (2004b, November). Balance individual autonomy and collaboration to center on students. *Education Digest*, 70(3), 17-22.
- Short, P. & Rinehart, J. (1993, June). Teacher empowerment and school climate. *Education* 113(4), 592-597.
- Stringer, P. (2009). Capacity building for school improvement: A case study of a New Zealand primary school. *Educational Research Policy and Practice*, 8, 153-179.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., Uline, C., Hoy, A., & Mackley, T. (2000). Creating smarter schools through collaboration. *Journal of Educational Administration* 38(3), 247.

- Webber, A. M. (2007, December 19). Why can't we get anything done? *Fast Company.com: Where ideas and people meet*. Retrieved from <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/35/pfeffer.html>
- Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York: Free Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenzlaff, T. & Wieseman, K. (2004). Teachers need teachers to grow. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 31(2), 113-124.
- Yukl, G. (2006). *Leadership in Organizations* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Appendix A

Three Step Interview Process



Appendix B

Interview Questions: I, II & III – Protocol Templates – Three-Step Series

Interview I

Name _____ School _____

Date _____ Grade/Subject _____

Male / Female _____ Years Teaching _____



Focused Life History - Put participant's life experience in context.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What was life like before you became a teacher [in ProEd's PLC]?
3. Talk about your experience in school, with friends, family. Describe your neighborhood.
4. Do you have any mentors?
5. What values guide your life?
6. What education level have you attained?
7. How long have you been teaching?
8. How do you feel about teaching?
9. How did you become a member of ProEd's PLC?
10. How do you measure your personal/professional success?
11. What legacy do you want to leave?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about you/your life?

Interviewer: _____ **Date:** _____

Interview II

Name _____ School _____

Date _____ Grade/Subject _____

Male / Female _____ Years Teaching _____



The Details of Experience - Concentrate on present life experience [constructs] within PLC.

1. Explain your role as a teacher in _____ School?
2. Describe a typical day in your life [from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep at night].
3. Talk about your relationships with administrators, parents, students and other teachers.
4. Describe your school environment
5. What is it like to work in your school?
6. What happens when teachers in your school return from their monthly participation in ProEd's PLC. What have you observed?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to share about life or your work in _____ School?

Interviewer: _____ **Date:** _____

Interview III

Name _____ School _____

Date _____ Grade/Subject _____

Male / Female _____ Years Teaching _____



Reflection on the Meaning - Intellectual and emotional connections between participant's work and life.

1. Given what you have said about *your life in Interview I and your work in Interview II*, what do you understand about your role as a teacher in _____ school? **Additional Question:** *What is your role as a ProEd teacher?*
2. Where is your future heading?
3. What factors contribute to the development of your School?
4. Do you think your school is effective? Explain.
5. What contributions do you feel you make to your school's effectiveness?
6. In what ways do these contributions add to the overall effectiveness of your school?
7. What [if any] changes would you like to see at your school?
8. On a scale from ***very – somewhat – not at all*** how challenging is it to make changes at your school? Explain.
9. ***Finish this sentence:*** Next year, I would like to see _____ happening at my school ***because...***
10. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us at this time?

Interviewer: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix C

Walkthrough Classroom Observation Checklist



Classroom Observation Checklist

Name of School _____ Date _____

Name of Data Collector _____

Name of Teacher/Grade/Subject _____

POWER LISTENING IN PRACTICE _____ YES _____ NO

Comment:

EARLY BIRDS ON BOARD _____ YES _____ NO

Comment:

OBJECTIVES ON BOARD _____ YES _____ NO

Comment:

AGENDA ON BOARD _____ YES _____ NO

Comment:

STUDENT PARTICIPATION

_____ YES _____ NO

- High Level of Participation
- Moderate Level of Participation
- Low Level of Participation
- No Student Participation

Comment:

SEATING ARRANGEMENT DIFFERENT

_____ YES _____ NO

- Collaborative Seating
- Rowed Seats
- Accessible Materials
- Technology Integrated

Comment:

TEACHER WALKING AROUND

_____ YES _____ NO

Comment:

Signature Data Collector

Date

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions – Protocol Template



School _____ Date _____

Participants:

NAME

POSITION

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

- 1.) Describe your school environment.
- 2.) What factors contribute to the development of your school?
- 3.) How does your school learn?
- 4.) How would you describe an effective school?
- 5.) Is your school effective? Explain.

6.) Using the scale: MANY – SOME - NONE

Do different teaching styles exist between teachers in your school?

7.) What changes have you seen during the 2011 school year?

8.) When your colleagues return from their monthly training with the ProEd Foundation, do they share what they learned with you?

9.) Do you use any new strategies from ProEd, even though you haven't participated in the 2011 program?

10.) Are there other comments that you'd like to share at this time.

Interviewer

Date

Appendix E

School Participant Empowerment Scale

Administered to all 2011 ProEd PLC teachers and to the 25 randomly selected teachers who participated in the Three-Step Interview.

School Participant Empowerment Scale
(Developed by Paul M. Short and James S. Reinhart)

Please rate the following statements in terms of how well they describe how you feel.

Rate each statement on the following scale:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I am given the responsibility to monitor programs.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I function in a professional environment.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I believe that I have earned respect.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I believe that I am helping kids become independent learners.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have control over daily schedules.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I believe that I have the ability to get things done.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I make decisions about the implementation of new programs in the school.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am treated as a professional.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I believe that I am very effective.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I believe that I am empowering students.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am able to teach as I choose.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I participate in staff development.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I make decisions about the selection of other teachers for my school.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I have the opportunity for professional growth.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I have the respect of my colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I feel that I am involved in an important program for children.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I have the freedom to make decisions on what is taught.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I believe that I am having an impact.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am involved in school budget decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I work at a school where kids come first.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I have the support and respect of my colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I see students learn.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I make decisions about curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I am a decision maker.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I am given the opportunity to teach other teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I am given the opportunity to continue learning.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I have a strong knowledge base in the areas in which I teach.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I believe that I have the opportunity to grow by working daily with students.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I perceive that I have the opportunity to influence others.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I can determine my own schedule.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I have the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I perceive that I make a difference.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Principals, other teachers, and school personnel solicit my advice.	1	2	3	4	5
34. I believe that I am good at what I do.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I can plan my own schedule.	1	2	3	4	5
36. I perceive that I have an impact on other teachers and students.	1	2	3	4	5
37. My advice is solicited by others.	1	2	3	4	5
38. I have an opportunity to teach other teachers about innovative ideas.	1	2	3	4	5

This document is copyrighted. Use only by written permission from the authors.

Appendix F

ProEd Monthly Accountability Sheet



***ProEd 2011 Professional Learning Community
Teachers Teaching Teachers***

Observations, Feedback & Summary

Please take a few minutes to record some of your personal classroom experiences.

