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**Differentiating Professional Development for Teacher Success  
A Study of Effective Teachers**

Sandra Lynn Austin

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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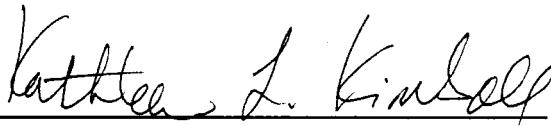
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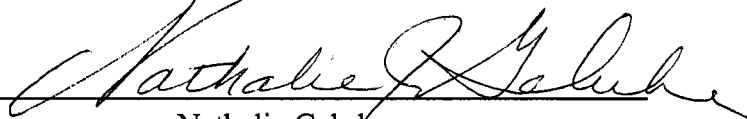
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**Abstract**

Differentiating Professional Development for Teacher Success  
A Study of Effective Teachers

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The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of how, if at all, Nooksack Valley School District's theory of action for improving literacy instruction impacts the success of three high performing elementary literacy teachers. The specific questions that frame this study are:

*Why do high achieving Nooksack Valley elementary literacy teachers attain academic success with the majority of their students year after year? More specifically, what is the relationship, if any, between these elementary literacy teachers' success and the district's efforts to improve teaching practices in literacy?*

The study is intended to enhance the district's efforts to increase the quality of decisions and accompanying plans to improve the practices of teachers and success of students throughout the system. Although the district has a stated theory of action that is used to guide decisions, we do not know whether the initiatives accompanying this theory of action are related in any way to a rationale articulated by the district's highest performing teachers as to why they are successful with virtually all students. If the district's actions are relevant for their success, we want to know what these actions were and how they contribute. Inversely, if the district actions have not been relevant, we want to know what factors do contribute to their success.

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## Chapter 1

### The District's Role in the Development and Support of Highly Effective Teachers

#### The Problem

There have been numerous changes in the Nooksack Valley School District (hereafter “the district”) over the past ten years. The traditional jobs in farming, fishing, and timber are diminishing. Student enrollment overall is declining, but there is an increase over the past ten years in the district’s Hispanic and special education populations, as well as an increase in the percentage of students living in poverty. The district also faces a difficult financial situation. The resources collected per student through the local levy are significantly lower than state averages, putting the district twenty-ninth out of thirty-three districts in the region and lowest in the seven-district county. Conversely, taxpayers in the district pay the highest rate per thousand dollars of assessed valuation in the county. This financial difference has been growing steadily over the past five years, and is projected to continue to grow. In spite of these challenges, the district, as measured by traditional state assessments, is doing well.

When looking at state WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) trend data over the past five years, it appears that the district is making progress. The district, as identified as by Standard and Poor’s School Evaluation Services, outperformed other like districts. An outperforming district, by their definition, is one that has significantly higher percentages of students in the aggregate who are proficient or above on state reading and math tests than other school districts in Washington with similar levels of poverty. But, when scrutinizing the data in more detail the picture

changes. When disaggregating student achievement data by ethnic group and socioeconomic status, it is clear that our poor and minority children are not provided an equitable education. Furthermore, when analyzing graduation rates, the percentage of students with the courses and credits to successfully attend a community or four-year college or technical school, a more startling problem emerges. Regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status, many of our students are not prepared to continue their education past high school. Of the ninety-nine students in the 2005 senior class, only forty-one percent were eligible to enter a four-year college in Washington State. In the graduating class of 2006 only twenty-five percent of the students are going to be college eligible. The district's theory of action for improving this situation for students begins with the belief that the district's fundamental responsibility is to ensure school success for each child. In the district this means that each student leaves the school system with the knowledge, skills, courses, and preparation needed to be ready for a post-secondary education.

Second, the district's theory of action rests on a research-based understanding that in order to reach this goal, children need highly effective teachers throughout their school career. As Haycock (1998) has noted, highly effective teachers are those who consistently produce student-learning gains. In an analysis of 900 Texas school districts, researcher Ronald Ferguson found that teachers' expertise, as measured by scores on a licensing examination, masters degrees, and experience, accounted for about forty percent of the measured variance in students' reading and mathematics achievement at grades one through eleven, more than any other single factor (Ferguson, summer 1991). Other research has suggested the "single most dominant factor affecting student academic gain

is teacher effect” (Sanders and Rivers 1996, pg.6). As Darling-Hammond further notes, “no other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable, skillful teacher can make in the learning process” (Darling-Hammond 1997, pg.8). It is very clear that what teachers know and are able to do in the classroom with their children each and every day makes a significant difference in the quality of a child’s education and future possibilities (Darling-Hammond 1997). Most poignantly, the advantage of having a highly effective teacher for three consecutive years is extreme – Fifty percentile points difference in mathematics achievement (Sanders and Rivers 1996). As Haycock notes, this difference in achievement “can represent the difference between a remedial label and placement in an accelerated or even gifted track and the difference between entry into a selective college and a lifetime at McDonalds” (Haycock 1998, pg.4).

Third, the district’s theory of action is rooted in the expectation that these rigorous new demands will require that all teachers, even those considered “experts” in their prior years of practice, continue to learn to teach in very different ways. They will need to provide opportunities for an ever more diverse student population to analyze and solve challenging problems unique to the various content areas, apply their knowledge to real world contexts, and be able to share their knowledge with others. “To do this, teachers must understand how their students think as well as what they know. They need a deep knowledge of subject matter and a wide repertoire of teaching strategies combined with intimate knowledge of students’ growth, experience, and development” (Darling-Hammond 1997, pg.32).

Consistent with this theory of action, over the past several years the district provided numerous opportunities for teachers to learn and improve their practice. Much

of this work focused specifically on the improvement of literacy teaching. These initiatives are based on the body of research on effective professional development strategies. We made the assumption, based upon ongoing evaluation of these professional development efforts, that the initiatives are impacting practice, and consequently student achievement. Yet we have not looked carefully at our most successful teachers and determined how, if at all, these opportunities impacted practice and student achievement for our best teachers.

### The Purpose and Need for This Study

In order to explore the relationship between teacher learning and professional development, this study focuses on three highly effective elementary literacy teachers. Reading assessment data show, over a period of five years, that more than 80 percent of these teachers' students consistently meet reading standards. In addition, each teacher was identified by their principal as being the most successful teacher in their school. The purpose of this study is to better understand, through the perceptions of these teachers, and observations of their classroom practice, why they are successful. In particular, we want their perspectives on which district initiatives, if any, have positively impacted their practice. The hope is that through this exploration we will have better information on the attributes of successful teachers, how they learn, and what the district can do to further support teachers' success.

Although our district obviously can directly benefit by the information, other districts could benefit as well. District leaders who are developing plans to improve student achievement, especially in the area of literacy, could use this information to

enhance their theory of action. They may be able to incorporate into their emerging plans the experiences and actions of successful teachers, including what experiences these teachers believe impacted their practice most significantly. Finally, from this research, additional ideas may emerge that stimulate further study on how districts can more effectively support teacher learning and student success.

### Overview of the Study

Although this study focuses on a district's professional development efforts, it derives from the district leadership's understanding that many children, particularly poor and minority children are not achieving as they need to be, and that it is teacher expertise that can make the difference. Therefore, a district's main function is to improve the quality of teachers throughout the system. These improvement efforts are not separate from the act of teaching itself but embedded in the process of teaching. Therefore the content of professional development is not the only factor to consider; *how* the professional development is structured and implemented is critical. Because our goal is to have effective teachers in every class for every child every day, this study focuses on three teachers who have achieved this goal.

The following chapters are organized as follows: Chapter 2 focuses on the existing literature on effective professional development practices and the role of the district in implementing those practices; Chapter 3 describes the rationale for the methodology, the procedures, and processes of analysis; Chapter 4, 5, and 6 discuss the three cases of highly effective teachers; and Chapter 7 is a cross case analysis. The study

concludes with a discussion of how the findings could impact the professional development efforts in the district.

## Chapter 2

### A Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study is to examine why certain elementary literacy teachers consistently realize high levels of student achievement, and the relationship, if any, between the success of these teachers and the district's efforts to improve literacy instruction. The literature reviewed pertaining to this question includes the following topics: effective professional development practices; the role of district in promoting effective professional development practices; and professional development with a specific focus on literacy. This chapter concludes with a description of the professional development initiatives in literacy in the district and the relationship to the literature available on similar structures in other districts.

#### Effective Professional Development Practices

If a standards based system demands that all children meet expected, common standards and if we recognize that teachers' level of knowledge and skill make a significant difference in the quality of a child's education and future possibilities, then district leaders have an obligation to know and implement the most effective professional development practices possible throughout the system (Darling-Hammond 1997). Effective professional development is grounded in learning theories that help explain how people – adults or children – best learn.

The patterns of learning lie in constructivism, a concept underlying theories of how children, adults, and even organizations learn (Lambert, Walker et al. 2002).

Constructivist learning involves bringing past experiences and beliefs into the process of learning and then interacting and interpreting new ideas and events. By inquiring about problems of practice, learners construct new meaning, building new knowledge into the process. “This constructive, interpretative work is facilitated and deepened when it is undertaken with others and with reflection” (Lambert 2002, pg. xvii).

This vision of learning requires that teachers involve themselves as learners by actively participating in a social context. Explaining further, Catherine Fosnot (Fosnot 1996), relying on the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, describes learning as,

a self-regulatory process of struggling with conflict between existing personal models of the world and discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as a human meaning-making venture with culturally developed tools and symbols, and further negotiating such meaning through cooperative social activity, discourse and debate. (Fosnot, 1999. ix)

This social setting becomes the locus for an individual’s learning. In this social context, teachers reflect critically on their practice and construct new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners.

Quoting from the American Institutes of Research/SRI International (2002), Fouts Director of the Washington School Research Center at Seattle Pacific University and Abbott further defines constructivist learning as: The idea that people learn better by actively constructing knowledge and by reconciling new information with previous knowledge. The theory, based on the work in psychology, philosophy, and anthropology, rests on several assumptions: 1) some of our notions of what constitutes “knowledge” may be culturally constructed, rather than truth or fact; 2) knowledge is distributed

among group members and the knowledge of the group is greater than the sum of the knowledge of individuals; and 3) learning is an active rather than passive process of knowledge construction” (Abbott and Fouts 2003).

These adult learning theories can best be adhered to when the professional development occurs in learner centered environments where adults engage in challenging content, discover new ideas, and communicate their understanding to others. In the broadest sense, professional learning communities are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, and a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott et al. 2002). In a school setting these communities can be viewed as the entire group of *professionals* coming together for *learning* about how to support student achievement within a supportive, self-created *community* (Morrissey 2000).

Professional learning communities emerge from norms of collaboration and inquiry that are focused on actual changes in the teaching practices that support student learning. Little (1982) and Rosenholtz (1991) have documented that the norms of collaboration are built through the interactions of staff created by the principal’s facilitation of collegial work. Little (1982) documented that these norms were built as daily routines of isolation were replaced by talking, critiquing, and working together. In Rosenholtz’s study (1991), in schools that were collaborative the teachers perceived the principal to be “supportive and concerned with treating any problems as collective school-wide opportunities for learning. In isolated settings teachers and principals were alienated, with teachers feeling that any request they make of them threatened the principal’s feeling of self esteem” (Lieberman, Saxl et al. 1988 pg.152).

These studies indicate that building professional learning communities is a complicated process and is greatly influenced by the skills, abilities, and supports the leaders use to establish the culture and corresponding norms for these communities to develop and thrive. Because of these complexities in creating and sustaining these learning communities, it is apparent that the district has a significant role to play.

#### The Role of the District in Promoting Described Professional Development Practices

*A large task confronts educational leaders and scholars who wish to imagine more powerful ways to guide teaching and learning from the district level. We need more powerful frameworks for conceptualizing what the district is and does, how thinking and action from the central office and school board can permeate the teaching environment, and thereby how the district can positively shape the work and careers of its teaching force. (Hightower and Knapp 2002)*

There is little research on highly effective districts. Elmore states, “Considering the magnitude of the task posed by standards-based reform for local school districts and schools, there is shockingly little research and documentation of institutional design and practice in exceptionally high-performing school districts” (Elmore 2000, pg.29). In the research that is available there is emerging evidence that the district does matter in improving student performance. Research conducted by the Learning First Alliance noted that:

Heroic principals who turn around low-performing schools, innovative charter schools that break established molds, inspiring teachers who motivate students to excel - while such efforts may mean brighter educational futures for the children involved, they produce isolated islands of excellence. (Togneri 2003, pg.1)

Preliminary findings suggest that individual schools cannot sustain change without the support of the district (Elmore 2000). There have been exceptional superintendents who have, on occasion, been able to jump-start sweeping reforms. But upon their departure, these reforms, never having really infiltrated practices of teachers, often disintegrate upon the leader's departure (Copland 2002). It is only when the entire school district is focused on sustainable educational improvements that children's lives during their time in school and into the future can be significantly impacted (Togneri 2003). More recent research conducted by McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) over a four-year period on three reforming California districts offers new evidence of the positive effects on improved student outcomes. The research suggests that the district as the unit of change is essential to reform efforts.

The limited district research that is available on this topic goes beyond claiming that the district matters. More specifically, the findings are indicating common attributes among districts that are making efforts to change in order to incorporate the demands of a standards-based system. Elmore describes these attributes as "Design Principles for Large-Scale Improvement in School Systems." Although broad in scope, Elmore claims that these general principles need to be in place in order to promote the development of teachers' professional practices. Under this set of design principles districts: maintain a tight instructional focus over time; routinize accountability for practice and performance in face-to-face relationships; reduce isolation and open practice up to direct observation, analysis, and criticism; exercise differential treatment based on performance and capacity, *not* on volunteerism; and base administrative control on performance of students and teachers, not generalized rules about centralization and decentralization

(Elmore 2000). A general theme throughout these design principles is that all the participants in the system are learners and the practices for all in the system become public.

One thing is clear. Schools and systems that are improving directly and explicitly confront the issue of isolation embedded in loose coupling. Administrators, both system-level and school-level, are routinely engaged in direct observation of practice in schools and classrooms; they have mastered ways of talking about practice that allow for non-threatening support, criticism, and judgment (Elmore 2000, pg.32). It is also clear that successful districts do not allow individuals in these systems to opt out of these reform initiatives.

In system wide improvement, schools don't get to choose whether they participate or not ... Allowing schools to choose whether they participate is tantamount to returning to old principles of loose coupling, in which improvement occurs in small pockets captured by faithful adherents to some instructional approach and never influences the rest of the system. (Elmore 2000, pg.24)

McLaughlin and Talbert, based upon their case study research, indicate key conditions that characterize reforming districts: a system approach to reform, a learning community at the central office level, coherent focus on teaching and learning, a stance of supporting professional learning and instructional improvement, and data-base inquiry and accountability.

These districts engender shared norms of reform practice across schools through system-wide communication and strategic planning, and the central office continually improves its support of schools' reform efforts through data-based

inquiry and learning. A reforming district takes *itself* as the focus for change and has a clear theory of change for the system. (McLaughlin and Talbert 2003, pg.10)

In a recent review of much of the literature available on the district's role in educational change, Stephen Anderson (2003) found common initiatives across successful districts. These initiatives included much of Elmore's and McLaughlin and Talbert's thinking. Part of Anderson's findings on the common characteristics among successful districts included: a district-wide focus on student achievement and the quality of instruction; a multi-measure accountability system and system-wide use of data to inform practice, to hold school and district leaders accountable for results, and to monitor progress; and district-wide job-embedded professional development that emphasized teamwork and professional community (Anderson 2003).

The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), a network of reforming schools and districts, studied schools and districts since 1995. The collaborative is committed to improving the academic performance of all Bay Area students and eliminating the achievement gaps between student groups. BASRC works with educators from a diverse network of schools and districts. They seek to provide education leaders, including teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members, with access to the ideas, tools, and supports they need to make continuous improvement "business as usual" in public education (Bay Area School Reform Collaborative 2002). As part of their work, they disseminate information to districts across the country. One way they accomplish this goal is to share lessons learned from innovative and effective districts, schools, and classrooms. In the area of professional development, they identify

critical district elements that develop, support, and sustain improved teaching practices. These elements corroborate the findings from other research and experience of successful districts. In successful districts, professional development is aligned with the district focus and designed to improve instruction for all children and accelerate the achievement of low-performing students, is regularly evaluated and adjusted to provide activities that help teachers better meet the needs of their students, and takes place regularly and in many forms, including on-site training, modeling, practice, coaching, and feedback. Time is also allotted for professional discussion of practice and collaboration on instructional issues.

The Learning First Alliance studied five high-poverty districts where student achievement was improving. This study also recognized that these districts focused on teaching and learning and had coherent district-organized professional development strategies to improve instruction. These districts were moving from fragmented, short-term professional development practices to deliberate research based principles of professional development, widespread use of data in decision-making, and clear connections between district goals and school-level practices (Togneri 2003).

Throughout all of these descriptions and lists of characteristics of successful districts, the most evident similarities are that successful districts are focused on teaching and learning and are determined to develop “professional learning communities” or “communities of practice” at every level of the organization while continuing to effectively manage many of the essential bureaucratic functions that are necessary to run a school system. Amy Hightower offers a clear explanation of a learning community as it pertains to the work in school districts.

Learning community means a relatively flat and decentralized organizational arrangement driven by compelling leaders; interdependent relationships; and the evolution of knowledge, ideas, and beliefs in interactive heterogeneous groups. Learning community members receive frequent performance feedback and use these data points for reflection and refinement of practice in communal settings and for making decisions about organizational practice. (Hightower 2002, pg.4)

Successful districts do not wander into this organizational pattern, but intentionally lead the district in instructional renewal (Hightower 2002).

Taken together, these studies indicate that in order to improve teaching and learning, successful districts have an unwavering focus on instruction through the design of professional development structures that are designed to: reduce isolation, increase collaboration, use data in an ongoing manner, and hold staff members accountable for student results. The studies point to the realization that the most viable structure for this type of professional development is the creation of learning communities in every aspect of the organization.

### Professional Development and Literacy

In addition to the structure and context of professional development, a significant part of the equation is the content. Districts can adopt a multitude of instructional frameworks. With regard to literacy instruction a division of thought and research exists among those that believe that a balanced approach is more effective than a direct instruction, skills-based approach. In order to understand the relationship between the district's professional development efforts and the success of the teachers in this study, it

seems necessary to understand the instructional practices they are using in the classroom and the alignment between their practices and what the district stipulates as the most effective instructional method for optimal student achievement in literacy. After reviewing the literature on student achievement, the district believes it is possible for children to become thoughtful readers; students who read, write, and think in complex and critical ways rather than students who merely read and recall (Allington and Johnston 2000).

In order to develop an organization where all students can become thoughtful readers, leaders need to know and understand how children best learn and the corresponding instructional designs needed to advance their learning. A considerable body of research in this area comes from the work of the National Research Council as described in *How People Learn – Bridging Research and Practice* (Bransford, Brown et al. 1999). The three key findings from this study are:

1. Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom.
2. To develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must: have a deep foundation of factual knowledge; understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework; and organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application.

3. A “metacognitive” approach to instruction can help students learn to take control of their own learning by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them (Bransford, Brown et al. 1999).

These learning principles seem simple, but have thought-provoking implications if students are going to internalize what we are expecting them to learn. These implications necessitate that teachers:

- activate and use prior knowledge of students,
- teach some concepts in depth, providing opportunities for active inquiry and student engagement while providing an organizational framework to retrieve and use new knowledge,
- teach and use metacognitive skills - modeling thinking, setting goals, and monitoring progress, and
- emphasize that learning and growth are based upon student effort, not upon luck or innate abilities.

The National Research Council creates a framework for how these principles interrelate and can be organized in the classroom. The classroom is learner centered, which means that teachers “pay careful attention to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that learners bring to the educational setting” (Bransford 2000, pg.133). Learner centered also implies classrooms are responsive to various cultures as well as diverse language and learning needs. The classroom is knowledge centered, which implies that students are focused on deeply learning and applying expected academic standards. Additionally the classroom is assessment centered. In an assessment centered classroom teachers use both formative and summative assessments to provide ongoing feedback to

students and to guide their next steps in instruction. Some of these assessments would be performance based, requiring students to create demonstrations of what they know and are able to do. Finally all students work together so they can be community centered environments. In community centered classrooms, students work together to develop a supportive, collaborative learning community. The classroom community also builds connections to families and the broader community as a way to support and deepen student learning (Bransford, Brown et al. 1999).

These practices can be conceptualized and applied when teaching literacy. What would we expect to see in a learner centered literacy environment? Teachers in these classrooms realize students do not automatically move from pronouncing words to comprehending meaning. They do not assume that writing well occurs after students understand spelling, punctuation, and the parts of speech. They know that the process of reading and writing also develops students' knowledge and thinking skills (Allington and Cunningham 2002). In order to develop these skills in a learner centered literacy classroom, the teacher pays close attention to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes learners bring with them (Bransford, Brown et al. 1999).

The most important factor in determining how well readers will comprehend and how well writers will be able to communicate about a given topic is their level of knowledge about that topic. According to schema theory, prior knowledge provides a schema – a framework or structure that helps thinking (Allington and Cunningham 2002, pg.44). Without activating and using prior knowledge, students will be able to read words but will have a difficult time understanding text, especially on an unfamiliar topic. Another reason to activate prior knowledge is to bring misconceptions to the surface and

provide experiences to correct these misconceptions. The teacher also has to know the impact of cultural differences on prior knowledge and pay attention to how these differences could influence understanding.

Additionally, teachers who develop a learner centered classroom pay close attention to the individual needs of students in order to provide reading materials that are at the instructional level students need to succeed – with the right amount of ease and challenge at the same time. Students may be able to decode text that is too difficult, but they will not be able to improve their comprehension of the text. “Children who can read the words but can’t understand what they are reading are not really reading” (Allington and Cunningham 2002, pg.45). Too difficult text that is read but not understood, along with lack of understanding as to what the reader brings to the text, creates students who may perform well on reading assessments through third grade where the emphasis is primarily on the skills of reading versus knowledge and understanding of text. It also creates a knowledge deficit that is apparent beginning in fourth grade and often continues through high school.

Not only do effective literacy teachers pay attention to the learner, they also pay close attention to what they are teaching, why they are teaching it, and what it looks like when students reach targeted objectives (Bransford, Brown et al. 1999). Knowledge centered classrooms emphasize understanding versus just doing. In knowledge centered literacy classrooms an observer would see a balance between word study and comprehension work. Effective literacy teachers, beginning in the primary grades, realize that reading requires children not only to decode and study words, but to analyze and interact with the text to gain meaning. In the past many educators believed that if students

could pronounce words, then meaning would automatically follow. The result was that children could read words but could not think while reading and therefore could not deeply comprehend the text. Effective teachers today know that remembering is not understanding. Recalling the names of characters does not mean that the students understand their intentions or motivations (Allington and Cunningham 2002). Teachers in these effective literacy classrooms would be engaging children in discussion, conversation, reflection, and revisions of their thinking based upon a deep comprehension of the text (Taylor, Peterson et al. 2002).

In order for students to interact with text at this level, they benefit by a substantial amount of modeling, explaining, and demonstrating. “Modeling, explaining, and demonstrating are essential teaching activities if all children are to learn to read and write” (Allington and Cunningham 2002, pg.47). These activities are essential at all levels – when students are just learning to read and when they are working to comprehend more complex text. When all three teaching activities are used together, students have a clearer picture of how to set goals and monitor progress and what to do to gain full understanding when reading independently.

The literacy classroom is also assessment centered. Assessments in these classrooms are designed for teachers to plan instruction and for teachers and students to set goals and evaluate their progress. Teachers know the purposes and uses of formative as well as summative assessments, know how to put students at the center as users of assessment information, and know which forms of assessment need to be used based on the objectives of the lesson. These various forms could range from selected response tests to reading records to observations to student portfolios (Flippo 2003).

Highly effective literacy classrooms require a supportive, caring, learning community among the adults and students. In this community centered environment a positive social tone where all members of the classroom support each other's work and ideas is evident. It is an environment where students take intellectual risks without fear of ridicule. Students recognize what quality work looks like and, when they produce quality work, their accomplishments are recognized and celebrated. In these environments, an observer sees students working together and supporting each other's learning, students knowing enough about each other to share books that would be of special interest, and students helping the teacher develop next steps in their instruction.

When viewed together the literature indicates that a district focused on teaching and learning has an obligation to initiate professional development strategies aligned to how adults' best learn which is characterized by environments that establish and nurture communities of practice. In these communities, professionals study data to uncover why particular students are not achieving as expected, design strategies to improve achievement, analyze the effects of the intervention, and make adjustments until each child is successful. The instructional practices and interventions are based upon the best instructional and content knowledge to date.

With this summary of the literature in mind, and to provide the district context for the case studies that follow, the next section describes the professional development initiatives in place in the district.

## Professional Development in Literacy in the District

For the past three years, the district's professional development plan focused on literacy instruction. This single minded focus is based on the knowledge that instructional change is easy to talk about but difficult to implement and sustain in the classroom every day. It is daunting to develop the knowledge and skills to implement instructional improvements in all areas at once. Limiting the number of instructional areas and practices to focus on also maintains coherence within the system. In studying district-wide achievement, Richard Elmore (2000) found that that maintenance of a tight instructional focus sustained over a longer period time is evident in successful districts.

Systemic change can't occur simultaneously in all parts of the system, nor is it possible to ask teachers to change instructional practice on all dimensions of their work simultaneously. It is possible, however, to create the expectation that system-wide changes can occur in certain domains and that over time these changes can reach progressively more content areas and more teachers. (Elmore and Burney 1997, pg.8)

Before any professional development began, the district established guidelines for literacy instruction. In alignment with the research the district ascribes to, the literacy guidelines do not rely on script or programs but are based on the development of lessons aligned with student needs. This requires that teachers have in-depth knowledge of children, grade level expectations, resources, and most importantly, effective literacy instructional practices that align with the district's literacy guidelines.

Before professional plans were designed and resources allocated, district leaders spent time studying successful schools and districts with a focus on effective professional development strategies, specifically in literacy. The practices in New York's District 2 and San Diego Unified School District were part of the district's study. District leaders learned that successful literacy efforts provided a wide variety of learning opportunities that engaged staff in solving real problems using their experiences, outside expertise, and collaboration with others. Once these characteristics of effective professional development practices were understood, the district was better able to create the opportunities and conditions to increase the capacity of teachers across the district.

The professional development activities are designed in the context of the teachers' current realities and ongoing problems of practice within a clearly defined district focus. Throughout the district, the learning activities are designed by teachers and principals based upon an analysis of the differences between actual student performance and student learning. Professional learning communities are developing in many school sites. They study how to improve instructional practices to address the problems students are having in meeting achievement goals. Many of these professional learning communities participate in a regular cycle of inquiry, analyzing student achievement data, developing supports for the students not meeting standards, putting the supports into place, rechecking student progress, and adjusting the plans if progress is not occurring. If the learning outcomes are not achieved, some of the learning communities bring in outside expertise, visit more successful schools or classrooms, or attend outside conferences or workshops. These new learnings are brought back to the entire group for consideration and implementation. The goal of the learning communities is to continually

challenge existing beliefs and practices through study and consideration of new knowledge with the hope that new knowledge and expertise is constructed and used to create additional interventions to help unsuccessful students reach expected standards.

Most recently, twenty-two teachers, known as “studio teachers,” worked with an outside consultant to further improve their instructional practices in literacy. They spent one and a half days a month studying and applying the components of a balanced literacy approach. They observed the consultant and each other applying these learnings in their classrooms. Eventually these studio teachers will work with the principal to support the learning of other teachers. This support will be designed to follow a gradual release of responsibility model, modeled after a design utilized in New York’s District 2. The gradual release of responsibility model allows for various forms of support depending upon the skill of the teacher. For example, when a skill is completely new, the teacher observes other classrooms to get a sense of what the instruction looks like and attends district sponsored workshops to gain an understanding of the philosophy and how the literacy components fit together. Once teachers have some understanding, they can work with a studio teacher to receive assistance in implementing these practices in their classroom. Once they are more competent, teachers work more independently. The plan is that all teachers will eventually become teacher/leaders in the building or a mentor to a teacher new to the district. The goal of this professional development model is to develop in-house expertise in order to continue to develop highly skilled teachers of literacy who are teaching in alignment with the district’s Literacy Guide.

It is important to note that the key to the success of this model is that professional development is embedded in the actual work of day-to-day teaching. Just as the heart of

the district's reading program is that children learn to read by reading, not by working on discrete reading skills, it is the district's belief that teachers learn to teach by teaching, not by attending workshops or reading a manual. Just like the district believes that the best way to help children learn to read is to provide appropriately challenging texts and exactly the right kind and amount of assistance, the district also similarly believes that teachers learn through the appropriate type and amount of assistance.

Similar to the professional development initiatives in District 2, professional development is also provided for principals. They participate in a variety of learnings around literacy from observing exemplary teachers to reading text together to determine what teachers would be doing with students if the text were effectively taught in the classroom.

The message from the district is clear. It is our responsibility to ensure student success as defined by the district's mission of graduating each student ready for college, work, and citizenship. In order for each child to achieve, all teachers have to incorporate the most highly effective instruction strategies into their practice. Once these instructional strategies are in place, teachers are expected to regularly and collaboratively review student data, focus on the students who are not making progress, and continually make adjustments until all are reaching expected standards. It is the district's obligation to provide the supports necessary for this to occur.

## Chapter 3

### Research Design and Methodology

#### Rationale

This research focuses on the perceptions of three high performing elementary literacy teachers and how they came to experience success with the majority of their students year after year. The study also explores the relationship, if any, between their success and the district's efforts to improve student learning. To answer these questions I chose to do case studies using a grounded theory approach to coding and analysis as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The following is the rationale for choosing this approach.

In reviewing the literature on successful districts, there are studies that research the correlation between district actions and student achievement (Anderson 2003; Fouts 2003; Abbott, Baker et al. 2004). The data for these aforementioned studies is collected from many stakeholders in the system including teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members. However, these studies do not focus on gathering data from those closest to the classrooms that are the most successful – that is, those teachers who have the majority of students in their classrooms consistently meet expected standards. If student success is the primary criterion for identifying a district as successful, I thought it would be informative to focus on the most successful teachers in the system. In order to fulfill this purpose, a multiple case study using a grounded theory approach as developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is the most applicable because it allows for inductive development of theory from observations and interviews without

presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be (Patton 2002). This is critical since this study takes place in the district where I make decisions. Although absolute objectivity is impossible to realize, a grounded theory approach enabled me to step back and critically analyze the existing data, mitigating the temptation to simply look for information that confirms that the district's approaches are effective.