<i>What did you try?</i>	<i>What results did you get?</i>	<i>Comments/Next Steps?</i>

Appendix G

Artifacts: Teacher Produced or Reproduced Activities & Resources



The teachers of one low-middle socioeconomic private PK-12 catholic school in Panama City, RP, conducted a workshop to teach their colleagues about what they learned from one module of the ProEd 2011 PLC. Their topic, facilitation skills, room arrangement and activities mirrored a ProEd PLC workshop.

SIX THINKING HATS



**ROOM
ARRANGEMENT:
MATERIALS READY
FOR THE
PARTICIPANTS &
ENVIRONMENT IS
WELCOMING**



**OBJECTIVES &
AGENDA ON THE
BOARD**

**MATERIALS AND
SAMPLES
DISPLAYED &
READY TO USE**

INSIDE - OUTSIDE



The teachers of one low socioeconomic 7th-12th public school in Panama City- East, RP, constructed a teacher-training center in the library of their school. They posted the strategies learned in ProEd and adopted ProEd's apple logo; adding a teachable value to the center of each apple. The teacher-training center will be used for workshops to teach their colleagues using the topics and tools learned in the ProEd 2011 PLC.

**TEACHER-
TRAINING CENTER
POWER LISTENING
POSTERS**



**PROED 2011 PLC
STRATEGIES:
POSTED IN THE
TEACHER-
TRAINING CENTER
AT THE PANAMA-
EAST SCHOOL**



**PROED LOGO
& TEACHABLE
VALUES**



Appendix H

Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: *The ProEd Foundation's 2011 PLC: Teachers Teaching Teachers*

Principal Investigator: Debbie Psychoyos

Other Investigators: *Maria Antonietta Cassino (Director of The ProEd Foundation, Panama, RP)*

Participant's Printed Name: _____

School: _____

Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research study, ***ProEd 2011 PLC: Teachers Teaching Teachers***, which is intended to identify the effects of monthly training workshops and collegial coaching sessions for teachers and administrators in Panama. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and your questions and comments about the study are valued. If you would like to be a participant in this study, please sign this form and return it to Debbie Psychoyos or ProEd's Director, Maria Antonietta Cassino. Thank you.

Section 1. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research study is to obtain information about the effects that monthly participation in ***ProEd's 2011 PLC: Teachers Teaching Teachers*** professional development and collegial coaching workshops have on teachers' implementation of instructional practices in their classrooms.

Approximately 25 educators in Panama will take part in this research study

Section 2. Procedures

The procedures of this research study include the following:

1. Sign consent form to confirm participation in the research study.
2. Complete the preliminary [empowerment] survey.

3. Attend the ProEd 2011 PLC 40-hour professional development program each month from February through October 2011.
4. Participate in video taped sessions of classroom lessons.
5. Participate in an Exit-Interview in October 2011.

Section 3. Time Duration of the Procedures and Study

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last approximately 43-hours from February through October 2011, requiring the following time commitment:

- 30 minutes to complete and sign the Consent Form
- 30-minutes to complete the preliminary survey
- 4-hours of professional development each month (40-hours total)
- 1.5 hours of audio-taped interviews
- 30-minute Exit Interview

Section 4. Discomforts and Risks

No risks or personal discomfort is anticipated to participants in this study.

Section 5. Potential Benefits

Possible benefits to the participant:

As a participant in this research study, possible benefits you may experience include:

- Enhanced professional practice;
- Improved professional confidence;
- Positive classroom management;
- Collegial support as a member of the ProEd PLC.

Possible benefits to others:

The results of this research may guide future training and professional development programs for the Ministry of Education and National Universities as they endeavor to advance education in the Republic of Panama.

Section 6. Statement of Confidentiality

In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from this research, no personally, identifiable information will be shared.

Section 7. Costs for Participation

The participant will assume transportation costs to and from each monthly training workshop. There are no additional costs for participating in this research study.

Section 8. Compensation for Participation

You will not receive any compensation for being in this research study.

Section 9. Research Funding

The investigators are receiving financial support from the ProEd Foundation to conduct this research study.

Section 10. Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop taking part in the research at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Section 11. Contact Information for Questions or Concerns

You have the right to ask any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, complaints, comments or concerns related to this study, please contact **Debbie Psychoyos, Principal Investigator at 507-270-5509 or E-mail: debbie.psychoyos@gmail.com**

Appendix I

Signature & Permission Consent Form



Signature and Consent/Permission to be in the Research

Before making the decision regarding enrollment in this research you should have:

- Discussed this study with the Principal Investigator, Debbie Psychoyos,
- Reviewed the information in this form, and
- Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the research and those questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

Participant: By signing this consent form, you indicate that you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research.

Signature of Participant Date Time Printed Name

Person Explaining the Research: Your signature below means that you have explained the research to the participant and have answered any questions he/she has about the research.

Signature of person who explained this research Date Time Printed Name

Only approved investigators for this research may explain the research and obtain informed consent.

A witness or witness/translator is required when the participant cannot read the consent document, and it was read or translated.

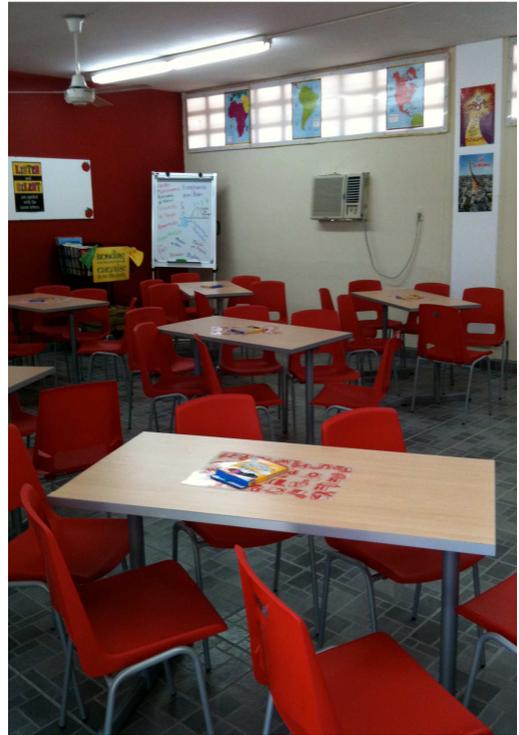
Appendix J

2011 ProEd PLC Setting

Before



After



Appendix K

The Cast: *In Their Own Words*

Teacher Profiles: School A

Teacher (Pseudonyms)	F/M	School	Grade/Subject	Total Years Teaching	Years in ProEd PLC
Ana	F	A	Kinder	18	1*
Beatriz	F	A	2 nd	12	1*
Carmen	F	A	7 th -9 th Spanish	12	1*
Dorita	F	A	7 th -9 th Music	9	1*
Elvira	F	A	1 st -3 rd English	11	1*