While determining the influence, if any, of the district's efforts on teacher success is a major purpose of this study, I also wanted to gain an understanding of other factors that may have influenced their success. To accomplish this purpose, I had to spend enough time with each teacher to reveal the dimensions that they perceive contribute to their success that, at times, went unrecognized by the participants themselves. Similar to the portraits of good high schools that Sara Lawrence Lightfoot described (Lightfoot 1983), in these descriptions I wanted to capture the characteristics, beliefs and values, instructional practices, and other influences these teachers had in common. The case study method allowed for this type of in-depth understanding.

Consistent with a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990) data were collected, coded, and continually analyzed until concepts, categories, and suppositions developed that began to offer insights on these teachers' success. Based upon the information that emerged, the case study using grounded theory methodology allowed flexibility. When it became apparent that information from these teachers' learning partner or principal was needed to add clarity or add another dimension to the information, interviews were added. When specific classroom data were needed, additional observations occurred. The methodology also allowed me to collect

information while the teachers were working and then check my findings with the teachers directly to make sure my perceptions were accurate.

### Description of Sites

Each of the three teachers was selected from one of the district's three elementary schools. These elementary schools have many traits in common, yet have differences that were considered in the selection of teachers. The three elementary schools are situated in a small rural district of 1,700 students. The district is 30 percent Hispanic and 75 percent White. Approximately 50 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, 13 percent of the students qualify for special education, and 7 percent are in an English Language Learner Program (hereafter referred to as ELL). There are 113 certificated teachers across the district. Sixty-four percent have a Masters Degree.

The elementary schools' populations have been relatively stable over the past ten years. Mountain View Elementary School has 250 students, Sunnyside has 200 students and Cascade has 300 students. Students attending these schools represent a diverse range of ability and backgrounds. Consistent with district averages, each school's special education population is approximately 13 percent. Cascade and Sunnyside have a Hispanic population of approximately 15 percent, while in Mountain View the Hispanic population is 30 percent. Cascade's and Sunnyside's students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch population total approximately 45 percent, while in Mountain View the total is approximately 60 percent. The reading and writing Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores in all three schools, until 2004, have been similar over the past three years with approximately 75 percent of all fourth grade students meeting

expected standards in reading and 70 percent in writing. The 2005 WASL test results for Cascade Elementary have increased in comparison with the other elementary schools, with over 90 percent meeting expected standards in reading and over 80 percent in writing.

The majority of the teachers in all three elementary schools have been teaching in the district ten years or longer. Teacher turnover is limited; over the past five years only five teachers were hired in as new employees. Of these teachers only three were new to the profession. All schools have principals who have been in the district for five years or more. One principal has worked in the district for over twenty-years, another for eight years, and the third is entering her fifth year.

Over the past four years, principals and teachers from all three schools participated in professional development opportunities, both internal and external to the district. Consistent with district direction, each school's improvement plan focused on literacy and assessment for the past three years. All buildings had similar district support and training.

#### Selection of Teachers

These teachers chosen for this study were Diane, Anne, and Carrie. They were selected based upon the following criteria:

##### *Longevity*

These teachers have been in the district for at least the past five years. This provided enough time for them to have had multiple opportunities to be affected by or participate in some or all of the district's most recent initiatives. This time frame also

provided an opportunity to determine the trajectory of each teacher's success with students meeting standards.

### *Teacher of Literacy*

Selected teachers all spent some portion of their day teaching literacy. This excluded specialists in the arts and music as well as those teachers who only teach math or science. This common instructional focus was chosen on the basis of the district's emphasis on professional development in literacy instruction.

### *Achievement Data*

The teachers were selected based upon their students' achievement data. Since Anne taught fifth grade, this data included scores from the district's Levels Reading Assessment, which is administered to students in grades three through nine every spring. The scores are reported for individual students, noting whether each is "meeting" or "not meeting" the expected grade level standards. Since the test is administered annually beginning in the third grade, individual improvement scores are also reported. At each grade level there is a suggested improvement index for the students from one grade level to the next. An analysis of the average improvement scores over time for the students who Anne instructed was used as one indicator of student success. The Developmental Reading Assessment (hereafter known as DRA) from the 2004-05 school year was also an indicator for the success of Anne's students. Anne had at least 80 percent of her students reaching standard on the Levels Test the past five years and the DRA during the immediate past year.

Scores on the DRA were used as the primary indicator of student academic success for students taught by Carrie and Diane. Both teachers had at least 80 percent of

their students reaching reading standards on this assessment. Carrie and Diane reported their classroom based assessment results regularly to their principal. Anne was also identified as highly successful by her principal, but specific academic information was not systematically shared between Anne and her principal.

### *One Teacher per School*

To represent the various contexts of the three elementary schools, only one teacher per school participated. Since there was only one male teacher at the elementary level, gender was ruled out as a selection criterion.

### *Principal Identification*

Based upon achievement data, longevity, identification as a teacher of literacy, and the stipulation of one teacher per school, principals selected the teachers and invited them to participate voluntarily in the study. Once identified, I met with these teachers and explained the conditions of the study (time involved, activities of the study, benefits to their practice, etc.). All agreed to participate.

## Data Collection

Data were collected through repeated interviews conducted with the participants, as well as through interviews of the participants' principals and their teaching colleagues. The interview data were corroborated with classroom observations.

### *Interviews*

An initial individual interview was conducted. Questions during this interview were intentionally broad, so as to surface ideas that were further explored during follow-up interviews. Using an initial interview protocol developed to focus the interview (See

Appendix A), teachers were asked questions such as: To what do you attribute the strong academic success of your students over the past five years? How did you, individually or as a group, contribute to this success? What other supports contributed to your success? If you were in another district, do you think you would have been as successful? A follow-up interview was conducted with each of the participants. The purpose of this second interview was to clarify and expand on responses given during the first interview focused on their sources of learning (See Appendix C). Informal interviews were used throughout the duration of the study.

Individual interviews were also conducted with the school principals (See Appendix B). The purpose of these interviews was to corroborate the data surfacing from the teachers and to gain any additional information. This interview included questions such as: Why do you think that (the teacher in your school) is successful with students year after year? How has your work as principal changed over the last five years? As a principal what part do you think you played in her success? This information was woven into the developing concepts and followed up via subsequent interviews with the teachers.

After the initial and follow-up interviews with the participants and their principals, interviews with the participants' closest colleagues were conducted. These colleagues were identified by each participant as the person with whom they had worked most closely on instruction, curriculum, and assessment. The purpose of these interviews was to generate data on the participants' perceptions of success and how their interactions influenced each other's practice.

Following the guidelines for conducting an inductive study rooted in concepts from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990), I analyzed and compared information during each stage of the process and scheduled follow-up interviews accordingly. These interviews took place as needed throughout the duration of the study, which occurred from January 2005 through May 2005. These follow-up interviews built upon each other and deepened previous conversations. The interviews were designed for each participant, but focused on confirming or negating emerging categories. In order to ask open-ended questions based on previous information and avoid questions that led the participants to a position I deemed favorable, I worked from a list of question-asking structures and strategies instead of a list of written questions (Agar 1980). These strategies kept the focus on questions that are open-ended, neutral, singular, and clear (Patton 2002).

#### *Documents*

In addition to collecting interview data, I reviewed meeting minutes from the pertinent grade-level and school committees, district task forces, as well as professional development sessions. Although limited (the minutes from these meetings recorded group decisions and only rarely were the comments linked to one participant or another), the references related to this study helped confirm the involvement of two of the participants in district decisions regarding curriculum, instruction and assessment, and the leadership roles they played with other colleagues.

#### *Observations*

Observations for this study were critical because they helped me understand the specific contexts in which the teachers worked, to substantiate the findings related to their perceptions (especially in the area of instructional practices), to record actual behavior

(not what people say they do or believe they do), and to record behavior as it occurred. These observations also served as a reference point for further specificity in follow-up interviews consistent with techniques suggested by Merriam (1998). These observations took place during classroom instruction and, to a lesser extent, during school and district meetings and professional development activities.

### Quality of Data and Inquiry

#### *Internal Validity/Credibility*

I considered the quality of data when I first studied the concept of internal validity as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). When checking for internal validity the authors ask the researcher to pose these questions: Do the findings make sense? Are they credible to the people we study and our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we are looking at? In order to provide for the highest level of internal validity possible using this definition as a guide, I designed the study to incorporate multiple sources of data.

The first triangulation strategy was the use of multiple sources of data to corroborate emerging phenomena. The responses during the interview were corroborated through additional interviews and, where appropriate, observations in the classroom, review of related meeting minutes, and interviews with others.

A second triangulation strategy was the use of evidence from sources gathered over a longer period of time. This strategy helped to increase the likelihood of a more accurate interpretation of data, since the analysis was based on numerous examples of

similar information. This was particularly helpful in noting instructional strategies used by Carrie and Diane.

A third triangulation strategy was the use of member checks or, as described by Yin (2003), theory triangulation. I regularly discussed my interpretation of the data with the three teachers. This helped to determine accuracy as well as give voice to the teachers involved.

#### *External Validity/Utilization*

The primary purpose of this study was to understand and corroborate the perceptions of the district's highest performing elementary literacy teachers regarding their ongoing success with students meeting standard, and more specifically, to uncover perceptions about the district's role in supporting this work. Because the sample is limited to our context, the ability to generalize the learnings to a larger group of teachers or other districts is not possible. On the other hand, the richness of detail on why these teachers are successful along with a description of their work setting and literacy practices has stimulated the thinking of leaders in the district and may stimulate thinking in other districts as well.

#### *Reliability/Dependability*

In order to ensure dependability, I tried to make sure that the participants were sharing the same information consistently from interview to interview and that the observations were following consistent patterns over time. To ensure dependability in the data collected from the participants, I asked some similar questions in the first and second interviews. My primary purpose was to add depth and richness of description to the initial responses, but I was also able to compare the first response to the second in order to make

sure that they were comparable. During the interviews, once categories emerged, I was able to determine over multiple observations, if the findings were consistent. Explaining my role in this study was also a way to ensure dependability, which was accomplished through articulating my theory of action on district change as well as noting any possible bias due to my direct involvement

### Data Analysis

Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide a systematic, organized approach to data analysis that enabled me to think logically, understand the meaning behind the data, and develop suppositions that, with further study and research, could lead to substantive theory as to why teachers in the district perceive they are successful and the role of the district in their success.

The first phase of the analytical approach was open coding. Open coding constituted the analysis process where I labeled the phenomena present in the data. Phenomena, as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) are “the central idea, event, happening, incident about which a set of actions or interactions are directed at managing” (pg. 96). Once the phenomena were identified and coded, through a constant comparative method (asking questions and comparing one set of codes to another) I identified common concepts that I eventually named and grouped into categories. I began to understand and refine these categories when I identified the properties of each phenomenon. Properties, as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), constitute the characteristics or attributes of the category. I also identified the dimensions of the properties of the category, which are the location of the properties along a continuum

(e.g. how often, at what intensity). Through a process that involved continually comparing their properties and dimensions, I integrated these initial categories into richer, more detailed common categories and corresponding subcategories. As coding progressed, I developed analytic memos, coding notes, and other brief written reflections on the data to enable me to organize and keep track of the properties and dimensions of the categories. These properties and dimensions were used during the axial and selective coding phases. During axial coding, the relationships between the categories and subcategories were established. They were used again during the selective coding phase where all the relationships between the categories and subcategories were organized into a core category; the central phenomenon around which all the other categories were integrated (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The depth of analysis was possible because of the detail present in the individual cases, which was influenced by Sara Lightfoot's (1983), description of case studies as portraits. Sara Lightfoot (1983) presents a unique way of thinking about and organizing cases into rich detailed pictures through her emphasis on portraiture. Another influence was Patricia Wasley's study on teachers who lead (1989). Wasley used a multiple case study method that includes a cross case analysis. Since I was using a similar approach, her work illustrated one way to organize and present data. Using a common, organized writing structure with all three cases helped ease the analysis process.

### *Open Coding*

Open coding, the first phase of the analytic process, initially began with analysis of data sources collected on, and from, each participant. Tape recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Following each interview, I began the analysis process by

reviewing the transcript line by line and underlining the words I thought might relate to the research questions.

To illustrate this open coding process, one particular case transpired as follows. In this instance, I first noticed a dimension and then went back to identify the phenomenon to which the dimension referred. One line of the transcript read, “the bookstores spending all day reading educational books” (A: int.2.pg.1). I underlined the word “all day.” Reading further in the text, “and it was through a lot of conversations and a lot of reading” (A: int. 2.pg.1) I underlined “a lot.” Initially, during this open coding phase, these bits of data were labeled, “time spent” because they both referred to spending a large amount of time on particular activities.

The open-coding process continued as follows. I went back through the transcript and noted what the dimension “time spent” was referring to. In the first example (the bookstores spending all day reading educational books) the dimension was referring to “reading education books” and in the second example (through a lot of conversations and a lot of reading) the dimension was referring to “conversations and reading.” Upon complete review of the entire transcript, I organized these phenomena (reading education books, conversations, reading) and developed the category, “spending time learning” because the phenomena in the category had to do with ways of learning that participants perceived to be important.

Another aspect of open coding involved making initial determinations about how to code phenomena that, on the first pass, seemed to link to similar ideas, but that subsequent passes through the data revealed nuances that were present. For instance, in the interviews there were numerous themes that referenced time (e.g. a lot, everyday, all

day, lots and lots, months), but these references to time linked to various phenomena. For example, some of the references had to do with the amount of time teachers spent trying to figure out how to plan effective lessons. These words were labeled “time planning” because they were focused on how much time it took to plan quality lessons. Another group of time ideas were labeled “time spent with students” because they were focused on how much time it took to work with a particular student not making progress.

As the analysis deepened, “time planning” was integrated into the subcategory of “setting the stage” which referred to what the teacher did before beginning a lesson. “Setting the stage” resided in the main category “instruction” because it was a part of how the teacher prepared to teach, and “time spent with students” was integrated into the subcategory of “attitude toward the teaching profession (professionalism)” because of an understanding that developed about these professionals not “watching the clock” but spending the time necessary to enable children to learn. All of these became subcategories of “personal attributes” because personal attributes referenced the attributes that a person learns or acquires through life experiences or innate personal characteristics. Being a professional is one of the attributes that these teachers perceived they acquired through their teaching experiences, learnings, as well as life experiences.

This process was repeated many times. Throughout the document, the data were “broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data” (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pg.62). As suggested by Strauss and Corbin, I closely examined the data presented in the transcripts asking myself a variety of questions such as: What is

this? What does this represent? How is this different? How frequently is this idea brought up? I continually compared one phenomenon with another and identified similarities.

In order to more fully explore the depth of what was present in the data, I looked beyond the obvious to uncover explanations that may not have been present upon initial review of the transcripts or other data sources. By using the techniques as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to enhance theoretical sensitivity (questioning, focused analysis of a single word or sentence, making comparisons), I became aware of more subtle categories that were developing. In one example, in the analytic memo I constructed after the first interview with one of the subjects, I wrote, “the word imprint comes to mind when thinking about the relationship between one of the participants and a mentor” (Memo: 3.05). In going back into the data, I reread the transcript sections that only had to do with the mentor and asked: What did I mean by writing about imprint in a memo? After reading all the transcripts together from this one participant focused only on this phenomenon, I discovered that the teaching of this mentor was the standard in which all other teaching was compared. This discovery explained a lot of the decisions and actions of this teacher and would not have been as clearly understood without utilizing the technique of questioning.

### *Axial Coding*

Whereas open coding fractured the data into concepts and categories, axial coding allowed me to put the data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Guided by the paradigm model as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to help think about the data in a more complex manner than I considered during the open coding phase, I went beyond asking questions

only about the properties and dimensions of a phenomenon, and I explored the conditions and context as well.