1* = First Year in ProEd PLC

Ana

In 1993, I began my teaching career in the Comarca [Indian Territory] of the Kuna Yala Indians. I taught Kindergarten there for two years during my probationary teaching period. When my internship in the Comarca was finished, I came to the Province of Colon to teach. In 1998 I came to School A to teach Kindergarten. I have been teaching Kindergarten for 18 years. I am a Kindergarten Specialist. Respect and tolerance are values that guide my life. Love is fundamental for all of us. I have earned a four-year teaching degree and a 2-year pre-school specialist degree from the University of Panama's Regional Campus in Rainbow City in the Province of Colon. Last year I actually started to feel 'actualized' about my teaching because I felt my students were very prepared. My colleague, the first grade teacher in this school, who is also a ProEd participant, is a very prepared teacher. I ask her how my students are doing this year in first grade and she said they were reading and writing very well. I used her method of teaching reading and writing. The students know the alphabet and they can make words and sentences. They are doing well in math too. I measure my success from my students. If they learn, I am successful.

Beatriz

I love my job! I love being a teacher with children. Sometimes, I get intolerant of unfairness. I want to improve this, but sometimes, when there is unfairness, I get angry. I like to learn. I like to look for new ways to learn. I have been teaching for 12 years; 10 of those years have been in School A. I have learned a lot in this school. For me, teaching is the best profession in the world, because if we didn't have teachers, we wouldn't have doctors or other careers. The values that guide my life are love first, then responsibility. I just returned yesterday from a conference in Nicaragua. The bus ride was 25 hours long. Today my legs hurt, but I am here because my students need me. I have attended the University of Panama for six years at night to earn my Primary teaching degree. I have not finished my pedagogy license yet, but I have completed three years of study in that field. I have learned a lot of techniques in ProEd's training. I see things more positive. I'm getting more results now than three years ago. Teachers like to stay in their comfort zone, but the kids don't learn. My students are learning faster than they have learned.

Carmen

I am a 42-year old professional. I like to know and learn and read. My favorite book is the bible. It is a life manual. I am married. I have no children. I teach Spanish and I ask God for the strength to work with the kids I teach. I feel that God puts diamonds in the rough into our hands and it is my job to convert them with knowledge and values and love. I have been teaching for 12 years, five years in School A. I have a degree in Languages from five years of study at the University of Panama. I also have obtained a two-year certificate for middle school. Honesty, responsibility and helping others are important values to me. I like to teach. I think on a scale from 1 to 5, I am a four because

I think success is not achieving but continuing to achieve and overcome obstacles. So I am a four because I always have challenges that I can overcome from the circumstances of life.

Dorita

I love what I do! I love teaching. I began my teaching career by substitute teaching for my aunt's class. I was so afraid that the responsibility for these children was all mine. It was during my substitute days that I discovered I had a gift of music and art. I was born as a teacher, there in that class with those students. I used to be timid, but I began to use my voice and sing to the students. I am in a teaching career by accident, but I love my work. I have a 4-year teaching degree from the University of Panama and the University of Paz [Peace]. I also have a 2-year teaching certificate from the University of Panama. I have taught in School A for two years and I have been teaching for nine years in total. I teach 7th, 8th and 9th grade music and art in School A. I believe I have a talent to transmit to students. Faith and keeping the faith is important to me. I especially help others to keep the faith when they think that they [students] do not have musical talent. Valuing life is the most important thing to getting ahead. I am successful because I have the support of my family. I travel from Panama to Colon everyday, so sometimes I am very tired. My husband says I plan everything. I like to have control. Professionally, I would like to have a space for my students to learn in a music classroom. I have to carry all of my equipment from class to class when I teach.

Elvira

I am a very happy person. I am married with two sons and I love teaching English to children. I think my students get much knowledge. I have a 4-year English as a Second

Language (ESL) degree from the University of Panama and a 2-year teaching certificate. I'm also finishing my Masters in English, which is a 5-year program. I've been teaching English in School A for two years and I've been a teacher for 11 years total. I really enjoy teaching. When we finish this interview, I'm going to play ping-pong with my students during recess. I try to tell them that my job is more than just teaching. To me success is when you reach and seek more than your goals.

Teacher Profiles: School B

Teacher (Pseudonyms)	F/M	School	Grade/Subject	Total Years Teaching	Years in ProEd PLC
Federico	M	B	8 th Industrial Arts	10	1*
Guadalupe	F	B	4 th -5 th Spanish/Mathematics	5	1*
Humberto	M	B	12 th Electronics	19	1*
Isabel	F	B	Kinder/ 7 th -10 th & 12 th Computers	9	1*
Juanita	F	B	9 th -12 th English	19	1~

1* = First Year in ProEd PLC

1~ = Former student of Researcher

Federico

I am one of three kids. I am happily married with two kids of my own, a boy and a girl. I am happy. I like to be happy all the time and when crisis comes and we get frustrated, I try to bring positivism and smiles to the day. In general I am like this. I like justice. I am faithful and God fearing. I make daily petitions. I have been teaching for 10 years in School B. I am an alumnus of School B. My friend who works in the workshop of this school asked me if I wanted to work here. I said just tell me where, when and I'm there. Because I graduated from this school I didn't need a psych evaluation, because they already knew me. I try to teach using the values that they taught me: respect of others' opinions, solidarity and religion [fear of God]. I have a 3-year Technical Education degree and a 2-year degree in Industrial Arts from the Technological

University of Panama (UTP). In one of the ProEd sessions, you asked, “What makes a perfect day?” For me, the answer is, when all I do works out. I believe God makes it happen. I think that I am successful when all of the things in my agenda are complete.

Guadalupe

I am collaborative, sensible and I like to work with kids, especially adolescents. I am strict and caring. I have two sons who are both adolescents. I have a 5-year degree with a practicum from the University of Panama in Primary Science Education. I have not finished my pedagogy and teaching certificate because I’m helping my sons with their school right now. I made a lot of mistakes with my first son, but my university training has helped me with my second. I have been teaching for five years and for 2 years in School B. Teaching is a big challenge for me. It’s more than academics. When a student loses his grandmother and he only wants to talk about it with me, well, that’s when I know I am valued a lot and I value my students. I try to integrate values into everything we do. I try to be a model and an example with respect, love, responsibility and solidarity. Success for me is the success of my students. If they fail, I fail. It’s the same with my own children.

Humberto

I am an alumnus of School B. I attended here from Kinder through 12th grade. I’m married with three kids. My wife teaches next door. I came here to teach for three years... I’m still here, 19 years later. I’ve been teaching since 1992. I consider myself a very ‘vertical’ man. I try to be the same person everyday – all the time. I’m relaxed, although not with my students. I know how to act in different situations. I know how to relate to them [students]. I maintain a vertical line with my students. We can negotiate.

Sometimes there is only one change to do things. I have to teach them like they worked for me. What I ask of you is what you give me. I know they can give me what I ask for. I know they can be more responsible. More or less is not enough. I did not finish my teaching certificate. I only completed three years of electrical training. It's difficult to explain how I feel about teaching. I came here with the intention of staying a short time and I'm still here. We do things the way we can. Some things we feel with conviction. My personal and professional success is a curious thing for me because I expect a lot from my students and myself. When my ex-students return for a visit they come back motivated and excited and for that reason, I am still here in this school. That's success!

Isabel

Isabel is happy and cooperative. I am an innovative person who is always learning something new. I'm active and sensible. I like to learn new things. I try not to judge others. I value honesty, fairness and justice, especially with my students and my colleagues. I have completed my Masters at the Universidad Americana (UAM). I have a 2-year teaching certificate in computers and a 5-year diploma in computers from UTP. I've been teaching for a total of nine years. I actually came to School B for one year, but I'm here already for three. I like teaching. If you like something, you go forward. For me, success is realizing and forming and developing myself; and leaving seeds with people who I am creating... and achieving my objectives.

Juanita

I am a happy grandmother. I have eight children, who all speak English. I don't see my grandchildren so much, so it's hard to teach them English. When my siblings and I came to Panama from the United States, we stayed with our grandmother and our

parents stayed Stateside. It was very hard, but my mother would call three times a week and remind us to hold on to God's hand and all things will come through. I still value that today. Something I enjoy a lot is teaching. My main goal is to have my students speak English. I would like to listen to all of them, but it's not easy. I have been taking classes for two years at the Universidad Latina (ULAT) to complete my Masters in Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESOL), where you [researcher] were my professor. For me, success is beginning with nothing and finally becoming something. My mom used to send me things to teach with from the U.S. I had nothing and now I'm great. I have my bachelor's degree, completed in a four-year program and a teaching certificate that required two more years of study from the University of Panama. I have been teaching for 19 years, six of them have been at School B. I think teachers do more than teach. I get rewards, including emotional rewards. Being a teacher is not only teaching a subject, it's becoming a family member.

Teacher Profiles: School C

Teacher (Pseudonyms)	F/M	School	Grade/Subject	Total Years Teaching	Years in ProEd PLC
Karla	F	C	1 st English	5	2
Leticia	F	C	2 nd Math/Spanish/Social Studies	5	2
Maria	F	C	10 th -12 th Biology	25	2
Nicolas	M	C	7 th -8 th English	1	1*
Olivia	F	C	6 th /10 th -12 th Mathematics	11	2

1* = First Year in ProEd PLC

Karla

Karla is a person who likes to challenge herself for the present and future. She likes all challenges; whatever the challenges may be. I am guided by the truth. I understand that we are not perfect but we always have to do our best. My B.A. is in Business Administration from the University of Panama. I also have a teaching

certificate, which required a couple of more years of study. I have been teaching since 2006 and I've taught in School C for the past three years. I like teaching. In life you have to consider what is best for you. I consider it better to work with children than adults. I like to work with adults too, but I would like to work with young children first and then adults. I don't really like to measure myself. I prefer to do my best and if I consider it is not O.K., then I challenge myself to do better. I'm like military, very strict; and always challenging myself to see results and help students meet their expectations.

Leticia

Well, Leticia is 39 years old and I like children. I teach them values. I have two sons and I'm married for 20 years. I've always wanted to be a teacher, even though I studied Public Relations for three years in the Faculty of Social Communication in the University of Panama. But I really wanted to work with children, which I realized when I worked with a pediatric doctor. I returned to the University of Panama to the Faculty of Science and Education and I prepared to obtain a degree in Science education. I also got a teaching certificate in primary and a second certificate in secondary education. I've been teaching for five years, two of which are in School C. Teaching is important to me. If a student misses one day of class, they miss a lot. Success to me is a beautiful family. It is the base and a struggle. It is not easy. Pride has to be put aside and forgiveness must be requested.

Maria

I am a 49-year old Buddhist. I am happily married and I have two boys. I like to work directly with the students. I live by the Buddhist way of cause and effect. Honesty, respect and responsibility guide my life. I have been teaching for 25 years and have had a

position in School C for two years. Each new-year brings something new. I am satisfied. I have reached my results and benefits. In 1997, I got my B.A in Chemistry from the University of Panama. I also have a teaching certificate and a Masters in Administration. My life is my work in school. I work in all areas of the school. My own children are in this school [School C]. I have an excellent relation with my colleagues. We get along well and are sincere and open for suggestions.

Nicolas

I describe myself as a sociable, talkative person who likes to be around people, but who also likes alone time. Respect, effort and honesty are values that I uphold. I like what I do; work with teens. I live with my mom and stepfather. This is my first year teaching. In the beginning with no experience, you only have what the University teachers tell you... you teach with ideas. They taught me how to teach lesson plans. But students are unpredictable. I like it [teaching]. I'm doing good work with people. The hardest part is to get the students to speak English. They listen o.k. I just finished my course requirements for a Bachelor's in Translation at the University. I'm working on my thesis, which will be translation of the Panama Canal Treaty with the United States. I would like to pursue a post-grad teaching degree in higher education. For me, success is not only seeing the results our eyes see... it is looking beyond. I know that hard work brings results with practice.

Olivia

I am a caring person with my and family and students. It is important that my students like my class and that it is not boring. I'm not strict, so that the students can't talk to me. I like to treat my students well. Teaching is a very good alternative to help

others and myself. It is an opportunity for me to learn. By getting feedback from students both emotionally and academically, I learn and listen. I have been teaching for a total of 11 years, six have been here in School C. My degree is a four-year diploma in Banking and Finance. I also have a teaching certificate in secondary education. I measure my success by what my students think of me. Also, because my two kids are in this school, I like when their teachers tell me how applied and good they are. That's the best! My kids are respectful and responsible. I believe that love is the best value that guides my life.