Conditions, as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to the events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon. Context represents, "the specific set of properties that pertain to a phenomenon; that is, the location of events or incidents pertaining to a phenomenon" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pg.101). During this process, by adding additional properties and dimensions, and by identifying the conditions and context related to a phenomenon, my goal was to develop more complex categories and link the categories into broader categories and related subcategories.

The example that follows offers one illustration of how I applied axial coding. Looking across the interviews during the open coding phase of analysis I identified a recurring phenomenon and labeled it "reading." I then took all the references to reading and grouped them together in order to identify the common properties, trying to go beyond the obvious by asking myself: What type of reading are they doing? Why are they reading? Who are they reading with? How often and how long do they spend reading? Where are they reading? When do they read? Through lines of questioning, subcategories were linked to categories by surfacing as many conditions and contexts to the phenomenon as possible. Through analysis of teachers' responses to the question "what were they reading?" some subcategories emerged, including reading children's books, reading professional journals, reading students' writing. When exploring the causal conditions, I asked myself: Why were they reading these materials? The common answer had to do with teachers' efforts to improve student achievement in reading. In analyzing

specific properties of reading, responses to the questions “Who are they reading with?” and “Where are they reading,” additional dimensions emerged. In some cases, the participants read alone, sometimes with colleagues inside the school, and sometimes with colleagues outside of the school. Looking across these subcategories it became apparent that the initial theme of “reading” broadened into a variety of related, but differing categories focused on teachers’ learning. Related to improving student achievement, the teachers repeatedly indicated that they had to spend time learning because of their professional responsibility to ensure that students were successful. The broader categories that eventually developed from the theme reading, drawing on the relationships between the conditions, phenomena, context, and consequences, were “self-guided learning,” “learning from colleagues,” “learning from outside sources,” and “instructional practices (assessing student learning)”. (See Appendix E for a graphic representation)

In another example, the word “talking” was more finely distinguished and identified in two categories; “talking with a learning partner” vs. “talking with professors.” In this case, the properties that distinguished these two concepts were expertise and location. The dimension that I asked myself about and noted was how often did the subjects either talk with their learning partners or talk with professors. These two ideas, since they surfaced in all the cases, eventually became subcategories under two different major categories. “Talking with a partner” became a subcategory of “learning from colleagues” and “talking with professors” became a subcategory of “learning from outside sources.”

Through repetition of this process the categories and subcategories I finally identified were as follows:

Major Category: Personal Characteristics Categories: attitude toward the teaching profession, enthusiasm for learning, relationships with students

Major Category: Instructional Practices Categories: setting the stage, instructional moves, assessing student progress

Major Category: Sources of Learning Categories: learning from colleagues, self-guided learning, learning from outside experts, learning from the district, learning from the principal

For purposes of this study the organizing categories are defined as follows and encompass some of the following phenomena.

Personal Characteristics: The attributes that a person learns or acquires through life experiences or innate personal characteristics. Examples of phenomena that may be in this category include persistence, curiosity, caring, etc.

Instructional Practices: The instructional practices that a teacher uses in the literacy classroom. Examples of phenomena that may be in this category include using frequent and ongoing assessments, charting of student responses, or encouraging student discourse, lesson planning, setting up a classroom community, etc.

Sources of Learning: Those activities and experiences that increase knowledge about content and skill in implementing effective instructional practices and where these ideas originated.

Self Guided Learning: Those activities and experiences that increase knowledge and skill to implement effective instructional practices that originate from activities that are done alone. Examples of phenomena that may be included in

this category include personal reflection based upon observations of students, intuition, reading professional journals, and reading children's books.

Learning from Outside Sources: Those activities and experiences that increase knowledge and skill to implement effective instructional practices that originate from sources outside of the school or district. Examples of phenomena that may be in this category include courses offered through the Educational Service District, universities, other systems (personal as well as professional), student teachers, and mentors outside of the district.

Learning from Colleagues: Those activities and experiences that increase knowledge and skill to implement effective instructional practices that originate from collaboration with colleagues. Examples of phenomena that may be in this category include working with partners to study the impact of instruction on student achievement, studying articles, books, or instructional videos with colleagues, looking at student work together, and observing each other's practice.

Learning from the Principal: Those activities and experiences that increase knowledge and skill to implement effective instructional practices that originate from principal leadership. Examples of phenomena that may fall in this category include teachers' work through acknowledgement of success, providing the resources to work together, providing feedback on instructional practices, removing external barriers, and distributing leadership opportunities.

Learning from the District: Those activities and experiences that increase knowledge and skill to implement effective instructional practices that originate from the district stance and initiatives. Examples of phenomena that may be in

this category include participating in and implementing the learnings provided by district professional development activities, time and resources to implement new learnings (release time, study materials, resource support for new initiatives), and setting district expectations for administrators and teachers.

### *Selective Coding*

It is beyond the scope of this study to generate a fully developed grounded theory, but rather my final analytic work focused on integrating the categories and subcategories that emerged during the open and axial coding process under one category that coherently explained all other categories, in order to produce an analytic story and the early elements of substantive theory that may provide guidance for further research and study toward further development of the theory. As a result of the selective coding process as explained by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the core category that the analysis pointed out to describe the perceptions of success of these teachers and the district's impact on their success was "student focused, inquiring professionals." I came to this core category, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) by developing and explicating the story line through the use of similar procedures I used during axial coding.

"Student focused" was chosen because it integrated the categories and subcategories related to the major category of instruction. These teachers felt they were responsible for student success and therefore would try a variety of individualized strategies to ensure students were successful. Their classrooms were student focused. They all believed that students had to be involved in the learning process: actively engaged, setting their own learning goals, and making sense out of the information. A positive, nurturing community was created where students could learn from each other

and explore their own thinking. Assessments were student centered. Students in these classrooms set goals and analyzed their own progress.

“Inquiring” was chosen because all of the categories and subcategories under the major category of “sources of learning” had to do with the amount of time and energy these teachers spent, regardless of the source, to study and learn to meet the needs of each child in their classroom.

“Professionals” was chosen because it integrated the categories present throughout all three major categories; personal characteristics, instructional practices, and sources of learning. Professionals are learners who work together to solve common problems of practice. They rely on professional judgment combined with their own experiences and craft knowledge and make decisions based upon the particular situation. When analyzing all the components of the categories, the attributes of a professional describe many aspects of who they are and how they teach.

The story line as shown in the paradigm will be described in Chapter 7; Cross-Case Analysis.

### Ethical Concerns

Although it was important to obtain quality information in order to answer the research questions, it was more important to contribute to an atmosphere of inquiry in our district. We see the value of trusting each other and are now able to share ideas, observe in classrooms, and inquire honestly together about instructional practices. It was my intent to enhance and deepen this emerging culture through this work without jeopardizing it in anyway. Therefore the ethical considerations were of extreme importance.

The primary ethical dilemma that I needed to reconcile was the dual role of researcher and district administrator. Because of my position in the district and because I am studying teachers who have participated in many initiatives that I am personally responsible for, I needed to solve this predicament. The first time this challenge was addressed was during the selection phase of the study. It was fortunate that in our elementary schools over 80 percent of our students are meeting standards in reading and over 70 percent in writing. To find three high performing teachers representing each of our elementary schools was not difficult, but I had to communicate openly about this research project in order to avoid both feelings of coercion and the perception of favoritism. I addressed this challenge by explaining to all staff members the components of this research study before the individual teachers were selected. I communicated the reason for the study and the benefits to the district and therefore indirectly to their practice while in the district, as well as the criteria needed to promote a stronger design (small sample, variance in school settings, variance in grade levels, length of time in the district, etc.).

For the participants themselves, the general ethical considerations for all studies were adhered to. The principals, considering the student achievement data and other selection criteria that I provided, identified teachers from their building who met the selection criteria. Those who volunteered at that point met with their principal. The principal answered additional questions and obtained their consent. This step was included in the process to allow the teachers to decline participation without feeling coerced by me to participate.

Once they agreed to participate, I met with each of them individually and answered any additional specific questions or concerns that they had about participating and mitigated as many of these concerns as possible. This involved letting participants know about confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms to conceal identities as data was collected, transcribed, analyzed, and written.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The First Case**

#### **Diane**

##### Diane's School Context

Cascade Elementary serves 300 students in grades K-5. The school is comprised of 15 percent Hispanic students, 3 percent American Indian, and 82 percent White. Forty-five percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 16 percent for special education and 5 percent for the bilingual program.

In 2005, as evidenced by the state WASL exam, fourth grade students' scores over the past five years have been steadily improving, reaching their peak in 2005 when 94 percent of the fourth grade students met the standard in reading, 88 percent in math, and 92 percent in writing. As a result, the staff no longer spends as much time analyzing specific areas of the test to determine where they need to focus systemically, but they analyze individual students' scores and try to determine why any particular child did not meet the standard. In the fall, the staff identifies individual students, including special education and ELL students, who are not meeting expected standards and, as an entire staff, on a monthly basis, discusses their progress. Interventions are designed with the classroom teacher, principal, and specialists until the student meets grade level standards. Some of these students are taken off the "board" after a few weeks or months and others remain a focus for the entire year.

As have all five schools in the district, Cascade Elementary received additional financial and technical assistance through a Gates Foundation Grant. As a result there

was an infusion of ideas and support on knowing and implementing the attributes of highly effective schools and classrooms. One of the most significant impacts was the learning that was provided for, and taken advantage of, by the principal, Mary.

#### Diane's Principal

Mary is an educator with over thirty years of experience. She was a principal, district office administrator, and an interim superintendent in a large district in Montana. She served as the principal of Cascade Elementary for the past nine years. The staff as a whole possesses common personal characteristics that have created a strong, identifiable group culture. They have been described as extremely dedicated to teaching as well as learning and will go above and beyond what would be normally expected to help all students achieve. Teachers work with their own students in an after-school program and continue with students not meeting standards during summer school. Words like "relentless", "mama bear", "unwavering" have been used to describe their dedication to student success. They have also been described as a group of strong-willed teachers, each with their own clear way of doing things. This was a challenge for Mary initially, but she skillfully works with these strong personalities so that, as described by a staff member, "A strong willed person does not just survive in the system, but truly thrives" (L: int.1.pg.2). She does this (help teachers thrive) in a variety of ways, some clear and observable, some more subtle and artful. You can observe Mary's enthusiasm about the accomplishments of the staff. She is always applauding their progress to the PTA, district office, or schools outside of Cascade. She also spends a great deal of time really listening to staff, acting on their input, and making them feel valued and important. Staff will say

that they have never worked for a principal who has done this so well and it has enabled a staff that could be a group of individuals to come together as a community of learners, working together, sharing ideas, and making collective decisions based on student above adult needs.

Mary is a consummate learner herself and often says that she has learned more in the past five years in her career in the district than all of her other professional years combined. As a result, she sees her role as a building leader in a new perspective. She transitioned from the role of a building manager to an instructional leader, spending a great deal of time in classrooms observing teachers. Recently she has been video-taping teachers' instructional moves and student reactions and using the tapes to provide feedback and support. As a result, her staff spends a lot of time reflecting on practice and implementing improved instructional strategies. All teachers in the building have a learning partner and have participated and led learning opportunities during staff meetings or early dismissals. Of the twenty-two district studio teachers who worked with an outside literacy consultant during the 2004-05 school year, eight were from her staff.

Although a formal governance structure is not present, as part of "doing the work" Mary made sure that the teachers take leadership roles. This is designed to give voice to excellent teachers, create a culture of sharing and learning, and, less apparent but significant, to create a structure to sustain the accomplishments long after Mary leaves the principalship. She said, "I let them do (the leadership and professional development work) more and more and more because it will not sustain if I am the one doing it" (M: int1.pg.8). School leaders emerge based upon individual interests and passions. Mary nurtures this passion and interest by encouraging leaders to step forward for each of the

major content areas. As a result, there are teacher leaders who lead the charge in literacy, math, science, and assessment.

### Diane's Background

Diane is an upbeat, outgoing woman in her fifties. She dresses in bright colors that reflect her personality. When you see her walking down the hall or in her classroom she always appears to be relaxed, smiling – truly enjoying herself. Her room is busy with adult and college volunteers, paraeducators, and children all working on one project or another, so engrossed in their work that Diane can stop and focus on one or two students at a time or share an approach she is using or a success with a particular student with a visitor in the room. The children smile when she talks to them. They want to show her what they just wrote or a particular fact they discovered about an animal they are studying.

Diane just completed her sixteenth year of teaching in the district, seven of which have been at Cascade Elementary School. Previously she taught in each of the other two elementary schools in the district. In addition to playing both an informal and formal leadership role at the building level, for the past ten years she has served on the district's literacy committee and recently became a member of the science committee. Because of her expertise, her thoughtfulness in studying the impact of implementing a new instructional move on student achievement, and her success with students, as a member of the literacy committee she has greatly influenced the district adoption of an instructional model, instructional materials, and assessments.

Diane's father emigrated from Germany and although realizing the importance of a good education, he did not have the opportunity himself to go to secondary school. He always expected Diane to go to college. Diane explained that this was an important factor in her education. "My dad did not get through the sixth grade in Germany ... They (her parents) always said you were going to college" (D: int.2.pg.1). She also knew from a very young age that she was going to be a teacher. "I knew from first grade that I was going to be a teacher and it was because of my first grade teacher" (D: int.2.pg.1).

She attended public school in New York, and still talks positively about the education she received and the influence it had on her teaching practices. "I never knew how good New York Public Schools were until I fall back on things I learned at that time" (D: int.2.pg.1). The approach to teaching and learning she was exposed to inspired a continued love of learning that has been present throughout her life. "Within that (experience in NY schools) I always loved learning" (D: int.2.pg.1). She graduated college in the early seventies and began teaching in a rural school in upstate New York, but resigned four years later to raise her children. When she wanted to return to work, teaching positions were scarce and, as a result, she took a job in sales. She talked about the positive impact of this and other experiences on her success as a teacher.

I worked with kids forever. When you were in charge (of children at Girl Scout Camp) for a week you worked with leaders on the badges you wanted (the kids) to earn in the week. I would have to lay out five days. These are the activities we have to do to get this accomplished so they can sign off on Friday. It never occurred to me that this was the same thing as laying out a curriculum. (D: int.2.pg.1)

I had a realization of the real world. Some teachers have a very narrow focus on what is important. When you get out in the working world, especially in direct sales the people were trained, motivated, and had good attitudes. I can lead a whole group to exactly where I want them to be. I know that skill and I know immediately when it is being tried and yet most teachers don't. I am simply amazed, but I think that it is because they live in this very closeted world. (D: int.1.pg.16)

#### Diane's Personal Characteristics

When asked to describe Diane in a couple of words, her colleagues have a hard time limiting their comments. They say that she is bright, reflective, caring, funny, independent, asks a lot of questions before making up her mind, a very hard worker (and expects the same from others), confident, likes to be in charge, and most emphatically, as her principal said, "She has personal characteristics that have made her the best teacher I have seen" (M: int.1.pg.1). The following personal characteristics were highlighted in the data.