Teacher Profiles: School D

Teacher (Pseudonyms)	F/M	School	Grade/Subject	Total Years Teaching	Years in ProEd PLC
Pilar	F	D	2 nd Spanish/Mathematics	4	1*
Querida	F	D	4 th Grade / All Subjects	4	1*
Rita	F	D	10 th -12 th Business	2	1*
Sergio	M	D	10 th -12 th Physics	5	1*
Tina	F	D	10 th -12 th English	6	1*

1* = First Year in ProEd PLC

Pilar

Who is Pilar? Pilar is 29 years old. I have a husband and daughter who is five. This year, my husband and I moved into our new house. I have worked in School D for three years and I feel like a successful teacher because I give 100% to my work and my role as a mother, wife and daughter. I am very organized and not complicated. I am responsible and punctual. I am on top of things. It seems like I want everything now. Respect, responsibility and love for what I do and for my family are fountains for my motivation. These are the values that guide my life. I have a teaching certificate and a Bachelor's degree from the University of Panama. I have been teaching for four years. I have been in School D since 2009. I am committed to teaching my students how to organize themselves. Success for teachers is when a student says: "Teacher, my dad told

me that my handwriting and my letters are just like yours.” It was true. I looked at her notebook [the student] and it was true.

Querida

Querida is a person who likes to help everyone. I am a mother of four children; two boys and two girls. It is for this reason that I wanted to teach. I actually graduated with a Pharmacy degree and worked in a Pharmacy for eight years. I did not have the time to take care of my children because of the rotating schedule in the Pharmacy, so I went back to school for a teaching degree. When I graduated from the University of Panama, I heard they were looking for teachers in School D. A week after my interview I got a call that I had the teaching position. I’ve been teaching here in School D since 2008. I tried to work in both the Pharmacy and the school, but I just couldn’t manage the time. I thought money does not matter, I have to have time for my children. I am happy teaching. Before I attended the ProEd program, I had students who could just not advance. Now I have strategies like ‘Power Teaching’ and there is no poor treatment. I’m not calling attention anymore. Instead of my students, copying, copying, copying, I have techniques to help them and working is fun. I feel successful when I see my student who has a lot of reading challenges reading. I put students who read well to read with this student and now he is reading marvelously. We applaud him! He is reading and writing. That makes me feel good and when I feel good and not stressed, I feel successful.

Rita

I am a happy person; patient, creative, and charismatic. I like to work in groups. It fascinates me. Better said, I support when I can. When someone has doubt or is not clear, if I can help, I am willing to help. I am not the person who things, ‘what I know, I know,

I'm not going to share with my colleagues because I studied and this is my information and knowledge'. If I see someone up against the wall, I help. I am not egotistical in that way. I have an accounting degree from the University of Panama and I got my diversity teaching degree as well. I've been teaching for two years. I think that teaching is very beautiful. I believe we have to have vocation, interest and desire because maybe we can study education, but if you are not motivated or do not have the charisma to teach the quality of the teaching will not be there. We all have to be concerned for the thing that makes good teaching and what will be transmitted to students. Honesty and responsibility above all are important. If I make a mistake or something, I confess it is my error. I say, 'I didn't have time, or I didn't finish, but I take responsibility for my acts. On a scale from one to five I think sincerely, I am a four. Sometimes, I get stuck and I think how can I continue investigation. I think I need a little more knowledge so that I can teach my students better.

Sergio

Professor Sergio is always available to help his students. When they need help in whatever moment, I am there. At any time, even if they are not my students, they look for me. I am an example of how to continue and many trust me as an example for them. Respect, justice, responsibility, punctuality and love in general are my basic values. After eight years of classes at the National University of Panama, I obtained a degree in Chemistry. I started the university as a day student, but when I got a job, I attended classes at night. It's longer to get your degree at night because sometimes they don't have your courses. I have been teaching five years. All of my teaching experience has been in School D. Teaching is a good experience. For me, it is very fun and interesting. It is not

stressful if you keep the kids active and participating. I measure my success by the aspect that my students are participating in class and the way I teach; if my students show interest and I hear them talking. I would like to be a university professor.

Tina

Well, I am a humble person who likes to speak a lot. I'm a funny person too. And, I am a beloved mother. I have a kid. I am a teacher because I like what I do, not because it was the only thing I could get a job doing. I was 'pretending' to study medicine at the University of Panama. After the first year, I thought, 'oh now what am I going to do'? My brother was studying in Lawrence College in Kansas City on a Fulbright Scholarship. He told me, 'Tina, you like to speak English, you like to play, you're funny, why don't you study to be an English teacher'? For the past five years I've been taking classes at the University of Panama. I'm still taking classes. Patience and tolerance are important. My brother is my mentor. He's always pushing me. I want to go to the U.S. or maybe England to learn how to pronounce words correctly in English. I want to complete my Masters and PhD in English. I've been teaching for 13 years, six have been in School D. I feel motivated to teach. Everyday is different from the other. Everyday, I have to deal with the students; especially here in School D. Everyday is a challenge for me because I have some students who can not come to school for two or three days, so I always have to go back and help them. This makes everyday a challenge. Our challenges are not only academic. We have to deal with emotional needs of students too. I feel successful when my students are improving and at least by the end of the week they can have a short conversation with me or I saw that they really liked what I taught that week. That is success for me.

Teacher Profiles: School E

Teacher (Pseudonyms)	F/M	School	Grade/Subject	Total Years Teaching	Years in ProEd PLC
Ursula	F	E	10 th Social Studies	15	1*
Veronica	F	E	7 th Geography	28	1*
Wanda	F	E	7 th -12 th English	8	1~
Xiomara	F	E	10 th -12 th Orientation/Values	11	1*
Yannis	M	E	10 th -11 th English	25	1*

1* = First Year in ProEd PLC

1~ = Former student of Researcher

Ursula

Ursula is a teacher of Modern and Contemporary History and all subjects related to the social sciences: civics, geography, the History of Panama. I am available to give the best of me to help schools in Panama. I am Pro-Panamanian Education. I have a degree in geography and history, plus a teaching degree for middle school and a one-year post-graduate course in higher education. I have been teaching for 15 years; six of them have been here in School E. I feel very comfortable teaching. I like to teach and get along with the students. I never lose my cool. I enjoy them [students]. Responsibility is the value that comes before all others; however, honesty, loyalty and love are included. For me, success is to be well in my work and my family in my personal life. We are always setting goals and we have many goals to reach. Achieving all of our goals is success.

Veronica

Veronica is a simple person with a lot of desire since the beginning of my service. I have a five-year degree in Geography from the National University of Panama. I have learned a lot of techniques and methods to help my students. I have been teaching in School E for 20 years and I have been teaching a total of 28 years. I think it's important to teach youth to put values into practice. We are losing values and I want to rescue them. All values are important. For me, honor and solidarity above all are important values. I

feel good about teaching, especially when I meet my students and ex-students and they tell me that they are professionals. I feel successful when I achieve all of my professional and personal goals.