Data suggest that Diane exudes curiosity about the world and conveys this sense of wonder to her students. As I watched her work with a small group of students on animal tracks, she would continually "ohh and ahh" about what they were seeing in the book (D: obs.2.pg.1). Through her teaching she has discovered that talking about her own curiosity about the world and how it works is motivating for young children. To show her enthusiasm and give the children a common experience, she often begins her content studies with a field trip; a trip to the Marina, a local lake, or a community walk. As a result, when she begins to study the topic, the children have a shared real life experience

to relate to. She then spends a great deal of time on non-fiction reading and researching topics that relate to the experience. In observing her practice, I have seen these research projects range from how a spider spins a web to what plants live in tide pools. She put this belief in her own words when she talked about the power of learning about real world phenomena. “I also truly believe that non-fiction is the hook to any first grader because there is an interest. (They say to themselves) I have to find out about that spider or bat or I have to find out something in their living world” (D: int.1.pg.9). She also uses fictional stories to enhance their understanding. I observed her introducing a read aloud on *Jack and the Beanstalk*. In introducing the book, she shared with the children that they are reading the book “because we are studying plants. I tried to think about a story that will help us think about plants” (D: obs.1.pg.1). At the point in the story when the beanstalk was growing, she asked, “Do you think it needs sun or light to grow? When we were scientists doing an experiment, what did we do?” (D: obs.1.pg.1)

Another personal characteristic that emerges from the data is her passion for and dedication to teaching. When I asked Mary about Diane’s success she quickly indicated “She is very dedicated to education. She puts in time. She works at home. She is planned” (M: int.1.pg.1). In preparing for a science lesson, even though there are curriculum materials that provide guidance for the teacher’s planning, she met with her learning partner for a day and went through the entire science kit, reworking the lesson, making sure there was an alignment between the grade level expectations and student needs.

As her learning partner, I have had specific evidence of that (really preparing for a new unit) where we were going to do the Foss Kit (science unit) and instead of

just following the guidelines, we met for a day and went through everything that was there and picked it apart and made a match between the benchmarks and the previous way we did plants (L: int.1.pg.1).

I observed Diane and her student teacher during a planning session on a new tide pools unit. She guided the student teacher very methodically through the steps she felt were needed to plan a well orchestrated learning experience. As they were talking, Diane took notes in very specific categories (introduction, hands on, music, books, and research questions) which eventually became part of the unit of study (D: obs1 .pg.2). She then went back and identified all the skills the students would need to even begin the project. It was an ambitious unit, which based upon my observation, was going to be so well designed that it could easily be shared with other primary teachers.

Data also reveal Diane's tenacity when working with students. During my observation of her working with ten first grade students, one little boy was reluctant to offer his thoughts to a question Diane posed. She asked the other students to get ready to share their thinking quietly in their own mind while they waited for the other student to gather his thoughts. After about a solid minute the boy began to respond. When I asked her afterwards how she got the other children to sit so quietly for a full minute, she indicated that that was the norm during group time and that the children knew that at some other time they may need similar support and that they would want the same respect. During the same class period when children were writing independently, she continually reminded them that they were not through until the quality was at the expected standard (D: obs.2.pg.1). Diane's persistence presents itself most prominently when working with a student who is struggling academically. She will go above and

beyond what is often expected to make sure that a student does not slip through the cracks. She talked about working diligently with her ELL students. She spent time working directly with the ELL support specialists to ensure an alignment between the tutorial help and the classroom work. She indicated that she “talks with the ELL teachers to help with the planning so that the instruction they provide matches the child’s needs and aligns with what is happening in the classroom. This is a flexible thing” (D: int.1.pg.3). When she works with guided reading groups, she does not assign her lowest performing students to volunteers or aides, but works with them herself.

Data show that Diane is an independent thinker. She does not blindly adopt what she is told is a best practice, what she reads in a book, or follow the district’s adopted curriculum. When asked about her literacy instruction this trait was apparent when she said, “It is not following a script. Why do you need a teacher’s manual if you know your kids and know where you are?” (D: int.1.pgs.6-7). Instead of looking for reading programs, Diane would meet publisher representatives at conferences and find the right resources to match the students and the curriculum. This is how she built the curriculum book closet for the primary grades. At a conference a “representative was there ... and then suddenly we had a good source for finding the right resource to match kids and curriculum” (D: int.1.pg.8). If she does not think something is right, she makes the necessary adjustments, trusting her assessment information and her instincts. I asked her if she has always made up her own mind as to what was best for children’s learning. Her response indicated she

Started (using the basal series) and the non readers were still not reading. The first year I followed exactly what they said and then I looked back and said, ‘oh no’ –

This story was harder than the one after it so it got the wheels turning. This is the last time I am going to blindly listen and take to heart (what the series said to do) (D: int.1.pg.13).

Through analysis of the data it is clear that Diane is a confident teacher. When asked why she felt she was successful, right away, she knowingly said that if you “give me the space to meet a standard ... they will be ok in two years” (D: int.1.pg.1). Diane feels confident in her competencies to assess children’s abilities through observation, often not even needing to write down what she observes. When describing her ability she shared that her former sales manager was finally convinced that she could sell as effectively as he could because “he has never seen a brain like yours. It is a drawer. You can pull this out or pull that out” (D: int.1.pg.8). She indicated that, “I can still do that and it is not like I do not take notes if it is important, but you have to know the kids” (D: int.1.pg.8).

Another characteristic that emerged from the data is her strong organizational skills. Her principal noted “She is organized. When she decides to teach, her thought processes are clear. She does not skip around. It is very intentional” (M: int.1.pg.1). She was also instrumental in organizing the book closet for her school, placing books in categories and instructional levels for all teachers to access. She researched, selected and bought most of the books. Completing this task allowed her to know the books well; she knew what skills were embedded that could be accessed when that skill became her focus. She is also extremely knowledgeable about matching the level of the book to the level of the reader.

Data also suggest that Diane is a caring person. She likes children and wants them to be happy. When asked an open-ended question on why she thought she was successful, her immediate response was, “The most important thing is that I like kids. I like little kids” (D: int.1.pg.1). She also likes and supports the learning of the adults she works with. Her learning partner explained this characteristic when she said,

She keeps the resources (ideas, books, etc.) coming. You would think there are only so many resources and if I take the time to share with others then there will not be enough for me, but Diane is a model of ‘I am going to share’ (L: int.1.pg.1).

Even when her excitement for sharing ideas and strategies becomes over enthusiastic and assertive, she “comes back and says I’m sorry. I think that has helped her be trusted ... rather than being offensive” (L: int.1.pg.2). On another personal level, Mary describes that she is “by far the most giving person. She keeps the spirit alive in the building. She is the one who gets the gifts and cards ready” (M: int.1.pg.7).

In summary, data indicate that Diane portrays the world as a wonderful place to experience and study. She puts in the time necessary to get a lesson just right for the classroom community as well as individual children. She is persistent, supporting children until they meet expected standards. She is an intelligent, confident independent thinker, making intentional professional decisions based upon the needs of the children, curriculum and resources available, and her learning targets, not because of a dictated sequence of study in a manual. She truly loves children, cares for them, plans for them as individuals, and encourages their growth and learning.

### Diane's Instructional Practices

When walking into Diane's classroom an outsider might think that the room was in disarray, overcrowded with books, papers, posters, charts, and animals, but the environment is intentionally organized to maximize learning. Tables are in groupings around the room. First and second grade students work together with a partner, an adult volunteer, a paraprofessional, or alone. Books are easily accessible and organized by various levels or by current topics of study. Visitors notice that the classroom spills out into the hall where student work is posted to celebrate and for others to emulate. The entry way is decorated to match current classroom content. Supplies of every shape and form are available based upon the needs and interests of the students. Most noticeable was that during all of my observations in her classroom, children were focused, engaged, and happy (D: obs.1.pg.1).

In interviewing Diane, her colleagues, and principal, and observing in the classroom the data suggest that Diane's instructional practices are aligned with the components of constructivist learning theory and highly effective literacy practices as previously described. According to Mary, "She has instruction figured out. She makes connections to the real world, she has active inquiry, engagement, and motivation figured, and she understands children and learning. She has all of those" (M: int.1.pg.6). But there were aspects of these teaching practices that were more apparent than others and in some ways atypical of other teachers in the district. When the superintendent and I visit buildings and walk through classrooms with principals, we have observed that many of the approaches that Diane incorporates into her instruction as standard practice (differentiating instruction, offering student choice, focusing on the development of

problem solving and higher order thinking, and supporting the continuum of student learning from guided work to independence) are becoming more routinized in many classrooms across the district. The difference is that Diane has been practicing and refining these instructional moves for a longer period of time. For example, when asked, “When did you know that it was necessary to differentiate for children?” Diane’s response was, “When I first started teaching” (D: int.1.pg.16). In her first years of teaching, after attempting to use a basal reading series as intended, she recognized that children could only read, “the stuff from the basal – vocabulary games – as long as it was supported by the story ... but they couldn’t read anything else” (D: int.1.pg.13). These instructional practices that are integrated into Diane’s repertoire seem to be grounded by very strong personal and professional beliefs and values.

Most prominently, data show that Diane has a fundamental belief that if students are not achieving academically or growing socially, teachers are responsible. When asked about her success she kept returning to a question she asks herself, “If they (the children) did not catch something, how come? And most of the time it is either my explanation or my expectation” (D: int.1.pg.6). Creating a classroom where students feel cared for, safe, and happy is the first step in acting on this belief. The first thing Diane does to create this culture is to get to know the children. The first few weeks of school she sees it as imperative to talk one on one or in small groups to find out about the child’s life. She gathers information about the child from their family members. She believes that, “If I do not get to know them in here, and if you looked on an academic plan, you would say to me – What are you doing? But basically, if little ones are not happy, they are not going to learn” (D: int.1.pg.1). Having first graders return for a second year with her in second

grade helps, but from the first minute the children walk into the room on the first day and every day thereafter, she is continually building this positive, supportive classroom community. If something does not go right, she reflects on the day and soon realizes that she did not start at a “safe enough spot” (D: int.1.pg.2).

Because this is so critical in a child’s learning, data show Diane spends a lot of time figuring out how to make the learning for each child not beyond their reach, yet she pushes them to the next learning point where successes can be celebrated. She has developed an ability to scaffold learning backwards from this learning point for each student. “You can assume too much and if one thing I know I can do is scaffold and it is very clear in my head that these are the steps, steps, and steps and if you go through those steps with them, they will be successful” (D: int.1.pg.2). As a result, when observing the students in her classroom all are able to participate safely in the classroom community of learners, feel cared for because their needs are being met, and as a result be happy, positive participants in the classroom and school community (D: obs.1.pg.4).

Data also reveal Diane’s ability to scaffold instruction is tied to a firm belief that all students need to be held to the same grade level expectations and that lessons and supports need to be differentiated based upon individual needs. She does not assume that children get off task and become unproductive because they are trying to be naughty, but because the task that they are working on is not at the right instructional or interest level. Diane explained that “if the kids are not successful it is because you skipped the model, the guided, or the shared. When I look at this (a child’s) writing it is the guided part that is missing” (D: obs.1. pg.2). She then takes the children who need more support and guide them through the activity during independent writing time (D: obs.1.pg.12). The

supports she provides to ensure the right instructional level are differentiated for each child. Mary indicated that she provides support to children (especially ELL children) by “providing an experience linked to activity before studying directly from books. Students will grow plants before reading about how plants grow. They will stop what they are doing to watch frogs before beginning their research” (M: int.2.pg.1). Once they have these experiences, have time to study and read about the topic of study, and know how to complete the accompanying writing assignment, she expects them to complete the task at the expected level of proficiency.

Additionally, the data indicate Diane’s instructional practices are based upon the belief that in order to increase motivation and engagement, learning should be stimulating and fun, which is accomplished partially by allowing even young children to have choices in what they read and write. When she asks them at the beginning of the year,

What do you want to learn about? It is not about fairy tales or mental imaging. It is about living things. I have seen every year in the fall – probably by October – I pull out spiders or bats. I’ve got these first graders reading words that they would never read. It really helps with ELL students. When they want to learn something; they will work harder at learning how to read about it (D: int.1.pg.10).

Diane has also noticed that if they begin to focus too heavily on a particular reading strategy and focus less on the content, then the children will ask,

When are we going to learn something? When are we going to study something?  
(As a result) last year I gave them a shot during writing time – I asked them, ok what do you want to learn about? We had this huge discussion and they all picked different things and they could work in little groups or by themselves. They were

cross graded, some did research, and some had to just make a model. It took a lot of work to do this, but as the year progressed they knew from one thing to the next to the next what they wanted to do. This year because we have gone to writer's workshop and things like that I do not have the time in the day and I have got rebellion on my hands (D: int.1. pg.10).

When she does focus on a particular genre study, writing form, or reading strategy, it is apparent through the data that she chooses activities that have real world application and align with student interests. The content then depends on the interests and prior knowledge of the children. When Diane is working with topics that the students have an interest in and the reading is on their instructional level, she is able to work on a deeper level, engaging children in higher order thinking; comparing two different types of literature they are studying or characteristics of various animals in a species, etc. During an observation Diane presented the reading strategy of "mental imaging" using a book on animal tracks, which was a high interest topic for the entire class (D: obs.2.pg.4).

In order to align the teaching with student needs and interests and, at the same time, have them think deeply and critically about their work, data suggest Diane strongly believes an adage she first heard from Margaret Mooney. "If you want them to think deeply, they have to read simply" (D: int.1.pg.15). To accomplish this Diane believes you need to provide reading material at their level so that they can do the more difficult work of thinking and talking about the ideas. When talking to her about assessment Diane explained that

If their reading level is a level eighteen and the book they are asked to read is higher you cannot ask them to think deeply about the ideas. If they are figuring

out text or vocabulary it can be at a higher reading level, but if you want them to think deeply, you make the book easier so they are concentrating on thoughts instead of decoding text. They can't do both (D: int.1.pg.15).

She also indicated, "That is why the read aloud is so important. It allows them to think deeply about the ideas without worrying about the text" (D: int.3.pg.1). To select the right texts, the teacher needs to be able to assess the child's instructional level effectively. When I asked Mary how she thinks Diane accomplishes this, she indicated that based upon numerous observations she noticed that,

She carefully observes the students - constant assessment - that is what Diane does very well. Lessons are not performances but a very careful process where she is monitoring the whole group and two to three students at the same time. She is watching the reaction and what they are taking in and if they are getting it and what the next steps are (M: int.1.pg. 6).

In addition to quality instruction, the data indicate that the structure of the one-two multi-age classrooms supports student learning. "Having two years with students – I know their learning strengths and challenges thoroughly and within two years they will be ok (meeting standard)" (D: int.1.pg.1).

Finally, data suggest Diane believes that the purpose of school is to explore the world, have fun doing it in a social community of other learners, and most important, if you are going to learn something new, learn it so well that you can apply your new learning independently. Her learning partner trusts what she learns from Diane because she sees how her students become independent learners. She explains, "I see her success with learners and how very much they are guided along the way and then they become

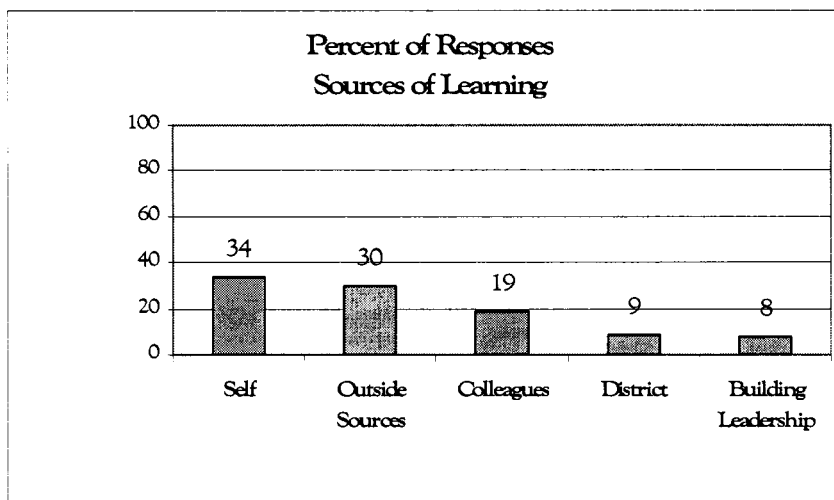
independent” (L: int.1.pg.2). Diane also firmly believes that each child (unless the circumstances are extreme, which in her thinking is rare) regardless of disability, socioeconomic status, or any other factor or circumstance, if taught well, will read and write extremely well on their own (D: int.1.pg.1).