Wanda

I have been teaching for eight years and I have worked as an English teacher in School E for five years. I like what I do. I like to put technology into teaching the students, who know more than we do. I have kids and I have two jobs. I teach English to adults at night. Both of my jobs are totally different. I like what I do. I am happy teaching. Personally, I like to be positive and transmit this to my students and colleagues. Positivism guides my life. I have a degree in English. I started the Masters in TESOL program with you [researcher] at Latina, but I will have to return when my kids are bigger. Success for me is achieving the goals that I plan. If I say I'm going to buy a car next year and I buy it, I'm successful. Not money or fame... putting something in front of me and trying hard to achieve it – that's success.

Xiomara

I love my profession and I love to work with adolescents and their parents. It's important to know all students individually; and their parents. Our Panamanian parents think schools are 'daycare' for students. We are forming students and we have to try to help parents spend more time to understand their students. We are here to bring pace and guide our students to a better future. I worked as the coordinator for the Police Department for many years. I have been teaching now for 11 years, all here in School E. I have a degree in Orientation (Counseling), which was the first five-year degree granted by the University of Panama. I have been working for 2 years on a Masters in Family

Counseling. I started my studies in the Faculty of Law, so I saw a lot of divorce cases, which made me think a lot about families. Everyone said, 'You're in the wrong field, go into Humanities and study psychology'. I would still like to study law. My dream is to finish my Masters in Family Counseling. All values guide my life. I tell the parents, 'Let's talk about responsibility. Give me five virtues for this'. We must all know the virtues of values. Teaching for me is a big challenge. I have humble families here. I feel successful when I feel peace with myself; knowing that I am helping another generation. Money is not important, it comes and it goes. Happiness and positivism matter most.

Yannis

I've learned through experience to be positive as positive and funny as I can be. I have learned to have a sense of humor, which makes life easier. I have a 4-year degree in middle school, a one-year teaching certificate, a two-year Masters degree in English as a Second Language (ESL) and a one-year post graduate degree in higher education. I've also participated in a six-month Total Physical Response course with trainers from Puerto Rico. That was a beautiful experience that I would like to repeat. I've been teaching for 25 years, eight of which have been here in School E. I will be sincere, the first three years I was convinced that this was not my profession. I was about to quit. I needed more psychology to make this happen. I'm not sure why I changed my mind, but lately, I keep thinking that the young generation needs good teachers; not only in English, but sharing jokes and love and attention. Just talking to them. Suddenly, I said to myself, maybe I don't have the vocation. I have to learn to like it. I am acting as a mentor to my students. I see success differently from others... it's not a bank account. I think if I feel good and happy, I have success. If I have in my case that students love and respect and you are a

mentor for them, then we are successful. It's not money or material things. Money comes and goes... but nobody can buy your dignity. You are what you project.

Appendix L

Target School Descriptions: *Teachers' Perceptions*

School A

Located in the province of Colon on the Atlantic Coast of Panama, School A is a co-ed, low-income, public, Catholic school, run by the Sisters of Charity of the Saint Vincent de Paul order. School A targets disadvantaged students in the city of Colon, and is the most sought after model school in the area, because there are no tuition requirements. The school is subsidized by the MEDUCA and private donations from individual and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). School A also provides a boarding school setting for girls from abusive and/or extreme poverty home environments. The 2011 population in School A included 547 Kinder through 9th grade students and 25 teachers. Fourteen of the 25 teachers at School A participated in the 2011 ProEd PLC.

The teachers who participated in the interviews for this study: Ana, Beatriz, Carmen, Dorita and Elvira, were asked to describe their school using one adjective. Their descriptors identified their school as: fabulous, pleasant, calm, clean and supportive. The five teachers were then asked to explain their answers, which resulted in the following descriptions: Ana claimed, "The environment at this school compared to other schools is peaceful and tranquil. The organization and cleanliness and the bathrooms are very good." Dorita also commented about the bathrooms being located on all floors, which made things convenient for teachers. Dorita stated, "The janitor is very on top of things and the students are active and pleasant in this school." Elivira and Carmen emphasized the calmness in the school, which was conducive to work and Carmen included the idea

that, “In School A, parents and students do more together than in other schools she had worked in previously.” Beatriz concluded, “School A’s environment is happy and supportive. It is a religious school and working with the sisters is favorable because they are happy and pleasant.”

To further describe the school environment of School A, the teachers were asked what it was like to work in this school. Their varied responses had a common thread that included the generalization of working with an administrative team of Sisters of Charity from the order of Saint Vincent de Paul. Ana suggests that the stereotype of working under the auspices of the Sisters, “excuse me ‘Nuns’, is that they will expect a lot, they are on top of you and bother a lot... the reality is that when the teachers works and complete their roles as teacher, we don’t have trouble with them [the Nuns] and we work very well with order and discipline to form and educate students.” Dorita explains that there were five vacancies in School A. “No one wanted to come here because it is a Nuns school and nobody wants to work with them [the Nuns] because they expect a lot like punctuality. I got my training in private school so I know how important it is to be punctual and complete all of your work. I know that if my work is done, there is no problem.” Elvira comments, “For me, it would be like... at the beginning it was like, oops, scary. First of all they are Catholic. I am not. Their ways of doing things are different. But I respect them.” Carmen explains that working in this environment is the same as working in other places and that to work in this school you have to register your points [professional development] with MEDUCA to get assigned. Carmen continues, “I asked for this school. I have been here for five years.” Beatriz concludes, “It is very special to work here because we work with civics and values. We have a sacred chapel

and we have Sisters and charity. It is very special to work here. In other schools it is different. We have a different mindset here. We achieve our goals because we absorb the environment working with the Sisters. It is a very special because God gave us the Sisters.”

School B

School B is a co-ed, low-middle socioeconomic, private, Catholic primary, middle and secondary school located in the center of Panama City and run by the Salesian priests of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. School B serves 780 Kinder through 12th grade students in college preparatory and vocational educational training programs. There are 60 teachers employed at School B and 14 of these teachers were ProEd 2011 PLC participants. When asked to describe their school environment using one word, the five teachers interviewed from School B: Federico, Guadalupe, Humberto, Isabel and Juanita, used adjectives like: pleasant and a second-happy family. The teachers shared their personal perceptions to detail these descriptions, with the following comments: Federico said, “I am the biggest critic because I was a student in this school and now I teach here. There is love and care and some serious communication, like a second family.” Guadalupe commented, “I came to this school as a mother of a student first. I was very impressed with the welcome that they give to the kids. I thought it was beautiful the way they treated the students. It’s like a big family.” Humberto, who is also an alumni from School B, shared “There are days I want to leave.” As he continued, he laughed out loud, “Don’t ask me why. I don’t know. I’m still here after 18 years. It’s like home.” Juanita, the English teacher in School B also claims that her school is like a family. Juanita is clear, however, that there is a need to have additional space for teachers to

identify as their own teaching areas. Juanita confessed, “We have to run up and down the stairs and travel all over the school with our things. We have no lockers and we must carry our things with us everywhere because we have no place to leave them.” Isabel expressed that she enjoys the green area around the school campus and concludes, “This is a place to enjoy and have fun.”

When the teachers of School B were asked what it was like to work in their school, their comments ranged from comments like Federico’s “crazy” to Humberto’s “stressfully great”. Humberto explains, “Some have certain expectations. They say I get things easier and faster than them. Everyone wants to be first... we have to put ourselves to one side and deal with the issues at hand with the students.” Federico claims, “I say this both seriously and jokingly... it’s crazy to work here. We wear costumes and disguises to work with colleagues and students. New people get ‘the works’. Working here you have to be active and very happy, very positive. Passive, timid people do not work here. We need intense people.” Federico continues, “I always say that it has to be something really drastic... If I ever leave here its because they threw me out.” Working in School B was a “big step for me” states Guadalupe. “I was a homemaker and when my son transferred from a public school to this private school and they had an opening for me, we negotiated transportation and that resulted in my working here for the past two years.” Juanita confesses, “I am a teacher, mother, sister, cousin, aunt... you know it’s nice. We are involved in so many things. Religion is even integrated into our English classes. I have a special relationship with my students. I don’t feel disrespect when I hear them call me ‘Juanita my love’ from across the yard. Sometimes, I feel like a priest because my students confess to me.” Isabel, a young computer teacher admits,

“sometimes it is stressful and sometimes it is fun... and sometimes I have to put a balance and control between stress and the rest of my life.”

School C

In an area of Panama City, called Golf Breezes, School C, a private, for profit, PreKinder through 12th grade school, will celebrate its first graduating class in December of 2011. School C educates, 1,300 students and employs 99 teachers, of which 16 were participants in the ProEd 2011 PLC. Karla, Leticia, Maria, Nicolas and Olivia, the five teachers interviewed for this qualitative case study described the environment of School C with the following adjectives: beautiful, pleasant, healthy, familial and cordial. The campus of School C has an open courtyard where students from all levels meet for recess and physical education. Leticia who thinks her school is beautiful and comfortable commented, “It gets a little bit overwhelming during last period with all of the noise and the physical education classes outside.” Karla likes the school environment of School C and acknowledges that even though there is an organizational hierarchy, she feels that her administrators give them [teachers] liberty to work. Karla claims, “I feel like we are not under a microscope. They [administrators] listen and changes are made.” Nicolas, a first year teacher in School C, thinks that his school environment is healthy because they have many extracurricular activities like soccer tournaments, which he states, “is good for students.” Nicolas continued by stating “as the school grows there will be need for more extracurricular activities, like band, to develop the talents of our students.” Maria shares her philosophy that you get what you give, “I give a smile and greeting to all. This makes a cordial environment in our school.”

When the five teachers interviewed for this study were asked what it was like to work in School C, Leticia shared, “I’m proud. It’s a big school in a nice area. When I tell people I work here, they say, Wow! We work in the heart of God to teach children here.” Karla thinks that working in her school is “Fun and not real work. Things are flexible and what we plan sometimes is stopped to modify for [struggling] students. I’ve been able to bring 11 out of 13 students up to level. So far only two will be left behind. They will move on too with help. They will move on at their own rhythm. Parents haven’t said anything about accommodations. We are working hard with them. The students struggle in English and in Spanish.” Nicolas, a first year teacher in School C, compares life in college preparing to be a teacher with life on the job as a teacher. Nicholas confesses, “This is something you can only describe if you have the experience of the work. In college everyone said are you sure you want to teach? There is no pay and there are discipline problems. When you are working on it, it is not as people say. It depends if you like it. If you like what you’re doing, you’ll enjoy it.” Maria, an experienced teacher who works mornings in School C and in a public school in the afternoon expresses that she likes working in School C because it is “professional”. Maria continues, “I like it. Academically and technologically this school is totally upgraded. The administrator is always on top of things to bring the latest for the students’ and teacher’s benefits. These things cost money. Students have their computers and audio-visuals. This permits us to upgrade ourselves. We can continue to look for our own upgrading.” Olivia comments that, “Working here is a little difficult because we have our daily things and we have to motivate the students and we have to complete our goals with parents to report their

student's progress. For me, it's o.k. but for other teachers they can't take all the things we have to do. I think it's normal what they [administrators] expect."

School D

A public, Catholic community school run by the order of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent De Paul, School D offers a Pre-Kinder through 12th grade program and serves 400 socially at-risk and low-income students. The enrollment of School D draws its population from the girls' orphanage located on the school grounds and from the low-income community in the surrounding rural area. School D, located southeast of Panama City, employs 29 teachers. Twenty-eight of the School D faculty members participated in the ProEd 2011 PLC. The 29th teacher is also the school director, who did not participate with the other teachers from School D in the 2011 PLC.

The five teachers in School D interviewed for this study, Pilar, Querida, Rita, Sergio and Tina described their school environment using the following words: love, beautifully pleasant, friendly, excellent and work. Querida explains her choice of the word excellent by saying, "If I am excellent, then my school is excellent too." Querida continues, "Flexible. Respectful. Our school is going forward to teach this generation that 'later' future is the name of the game. The kids want immediate gratification. They need to learn to work for delayed results." Tina explains, "If you don't have a big heart, don't come here to work. You have to be a unique teacher to work here." Tina continues, "We have difficult academic and social relationships. We need to sacrifice to help the students." When asked to describe her school environment, Pilar replied, "Nature... beautiful... there is an emphasis on nature and ecosystems. Our administrator is very focused on cleanliness, organization and beauty." Rita explains, "There is a connection

between us. I like it. It's friendly. We pray together and we play volleyball to 'de-stress' from routines." To conclude the descriptions about the environment of School D, Sergio concludes, "The physical school is good. All groups are separated [primary and secondary]. We don't have fans, but the area around is good. We work here."

When Pilar, Querida, Rita Sergio and Tina were asked what it was like to work in School D, Sergio summed it up by saying, "it is an unforgettable experience." Querida said that working in School D is "Excellent! Very good." Pilar suggests, "You have to look for results. I am used to working in this tranquil environment." Tina says, "I love to work here. I would like to stay here always and hope the principal lets me stay. It's a really good experience to talk with small kids that have nothing. No parents, no uncles, only sisters from the shelter [orphanage]; and they come with big smiles on their faces and that's contagious! You feel love here." When Rita is asked what it is like to work in School D, she concludes, "Perfect. Thank God. I am good. No complaints. We share, we learn, we live."