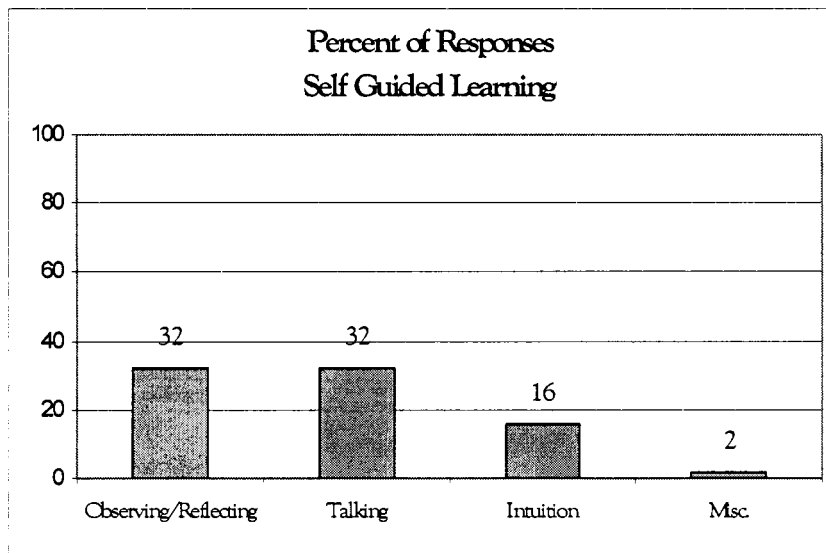
In summary, the data demonstrate Diane’s instructional practices align with constructivist learning principles and components of highly effective literacy practices. Highlighted in this section was a description of some of these practices that were integrated into her practice. The beliefs and practices reviewed were: 1) if students are not achieving academically or growing socially, teachers are responsible; 2) students need to be held to the same grade level expectations and that lessons and supports need to be differentiated based upon individual needs; 3) in order to increase motivation and engagement, learning should be stimulating and fun, which is accomplished by allowing even young children to have choices; 4) providing materials at an appropriate instructional level is critical if children are to think deeply about what they are reading. Therefore knowing how to assess children is key; 5) children beginning to apply their learning independently is the purpose of all instruction; and 6) all of this needs to be accomplished in a positive classroom community.

### Diane's Sources of Learning

The following tables depict 1) the percentage of responses related to the five sources of learning, and 2) the major sub categories in each of the sources. The section following the tables describes these five sources beginning with the source that was mentioned the most (Self Guided Learning) to the source that was mentioned the least (Learning from the Building Principal).

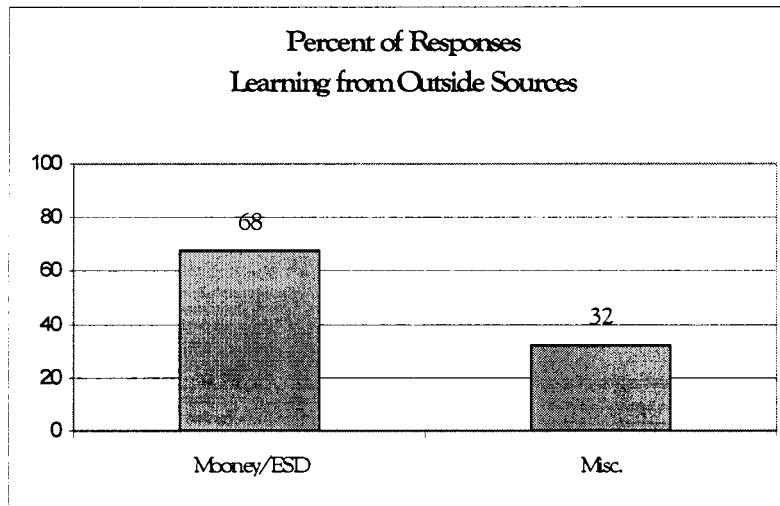
**Table 1: Diane's Sources of Learning**



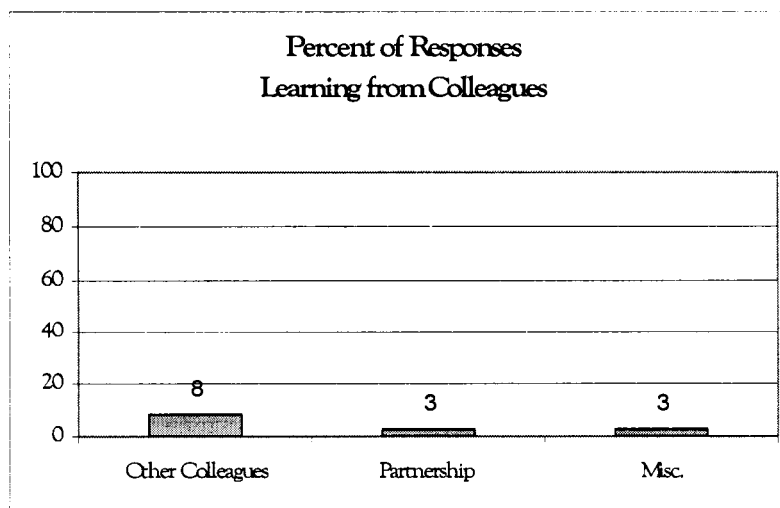
**Table 2: Diane's Self Guided Learning**

“Observing and Reflecting” refers to when they watched students and thought about their responses to instruction. In this case, “Talking” refers to the incidents where Diane claimed she either processed her ideas out loud with a colleague or her principal.

“Intuition” refers to the times Diane mentioned anything about “gut feelings” or “I just know.” “Miscellaneous” refers to the few comments she made about either writing an idea down or taking notes for future contemplation.

**Table 3: Diane’s Learning from Outside Sources**

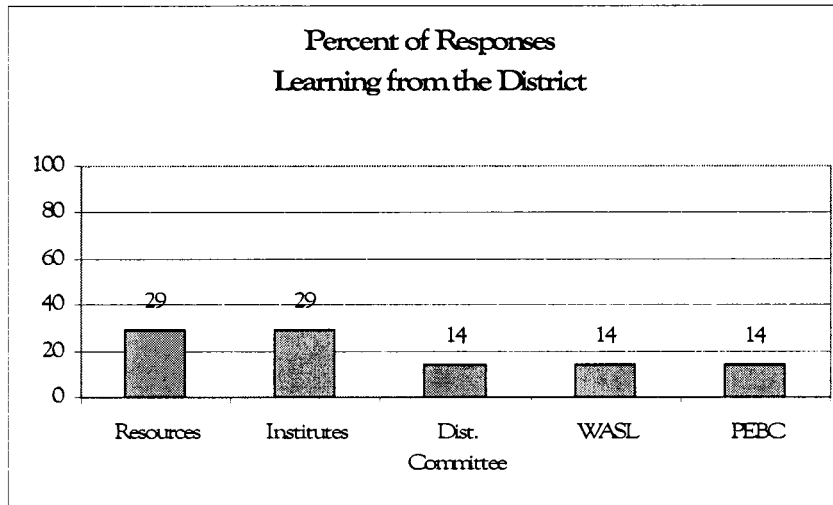
In this chart, “Mooney/ESD” refers to all the comments made about Margaret Mooney or the ESD cadre that formed and was influenced by Margaret Mooney’s thinking. The “Miscellaneous” comments were about other outside sources that were only mentioned once or twice. These included reading consultant Leah Mermelstein, observations in other districts, authors of books on literacy, etc.

**Table 4: Diane’s Learning from Colleagues**

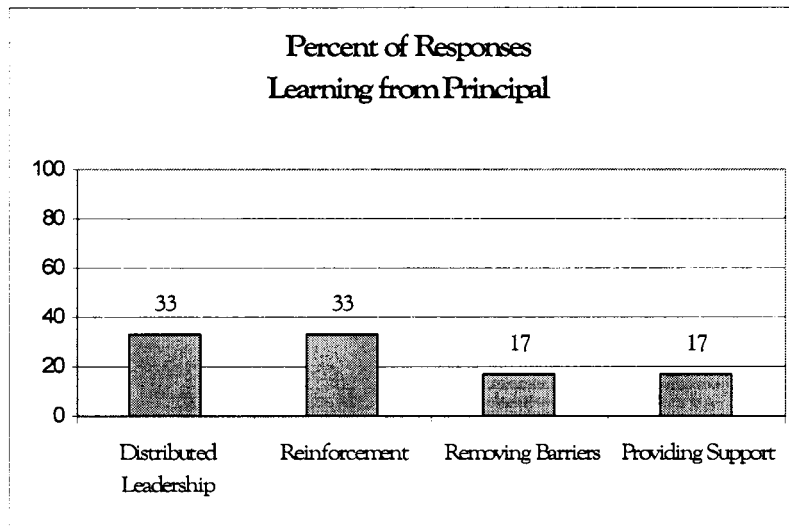
Learning from “Other Colleagues” refers to colleagues in Diane’s building. “Partnership”

refers to the partner with whom she shared students throughout the year. “Miscellaneous” refers to the comments she made in passing about student teachers or colleagues in other buildings.

**Table 5: Diane’s Learning from the District**



“Resources” refers to the study materials that the district provided or the time provided through early releases. “Institutes” were the formal professional development opportunities in literacy provided and supported by district resources. The “District Committee” refers to the district’s literacy committee. “WASL” refers to references about the state test and how the information was presented. “PEBC” is the Public Education and Business Coalition where Diane spent a week in schools observing literacy classrooms and studying literacy practices.

**Table 6: Diane's Learning from Principal**

These references refer to actions taken by Diane's principal. "Distributed Leadership" refers to the references Diane made to how the principal shares the leadership with staff. "Reinforcement" is when Diane mentioned how much the principal talks about her appreciation for staff work. "Removing Barriers" refers to the principal's ability to clear the way so teachers were able to focus on teaching. "Providing Support" refers to the times when the principal provided time and or study resources.

### Self Guided Learning

The data suggest Diane is committed to working with other colleagues for the sake of coherent, successful experiences for children, but not necessarily for her own learning. "I always did well independent of others" (D: int.3.pg.1). A common method Diane uses to learn with and from herself is by observing students and reflecting on their reaction to her instruction. For example, after observing an instructional strategy that is not part of her practice and deciding it has potential to improve student learning, she will

implement the strategy and observe student reactions and note how it impacts their learning before making a decision to continue the strategy or adapt it for her particular situation. The decision to continue to incorporate the strategy is contextualized, not based upon the perceived value of the instructional strategy, but is based on her current classroom context; grade level expectations, student needs, composition of the classroom, and student interests. Mary explained that “Diane has made the most out of any training opportunity. She tries it (a new strategy) and is extremely reflective. She does not just reflect on the strategy, but how students react to the strategy” (M: int.2.pg.1). This ongoing reflection of the impact of her instruction on student learning and how to make ongoing improvements is primarily done alone while walking or gardening and thinking she claims. Once she has some ideas in her mind, others observe that she will also spend time talking about these ideas out loud. Mary indicated that she “listens and talks to her (Mary) a lot. She verbalizes to sort things out. We talk a lot in incidental conversations” (M: int.1.pg.4). Mary articulated that these conversations seem to be designed as a way for Diane to process ideas she has been thinking about rather than to gather input and advice. When I asked Mary if she thought these conversations were initiated to gain advice and possibly change her mind she said, “Not much. I would not change her direction. The careful prompts will cause her to think bigger, but most of the time she is running something by me that she has already decided” (M: int.1.pg.4). She went on to say that, “It (talking with Mary) is an opportunity to process out loud to clarify her thinking. She is pretty self reflective. We talk because this is the way she processes information” (M: int.1.pg.4). Diane will say that she talks a lot to Mary not as much for her own learning, but to help answer questions that Mary has in her mind” (D: int.3.pg.1).

Another source of learning that emerges from the data is intuition, or what Diane calls “gut feelings.” Diane explained.

I can work with background noise, but I know immediately when it changes and it is not a productive noise. Gut feeling has a lot to do with it. People say it is not scientific, but it is what I run on. I can just hear it. It is one thing I try to teach my student teachers. Listen to the noise and you tell me when it (the noise level) goes from productive to not productive (D: int.1.pg.3).

She went on to talk about one specific incident where she “felt the vibrations that it is not going to be productive” and sensed that the students were, for some reason, generally unhappy. Believing that if they were not happy, they would not learn, she made a decision to “move to art” before returning to the intended activity (D.int.1.pg.3).

### Learning from Outside Sources

There are many examples in the data of Diane learning from outside sources, but the one that impacted her practice the most significantly was a multifaceted experience beginning with a reading conference where she was introduced to Margaret Mooney, a reading consultant from New Zealand. Mooney spoke to Diane in a way that transformed her thinking about her work.

It was Margaret Mooney. I remember the first conference I ever saw her at many, many, many years ago. I just sat in the audience and was amazed. There was a question from the audience. Why are our first graders failing in reading? She leaned over the podium and said, “You make it too hard” (D: int.1.pg.3).

A few years later, three teachers from the district were part of a state reading

cadre that met for two years studying effective reading practices. Margaret Mooney was hired by the state to write state reading benchmarks and periodically work with the state cadre of reading teachers. The district team met regularly, trying to figure out how to implement the learnings from their state work, influenced by Margaret Mooney, in their classrooms. When the state cadre dissolved, the ESD tried to continue the project but it did not sustain.

During the same time period, the district received a birth to age seven reading grant. The grant was designed for one school, which included the teachers who participated in the state reading cadre, to pilot SRA Voyagers Reading Kits. These materials, partially written by Margaret Mooney, aligned with the philosophy and methodology that the reading cadre was immersed in – a balanced literacy approach. As part of this grant, Margaret Mooney conducted a few training sessions for all the elementary teachers across the district and spent additional time in the pilot school.

The district also wrote and received an additional state grant of \$100,000 to pilot innovative reading programs. The purpose of this grant was to scale up the implementation of a balanced literacy approach using the SRA Voyagers materials. The teachers from the pilot school paired up with teachers from the other elementary school to train staff in what they had been learning. Diane explained that,

We had our district meetings once a month and we would train any teacher on how to look at guided reading and how to look at the characteristics of the books. It was not following a script. You were looking through the book and saying that this book is good for this and these are the challenges in this book. It got people to look at the books in a totally different way. It does not bother us that it is not in a

teacher's guide asking these questions because we came up with all of that ourselves based upon our classrooms (D: int.1.pg.6).

In response to the question, "How influential was the entire experience (from meeting Margaret Mooney at a conference to the state and ESD cadre, to the pilot and all district training grant) in improving practice?" Diane responded that "It was absolutely influential because it was our own. We read books together and talked about them" (D: int.1.pg.7). The entire experience brought literacy down to one main idea "Ok, why do you need a teacher's manual if you know your kids and know where they are" (D: int.1.pg.7). Diane took away from this three-year training experience some profound adages from Margaret Mooney that she still uses to inform and frame her work today. Most profoundly for Diane, Margaret said that in America we "make it too hard", which causes Diane to ask herself when students are not achieving, "What will make this easier?" (D: int.1.pg.7).