School E

A public high school in the heart of the urban area of Panama City called, St. Michael, School E is centrally located in a high-crime area known as a red zone of Panama. The student population of School E is 1,552 with 90 teachers on staff. The school has two shifts to service the large student population. The morning shift runs from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and the afternoon shift runs from 12:30 mid-day to 5:00 p.m. The afternoon schedule is shorter than the morning program to accommodate a safe dismissal from school while it is still daylight. Despite its location in the high crime area of Saint Michael, MEDUCA has named School E as a model school because of students'

academic and social accomplishments. The teachers in School E have also received accolades for their work with the students of School E. The School E teachers who participated in the interviews for this study: Ursula, Veronica, Wanda, Xiomara and Yannis described their school environment as tranquil and simple, going forward. Yannis explains, “I recognize we have many faults, but there are many other things that we don’t give up? All of us in the community.” Ursula agrees, “... all professors have something to do... this is good because there isn’t time to do things that are unproductive, like gossip. We are successful.” Xiomara continues, “If I am excellent, my school is excellent. We are respectful.” Wanda suggests that the environment is not as good as teachers want it to be, but says she doesn’t let it affect her. Wanda shares that the environment is “O.K. It’s manageable. We have problems and we look for ways to handle them, even though teachers sometimes fight... they don’t know how to get along with other colleagues.”

Appendix M

Colored Transcriptions with Highlights and Post-It Notes



Appendix N

Monthly Accountability Sheets with Post-It Note Feedback



Appendix O

Teacher Feedback/Testimonies – April 2011

Teachers were asked what they felt was most helpful for them during the April 2011 PLC and what the ProEd PLC Team could improve for the next session. The following testimonies were given.

Helpful	Needs Improvement
Directed Reading Thinking Activity (D.R.T.A.) – modeled during the April workshop	Give more time for group work/activities
Discussion about the use of Graphic Organizers	Too much material for a 4-hour workshop
Use of Technology	Transportation allowance for Atlantic Coast teachers
Good use of time and managing group work	More practice time for application of each strategy
Sharing of ideas and our knowledge	More empanadas and juice
Discussing different types of evaluation and assessment instruments	Classroom too small
Development of an interesting topic for teachers to improve the quality of education	More feedback
Clear instruction	Communication with school director to release teachers in time for them to get to the PLC workshop
Motivation kept high	
Snacks, activities and organization well done	
Teamwork, collaboration and sharing	
Word Splash Vocabulary Strategy	

Teacher Feedback / Testimonies - June 2011

At the end of the June 2011 PLC, teachers were prompted: In your opinion, what is ProEd? What comments do you have about ProEd? How would you explain ProEd to someone who has never heard of this organization? The responses included:

- ProEd is a great program that builds commitment for teachers in their work. Their principle objective is to provide new abilities and skills for teachers to make a big difference.
- ProEd is a good way to help our communities and our country. I like to continue learning. Please continue this teaching program.
- ProEd is an organization that cares about Panama's education. They strengthen teachers as educators in English and Spanish. Good Job!
- ProEd provides a great opportunity for teachers to develop methods and strategies that not even the Universities in Panama provide in their education program.
- More teachers have to be invited to join ProEd. The experiences and feedback are fabulous.
- I think that ProEd is a useful and important organization to help teachers become better teachers. It's kind of sad that we don't have more teachers here taking advantage of this opportunity. I also think that this program needs to get to the University of Panama.
- ProEd is a non-profit organization that works to teach teachers how to use all possible resources and new strategies and methods that improve education. Power Teaching is a great new tool that gets us excited to teach.

- Having participated in ProEd for a while, I have benefitted a lot by putting new ideas into practice in my classroom. Now I have the commitment to share with others what I have learned.
- Many of the strategies that were facilitated have been put into practice. This was challenging but the results that were obtained have been favorable. The things that you have shared are substantially beneficial to my students.
- I have enjoyed every ProEd workshop and have taken advantage of using the things that I learned in the workshops with my Pre-K students. We especially enjoy having the students walk to their positions on the floor saying “basket, basket, basket” with their arms in a circle like a hoop. We also have used “Class – Yes” from Power Teaching.
- I am a teacher with 18 different groups in a variety of levels. When the homeroom teachers use the skills that we have learned in ProEd consistently with me, it allows me to organize better and give my best.
- Since I’ve known ProEd, my life as a teacher has changed. My classes are more active and creative. Actually you can see in all of our classrooms the Power Teaching posters. My classes are like workshops with more motivation and improved discipline.
- ProEd has taught me how to manage my teaching time and to implement different routines to achieve participation of my students.
- ProEd has helped me learn new tools that I can adequately implement in my classes like: early birds, mind maps, tickets to go, ice breakers and brainstorm passports.

- ProEd has helped me grow as a facilitator with a lot of creativity. It has helped me improve and develop my teaching skills because the tools and methods are innovative and fun for the students.

VITA

It's been said that *you can take the girl out of Jersey, but you can't take Jersey out of the girl*. One may find argument with that statement, but good seeds were sewn in the Garden State. Debbie Scheffer Psychoyos was born, raised and educated in New Jersey. Upon graduating with a BA in Elementary Education in 1981 from then Glassboro State College (Rowan University) in Glassboro, New Jersey, I took my first position as a second grade teacher in an inner city school in Dallas, Texas. In 1982, newly wed, I relocated further "South of the Border" to the Republic of Panama. Embarking on a 10-year learning journey with the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS), I became a life-long learner in a professional community of practice. My career path in DoDDS included elementary classroom teacher, mentor teacher, reading specialist and staff development coordinator. During this time, I earned a Masters in Educational Psychology from the University of Oklahoma - Norman (Panama Campus), and raised three children.

In 1993, I ventured out of the Canal Zone as the US Military presence in Panama drew down, to pursue independent educational consulting in both schools and corporate organizations. In 2001, in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedies, I refocused my efforts toward the reconstruction of public schools and the creation of the ProEd Foundation, an NGO designed to serve educational communities in Panama. In January of 2002, the ProEd Foundation sprang into action with the launch of the *Students Supporting Students* community service project. The 35 private high school students and a handful of adult volunteers pioneered a 9-year odyssey that enlisted the support of over 300 students and

the refurbishing of dozens of classrooms in disadvantaged public schools in Panama City. In 2005, a second program: *Teachers Teaching Teachers* (TTT) was piloted, offering public and private school teachers the opportunity to collaborate together in a professional learning community. In 2010, TTT became the primary focus of the ProEd Foundation, offering educators 40-hours of professional development during the school year within the ProEd Professional Learning Community. I maintain an active role as CEO of the ProEd Foundation and lead facilitator in the research, design, facilitation and evaluation of the TTT professional development workshops.

My doctoral journey (a pending life goal) began in 2009 when I entered the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) program at the University of Missouri – Columbia. When I am not studying, teaching or rescuing stray dogs and cats, I can be found “exploring the earth” with Nick, my wonderful husband of 30 years.