### Learning from Colleagues

Learning from colleagues, although present in the data, was mentioned less frequently. Most of the references to colleagues were associated with the relationships Diane formed through her participation in the state and ESD learning cadre. This group was closely linked to the teachings of Margaret Mooney. She describes these colleagues as "a group of very strong teachers that we were in touch with. To me all of these teachers were rogues because we worked outside of the box" (D: int.1.pg.5). There were only two district teachers who were part of this group.

Her colleague, Natalie, and a friend in one of the other district elementary schools, Anne, were also cited as sources of learning, but again less frequently than the state/ESD cadre. In describing her friend and colleague Anne, she says, “When Anne taught third grade and I taught second we had a lot of good discussions. Her standards were my standards” (D: int.1.pg.2). Her references to Natalie were around planning common units together. “I am working with Natalie on the tide pool unit” (D: int.1.pg.2).

### Learning from the District

The data revealed interesting information on how Diane learns from the district. The most noticeable aspect of how Diane learns from the district is how she processes and uses information from district sponsored professional development opportunities. She studies the information skeptically, especially if it does not conform to what she learned from her experiences and learning with Margaret Mooney. As a studio teacher, Diane participated in district-sponsored professional development activities throughout the 2004-05 school year. Some of the year was spent working with an outside consultant from District 2 in New York, Leah Mermelstein. After learning a new instructional strategy, Diane was willing to implement the practice and then would carefully watch children’s reactions, reflect on how it fit with how she instructs, and then make a decision to continue or dismiss the new learning. More often than not, she made a decision to continue with her existing practices, but through the experience developed a stronger conviction in her own instructional practices. Even today Diane thinks of all other learning experiences in literacy as a way to fine tune her current thinking and practice.

Diane explained this when talking about the district trainings.

This year because we have gone to writer's workshop, I do not have the time in the day. They (the students) are saying, I want to learn something, so I also listen to that and say to myself, well ok, can you throw the mental imaging in there but not as the main study. You hit it hard, and then talk about it in other ways to make that room. That is what I am struggling with now; where does everything fit? The scaffolding that I have provided for writing is successful. I understand what they (outside consultant) are doing in theory; it is not my style. When I try and run it that way, it does not work (D: int.1.pg.10).

When asked why, Diane responded,

You see again Margaret said, and I listen, because she is my goddess as far as that goes. She just says, a lot of times you do guided reading and then you do guided writing. How do they know how to do that unless you guide them through it? She always said, if the kids are not successful, it is because you skipped the model, the guided, the shared, so I look at this writing set up and what is missing is the guided part. Margaret said the same thing in writing. She said if you want them to write a good letter so you do the pen pal thing, and then you immediately go to letter writing. She (Leah Mermelstein) goes from modeled to shared, and what I usually do is go, is more like this – pulling groups during independent writing time. It is not every day that you will see this - and sometimes the mini lesson is with guided writing, or during literacy time they are working with Gwen, and I will work with another group. I do not have reading and writing workshop. I just

call the whole thing literacy (D: int.1.pg.10-12).

In talking about a particular seminar and observation with Leah Mermelstein, Diane thought about how the information aligned with how she taught. After questioning Leah, Diane finally decided that she did the same thing, just a bit differently. She also decided her own organizational approach made more sense.

We (her school colleagues) did a book study on conferring, and people got so tied into the conferring end of writing. It did not make sense to me. There are many ways to confer and the book did not make sense, but when Leah Mermelstein came and explained that you can do a revising conference, a writing ideas conference, and the more she came, the more we do writing the same way. When she first came, I would have to say that I do not do it that way. But later on, she said she would pull like kids together on one topic, and that is what I have always done, and no conference is the same. Even the last time when we met and came back from Carrie's room, and people were saying that they would take three kids on Monday, three on Tuesday, and I heard her say you have to know your kids (D: int.2.pg.4).

Once Diane saw that she and Leah did similar things, she was able to listen and see where they were alike and what she could add to her repertoire or understanding. In talking about a particular incident with Leah, Diane said,

I asked Leah, would you go back to the kids you worked with the day before? and she said, 'of course you would'. That was a given on her part that she did not explain during the training. It was affirming and she certainly had reasons that I hadn't thought of, but I do them, so I have enjoyed my time with Leah (D:

int.2.pg.4).

She viewed the training with PEBC, which was a school/district supported training opportunity, in a similar way, referring to Margaret Mooney's philosophy of adapting rather than adopting in the process of explaining the value of this training.

I think the week of PEBC in Colorado was not necessarily an eye opener. It was an intriguing way to look at how reading strategies are taught as an independent strand. I got to see a math and science class taught the PEBC way. That gave me the base to think. (The training took place October.) When your year starts, you are out flat. You do not have time to think about something new. By going there and watching and questioning I never took anything as, 'this is the way'. It is better to adapt than to adopt (D: int.2.pg.3).

Mary affirms this approach Diane takes when presented with new information, even when it is a consultant who is well known and well respected in the field.

She makes conclusions about the skill level of the people presenting and whether they have something to offer and she will take from that experience and weigh it. She will not take all of it. Not all of it fits her picture. She is very careful about what she adds to her repertoire (M: int.1.pg.3).

The data did suggest that other district actions had some impact on her learning. For example, her involvement in the district literacy committee was a source of her learning, but again the learning was tied to the contributions she made because of the influence and training provided by Margaret Mooney. In response to a question about what, if any, district work was a source of her learning she indicated "Having served on the literacy committee because you need to be thinking and make sure that everyone

understands the lingo and how you do it. I could talk on that committee because of Margaret Mooney” (D: int.2.pg.3).

Additionally, the data suggest she did recognize the link between the district resources that allowed her to participate in the state/ESD cadre and the subsequent work in the district (training other teachers, curriculum, study materials).

Vicki (an administrator in our district) wrote the grant (Birth to 7). We had gone to some meeting with the pre-school and that is why Mountain View (the school where she worked at the time) was in that grant, because we went to that meeting. It was a birth through age seven and because of that we got Voyagers kits, and then because we were involved with that and had Margaret and had the SRA, we got three people into the cadre of people where every other district only had one (D: int.1.pg.5).

Diane also recognized that the other elementary school, Sunnyside, also received the curriculum materials because of training that the district sponsored. “When we got the Voyagers Kits, Sunnyside got them at the same time because we had training in Bellingham where you sent everyone and because we were part of this grant. It only cost you fifteen dollars” (D: int.1.pg.5).

In the data, the district focus on the WASL was also revealed as a source of learning, but the learning was again linked to the work Margaret Mooney did at the state level helping to establish literacy benchmarks and to help with the development of the WASL exam. “It (studying and learning about the WASL) also started with Margaret analyzing a fourth grade WASL question and identifying the skills kids need in previous grades do to answer the WASL question.” (D: int.1.pg.4).

### Principal as a Source of Learning

Although Diane did not talk about the impact of Mary's leadership on her practice, the data show that she was influenced by her principal, Mary. Linda, her learning partner, indicated that,

I think for me personally, I have never worked for a principal that has done that so well. The first year we came none of us, including Diane, wanted to come to this school. We were fine where we were. Most of the staff that came to this school was asked to leave somewhere they loved. The first year was awful. I think it was awful for Mary as well. We were strong-willed and we would butt heads with me and Diane, but what I think what has changed is that very soon – I do not know if Mary figured it out on her own, but she said I want to talk to you, listen, whatever (L: int.1.pg.5).

She went on to say that Mary “really, really has made sure that Diane feels ok and important” (L: int.1.pg.5).

When asked about the impact of her leadership, Mary indicated that one thing she does is make sure Diane does not over commit to district work. One reason is that she cares about her personally, and does not want her to get sick from doing too much.

I watch and protect her from extending too much because she has such a strong commitment to having the entire school district learning. Many times I will answer for her. I will say to her, stop and think about this - you will extend and then you will get sick (M: int1pg.1).

Another reason she cautions her about taking on too many district responsibilities is that she wants her to focus on her classroom. “I want her in the classroom as many days as

possible. I want her energized in the classroom and I protect her for that reason” (M: int.1.pg.1).

Mary also makes sure that Diane’s ideas are part of her decisions. She does this by making sure Diane is informed of decisions she is considering. “She has to be in the know and I make sure I do not surprise her. They (any of the teachers) do not like being out of the loop” (M: int.1.pg.1).

Mary also recognizes Diane’s accomplishments. “Even though she is a self motivator, I reinforce her” (M: int.1.pg.1). When asked how she recognizes her, Mary explained, “I listen. We talk a lot during incidental conversations. She enjoys what her kids are doing and what she posts on the walls. We walk the walls a lot. She talks about individual students who are puzzling” (M: int.1.pg.1).

It is also interesting to note what Mary does not do. Mary indicated that she does not try to influence Diane’s practice. When I asked her if she thought she influenced Diane’s thinking, she indicated that when they talk, “She has decided about most things. It is very seldom that she is asking for advice” (M: int.1.pg.2). Even Mary recognized the strong influence of Margaret Mooney on her practice when she said, “I do not know who except Margaret Mooney could influence her thinking” (M: int.1.pg.2).

In summary, the data signify that Diane learns from a wide variety of sources, but most predominately she learns with and from herself through: 1) observation of student behavior and reflection; 2) processing new learning, insights, or upcoming plans out loud; and 3) her intuition. Diane also learns from outside sources, more specifically: 1) participating in a three-year learning team influenced by outside expert Margaret Mooney; and 2) analyzing and implementing components of other learnings (work with

district consultants, visitations to other districts, etc.) to the beliefs and practices that solidified during the three year learning opportunity.

### Assumptions about Diane's Success

The most salient aspects of Diane's personality are her enthusiasm and confidence with her content, her empathy and love for children, and her ability to be structured, yet flexible and spontaneous at the same time.

When analyzing her instructional practices it appears that the areas that she is visibly strong in may be the elements that are most critical for student success, having more than the elements that, on the surface should have a negative impact on her teaching and student success. Mary explained it when she said,

When I say to myself she is probably one of the best teachers at Cascade Elementary, some would say are you kidding – she is all over the place, hard to follow - but she does have integrated instruction figured out, she has the connections to the real world, she has the active, engagement, motivation and she understands children and learning. She has all of those. (M: int.1.pg.8).

These instructional components are a key to Diane's success and are closely linked to what researchers have been discovering regarding how all people best learn and apply new ideas (Bransford, Brown et al. 1999). Participating in or providing constructivist learning experiences is integral to her own learning as well as her teaching. As explained by Bransford et.all (1999), the classroom is learner, knowledge, and assessment centered. Children in Diane's room interact with the physical environment initially and then work with the teacher and peers in a social setting with resources on their instructional level to

deepen their understanding of what they experienced. Diane does the same in her own learning. She experiences success with children, observes and makes a determination as to why the success may have occurred, analyzes and applies learnings obtained from a variety of sources, and then interacts with others to solidify her thinking.

When looking at Diane's source of learning, the word "imprint" comes to mind. Margaret Mooney, over ten years ago, struck a cord with Diane. She was a well regarded expert who said the right things at the right time in Diane's search for an instructional model that made sense and fit her beliefs and personality. Because Diane felt that these learnings were not dictated by the school or the district, but this expert and her way of thinking were "discovered" by Diane and brought to the district, she has complete ownership in the ideals, adages, and practice. This imprint is so strong that even today, a well known, highly qualified consultant (Leah Mermelstein from Teacher's College and District 2), the readings of Lucy Caulkins, internationally acclaimed as the founding Director of Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, or training provided by the Public Education and Business Coalition is tested, compared, and ultimately challenged by how she has interpreted and applied the teachings of Margaret Mooney ten years earlier.

The assumptions about why Diane is a highly successful teacher that are emerging from the data are as follows:

- Diane is genuinely interested in learning about a wide array of subjects and conveys this enthusiasm for learning to students.

- She loves, cares for, and knows her students well, which causes her to be motivated to ensure that each child is successful and therefore will try a variety of differentiated strategies until each child reaches expectations.
- She promotes a school structure that allows children to be with the same teacher for two years in a row during their primary years.
- She teaches in a way that mirrors the attributes of constructivist classrooms; active involvement of students, in depth learning of a topic they are interested in learning about, authentic student demonstrations of their success even though some of the discrete components of instruction on the surface might not align with what studies have found to be effective practices.
- She builds community and respect in the classroom and recognizes that happy, safe children learn.
- She uses other adults to support student learning.
- She is always seeking new knowledge, but applies learnings into practice only if they are aligned with the teachings of Margaret Mooney, conform to well engrained beliefs and values, and align with the needs of the students.
- She relies on her self reflection, life experiences, observations, and intuition, and verbal processing, especially with novices, to determine which instructional practices most impact student learning.

**Chapter 5**  
**Second Case**  
**Carrie**

Carrie's School Context

Sunnyside Elementary is the smallest school in the district, serving 180 students in grades K-5. The school has 19 percent Hispanic, 3 percent American Indian, and 75 percent White students. Fifty-four percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 12 percent for the bilingual program, and 22 percent for special education, which includes the district's elementary severely handicapped population. Beginning in the fall of 2005 the Birth to Five Program, including Head Start was also housed at Sunnyside.

The parents in the community could be described as concerned about their children's education, but not overly involved in school decisions. It is a close community and teachers know the parents of their children well. Parents have easy access to teachers, which is appreciated by both teachers and parents. Parents, as well as community members, are present in droves for special children's celebrations and are supportive of school requests and programs. Sunnyside has been described as a good place to live and raise children.

Since 2002, as evidenced by the state WASL exam, fourth grade students' scores in reading have consistently improved, reaching their peak in 2005 with 88 percent of the students reaching the expected standard. For the most part, this percentage of students reaching standard is paralleled in the district reading assessment. In math and writing a different pattern emerges. In math the scores have hovered in the mid to high 70s range.

In 2005, 73 percent of the students met the math standard. In writing the scores decreased by ten percentage points over the past three years. In 2002, 60 percent of the students met the standard, and in 2005, 50 percent of the students met the standard. Since there is only one fourth grade class in Sunnyside, the numbers are small, but nonetheless, the largest achievement gap between low income and non low income and between the Hispanic and White students in any of the areas is five percentage points.

#### Carrie's Principal

Like the Cascade Elementary principal, Jess Batton, the principal of Sunnyside Elementary, is a thirty-year veteran, but his career history has been quite different. His entire career has been in the district. He started as a math teacher at the high school and then became the principal of Sunnyside Elementary and the district's special programs director. The staff also has a history of longevity. Most of the staff has worked together for over ten years. Within this period of time only three new teachers were hired. The size of the teaching staff (fifteen teachers) as well as their longevity in the same building created a tight-knit team that has developed a trusting, open culture. One staff member indicated that "because there is continuity in staff, we are comfortable going to each other for help. We have rapport with each other and we trust each other" (C: int.1.pg.4).

Similar to Cascade, in a few cases, partnerships between teachers have formed, but there is a belief that more could be formed quite easily. Thinking about the entire building Jess said, "We certainly have positive relationships and culture in our building because people have been around for a long time. It is a very positive place" (J: int.1.pg.5). The positive culture is not just among staff. Another staff member indicated that "everyone takes

responsibility for all of the kids. That includes the custodian with helping the kids who come early. Everyone has a vested interest in the kids' success" (K: int.1.pg.2).

In addition to a positive culture, the staff has had a myriad of learning opportunities in literacy over the past three years. Two teachers have been part of the studio teacher initiative and all teachers have participated in literacy institutes throughout the 2004-05 school year. They have worked together to implement these new learnings into their instructional practice through study groups, peer observations, and studying student work. Jess has been an important component of their success in improving their instructional practices. Similar to other schools in the district, there are conditions in place for ongoing, job embedded professional development. Students are released every other week, the staff is provided time either within the school day or before or after school for collaboration. Resources are provided for ongoing professional work.

Like Mary, Jess has taken advantage of administrative learning opportunities and, as a result, has also evolved from being a building manager to a principal who can walk into any literacy classroom and comment on the quality of instruction. During a walkthrough of his building, when in hallway debriefing the observation, the superintendent commented on what he saw, but Jess described the components observed more precisely. He said, "That is what I saw also, but additionally ....." He went on to describe some subtleties that were not apparent on the surface (M.05.walthrough.recap).

In the building there is a culture of internal accountability for student results. Jess was partially responsible for the growth of internal accountability by adding formal external accountability measures for all the grade levels in writing. Instead of just looking at fourth grade WASL results or second grade DRA results, both of which are required by

the state, four years ago, as a result of low writing scores, staff members were required by Jess to turn in their classroom writing assessment results each month. Although the policy is no longer formally in place, there are teachers who voluntarily bring in test scores to share with Jess. Although the difference is not intentional, as a result they do end up receiving student supports that others do not receive. These supports range from another perspective when brainstorming solutions to a reallocation of support services. Jess indicated that as a result of reviewing student data with teachers, “I may have knowledge of resources, who, where, and when that the teacher doesn’t have, thus I might be able to say I bet we may be able to get someone to help” (J: int.1.pg.4). Jess is aware that there may be an inequality of student support with this volunteer approach. When I asked Jess, “If Carrie comes to you and you can brainstorm to figure how to get support for these five kids, do these kids in some way get more focused support than kids in a teacher’s room who does not share with you?” (J: int.1.pg.3). Jess’s response was,

That may very well be. If a teacher thinks they are doing all the right things for the kid and he is getting all he can and is making some progress they probably won’t bring it up as an issue. Now they are wrong in that assumption (that there are no other interventions available than the ones in place) and that can come to where it is having a detrimental effect (J: int.1.pg.4).

Although Jess recognizes the benefits of talking to all teachers on a regular basis about student achievement and the progress teachers are having in ensuring that all students reach standards, this is not part of the formal school plan at this time. When I asked, “Because of the experiences and resulting supports for students for the teachers who are coming to you, do you then initiate the same process with others?” (J: int.1.pg.4). Jess’s

response was “some but probably not maybe to the extent that may be beneficial for various reasons. I always have plenty of things to do. You do not often think: ‘What else can I do’ today” (J: int.1.pg.4)?

In summary, Sunnyside Elementary is a small, rural school in a close knit community. Like all schools in the district, the demographics are changing. Children are poorer and more ethnically diverse than they were ten years ago. As evidenced by state and district measures more students are meeting expected standards in reading than in math or writing. The culture of the building is positive and most teachers and the principal have taken advantage of professional development opportunities over the past five years. The staff is developing the competencies through their participation and use of ongoing professional development and is implementing, to various degrees, effective instructional practices. The principal is a positive contributor to the school culture and the development of teacher competencies. He knows the staff well and is able to differentiate supports in order for each staff member to continue to improve their instruction. In the past he has used regular analysis of student achievement to drive instructional changes, but this is not a systematic part of his leadership strategy today. Some staff members continue to share student achievement results with him on a regular basis.

It does need to be noted that the context of the school is shifting significantly. Jess retired from Sunnyside in June of 2005, after data were collected. The new principal will be working, not only with the original Sunnyside staff, but with fifteen additional staff members from the Birth to Five Program.

### Carrie's Background

When I watched Carrie before her children arrived one day, I thought to myself, there is a teacher with an abundance of energy. She is “all business,” getting her room ready for the children or handing out last-minute instruction to aides or parent volunteers. It felt the way it does behind stage before the curtain rises and the show begins. Carrie appeared to be enjoying the preparation routine, knowing that the classroom will be ready once the children enter the door. Unlike Diane's classroom, you got the sense that the routine is similar every day and the children come to expect and rely on the structure, as they happily go about putting their supplies away and getting settled in their desks. She smiled and personally greeted them, often referring to family events she knew about. The children appeared genuinely happy to see her and be in school (C: obs.1.pg.1).

Raised in a military family, Carrie moved frequently while growing up. She was a good student in school and had a positive school experience. Unlike Diane, Carrie did not report on any events or experiences from her youth that prepared her or propelled her towards a career in education, and did not always know she would be a teacher. She received feedback from others that she was actually “awful with kids” (C: int.1.pg.4). She thought she might be a doctor, but instead completed an accounting degree in the early eighties and became a bookkeeper, working alone in her home with her small children. When her children were old enough to go to school, she volunteered in their classrooms and “felt at home and that she belonged there” (C: int.1.pg.4). At the age of thirty-one, she decided that she would be a teacher and returned to school and graduated four years later with a BA in education.

All her teaching experiences have been at Sunnyside. She completed her student teaching in a kindergarten classroom in the fall of 1995 and subsequently held two long-term substitute positions in kindergarten. She taught special education for two years and when the opportunity arose moved to a first grade classroom where she has been for the past six years. She transferred to a fifth grade classroom beginning in the fall of 2005.

### Carrie's Personal Characteristics

Carrie possesses many of the same personal characteristics as Diane. Although the examples differ, data suggest that Carrie, like Diane is committed to teaching, tenacious about student success, passionate about the importance of reading and writing, confident about her teaching skills, and loves children. In addition to these characteristics Carrie shares with Diane, she possesses other characteristics that define her as a person and influence her actions as a teacher. Throughout this study the word that was most used by others and Carrie herself was "driven." Additionally, although never mentioned by others, Carrie indicated many times that the primary reason she is determined to make sure all children succeed is her faith. Another difference between Diane and Carrie that was referenced frequently in interviews and observed in the classroom as well as during professional development sessions is the particular approach Carrie takes to implementing new learnings. Diane will carefully analyze the applicability based on her students and her prior knowledge, beliefs, and experience before trying on a new strategy. Carrie, on the other hand, will try on new learnings immediately and then see how students react. When asked to define her approach to learning, she said, "Some people tend to watch and some people jump – I am a jumper" (C: int.2.pg.1).

The following personal characteristics that most clearly paint a picture of Carrie as a teacher; “drive,” “faith,” and “jumping in” are explained as follows:

In reviewing all the data on Carrie the actual word “driven” was used over fifteen times, (compared to two to five times other characteristics were mentioned), and many of the examples used to describe Carrie referenced some aspect of this personality trait. Unlike Diane, who enjoyed stopping in the middle of a read aloud to educate visitors about what she was doing and why, I would not want to interrupt Carrie or ask for an impromptu explanation of what she was doing. When asked why she is successful, Carrie responded, “I am a very driven person. If I do something I do it all the way. Not part way, all the way. It is just part of my personality. I am driven to help them (the students) be successful”(C: int.1.pg.1). Jess said repeatedly that Carrie “has that fire inside to do well and for the kids to succeed regardless of what grade she would be in. She would be the best teacher that she could possibly be and possibly get better” (J: int.1.pg.1).

There are many ways that this personal characteristic is actualized in her practice. Although not required to do so, the data indicate Carrie is one of two teachers who voluntarily “turns in her assessment information on each student every month – there may be a month I do not get it” (J: int.1.pg.3). Jess goes on to say that this is one strategy that she uses to hold herself accountable to her personal mission; to make sure one hundred percent of her children are successful. In talking about the purpose of reviewing assessment data with him, Jess indicated that “It must be an informal way to keep herself accountable” (J: int.1.pg.4). When talking about Carrie’s ability and unwavering belief in differentiating instruction for children, her learning partner Tessa explains that, “She has this internal drive to individualize. She has to do it. There isn’t another way” (T:

int.1.pg.1).

Although this drive is what seems to keep Carrie motivated to work very hard, data reveal there is a down side to this characteristic. Jess will say that there are times when

She gets a little fired up, gung ho. I do not know exactly how to phrase it, but she gets very focused on what she is going to do and kicks into high energy. She is a high energy person and sometimes I think that can raise the energy of the room to the point where it is too much. Sometimes her voice has a little edge. She works on calming down, relaxing (J: int.1.pg.6).

Data also show Carrie has to contend with colleagues who do not understand why she has to work so hard; why she is so driven. “She is kind of a driven person which is again one of those things which can cause other issues. People who are not as driven want to say, ‘Why are you so driven?’” (J: int.1.pg.5). Part of this drive is inherent in her personality, but as she admits, part of the drive is flamed by her faith. When I asked Carrie to talk more about her success, Carrie said that becoming a teacher was a “calling from God. It was something that I was called to do and I cannot waste it. It is why I am so driven” (C: int.1.pg.4).

The data indicate this sense of calling is manifested when Carrie implements new learnings quickly or jumps into new situations.

She pays attention to the information that is given out at the institutes or trainings. She is the first that will come back and implement new things. She is a front runner in that respect. She is not afraid to try new and then fail and then say that didn't work (J: int.1.pg.1).

Carrie herself will say, “I am a risk taker and do not mind change. I am willing to try new things. If I want the best for kids, then I need to try new things”(C: int.1.pg.6). Carrie was the first teacher in her building to implement a workshop model for teaching writing. After her drive, faith and tendency to jump right into new ideas and learnings, Carrie’s dedication to teaching and her confidence in her abilities are two other personal characteristic that were mentioned most frequently.

The data convey an image of Carrie as a dedicated professional who puts in the time until she completes the work to her satisfaction. “Carrie is not a watcher. Some days she is here until 5:00 and she is here early and on the weekend and does work at home. Not even work that you can see sometimes, but she is thinking” (J: int.1.pg.1).

She also initiates collaboration groups where teachers get together to study problems they encounter in their practice. She is one of the leaders that took the initiative to set up the collaboration group that meets before school. She has tried not to be the meeting leader all the time even though it was her idea basically to set it up. She thought it was an important part of the job to think and solve problems together (J: int.1.pg.2).

Carrie meets with her learning partner once a month to review the challenges they are facing with students and make adjustments to plans until the students succeed. Tessa explains. “If we had a child on a plan for six to eight weeks and if he or she are not making progress we change it up. What is their learning style? What else can we bring in that will help them learn?” (T: int.1. pg.1).

The data is also clear that Carrie, like Diane, is confident in her abilities as a teacher. She worked hard to learn and practice a range of strategies so she does not need

to refer to a manual to find out how to teach reading or writing. “Now I have so many things under my belt and I do not have to spend as much time. I know my resources well enough that I know what to pull for that student” (C: int.1.pg.1). Although she indicated that, “God gave me the energy to work with first graders, I would be just as successful with fifth grade students once I got it under my belt” (C: int.1.pg.6).

Although not a dominant theme in the data, after talking a long time about what she does to enable her students to be successful, she stopped and said, “I just love little kids. I went into teaching little kids so I could see them be successful” (C: int.1.pg.3). When thinking about student success, Carrie said, “the environment is set up with their success in mind. They know I love them regardless and so they are willing to take some risks to become successful” (C: int.3.pg.2).

In summary, the data reveal Carrie, like Diane is a confident teacher who sees herself as a professional educator; putting in the time needed to perform the job well. Additionally, Carrie demonstrates her commitment to the profession by seeing the importance of working together to solve common problems of practice, and she has initiated opportunities for this to occur. Both Carrie and Diane also are focused on student success, confident about their skills and abilities, and have a love for children. In addition to these common characteristics, Carrie has an abundance of energy and drive which she attributes to her faith. This energy and drive manifest themselves in many areas, but one that is distinguishable from Diane is that Carrie will often jump in to new learnings and situations with less caution.

### Carrie's Instructional Practices

I have observed Carrie many times reading aloud to students, writing with students, launching the writer's workshop, or conducting an individual writing conference. In all of these instances, almost every one of the twenty-three first grade students were engaged and participated. They have had so many visitors in the classroom that the students no longer turn around and wave or ask what is going on. They were told, and, according to Carrie, they know they are helping teachers learn.

The desks are set up in table groupings of three or four students. There is a distinctive place in the room where the children gather for whole group instruction. The longest lesson whole group I observed was about twenty minutes. Other lessons were just five or ten minutes before students returned to their seats to begin reading or writing. During independent writing time, the students know not to interrupt the teacher while she is conferencing with others, and instead they use a variety of independent strategies that allow them to continue writing if they get stuck. One student, for example, drew a straight line when she did not know how to spell a word. I asked this little girl why she drew a line and she said, "because I do not know the word and that is just what we do until we figure it out, learn some more letters, or get some help" (C: obs.1.pg.2). If they have a question, they know to put a yellow sticky on their desk (C: obs.1.pg.1). There is a couch on the back wall where parents or aides are usually reading with students or listening to them read. The room has comfortable lamp lighting in various locations; charts adorn the walls; books are everywhere. The children enjoy it when you sit and have them tell you about their work, but they do not seek the visitor's attention or feedback. Just walking in you would describe the classroom as busy, but well

orchestrated; a classroom where there was structure and routines and children knew what they were and followed them.

Like Diane's, data suggest Carrie's teaching practices in literacy are aligned to the components of highly effective literacy practices and are grounded in her beliefs and experiences. Carrie frequently talked about the impact of her belief that "if they (students) are not successful it is my fault. I didn't give them what they needed when they needed it" (C: int.1.pg.1). When asked how this belief directly impacts her practice, Carrie further explained.

I guess it would be that you really truly have to know your kids and where they are at to individualize appropriately, because if you do not know them well enough you will be instructing at a level where they will not learn. For some of my really low kids and I think I have the right teaching points for them, and if they do not learn it, I figure that I didn't know them well enough as a reader or a writer to pick the right teaching point (C: int.2.pg.6).

When asked about the children who did not meet the expected standard in reading, she responded, "I pondered and reflected over this so much. What could I do differently? What was challenging them or getting in their way of becoming better readers? What could I try differently?" (C: int.3.pg.1). When analyzing this particular situation, although well aware of some of the challenges she was facing ("I knew at the beginning of the year that things were going to be tough"), she still asked herself, "Did I over focus on comprehension and not enough on phonics and phonemic awareness? Did I not review the decoding strategies frequently enough?" (C: int.3.pg.1).

In order to adjust her instruction to ensure student success, the data indicate that she believes a teacher has to know children's strengths and challenges well in order to design individualized learning experiences. Therefore a description of Carrie's instructional practices begins with how her assessment practices lead to differentiated instruction that is designed to ensure that all students meet expected standards.

Carrie and others frequently talked about her assessment practices. Most evident in the data is her frequent assessment of children's knowledge and application of district and state standards coupled with her ability to differentiate instruction and supports based upon assessment results. When asked what assessments she uses to determine student needs, Carrie said, "I look at the DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment). We (Carrie, her learning partner, and the aides) look at our conferring notes. We look at patterns. I think about other kids that have been in similar situations and what has worked in the past"(C: int.1.pg.3). When asked what she does with the information that may make her more successful than others she indicated, "I give an assessment, I know where the child is at and I know where the next steps are. I look at all the data I have on that child and look at their strengths and what is the next step"(C: int.1.pg.3).

The next step for students is established by the state and district standards. Data convey Carrie understands the standards and believes that, with the proper instruction, each child will be able to meet these standards. The data also indicate she has high expectations for all students and recognizes that having high expectations for her students is part of her success. She said, "My students probably succeed because I hold them to high expectations and support them, and then praise them when they reach that new level" (C: int.5.pg.1). Even though the children are only six or seven years old, over and

over the data suggest Carrie expects them to think on their own and demonstrate their thinking instead of parroting back what she wants them to say. “Instead of stating something that may be obvious – she has them (the students) do that thinking. I think by having them verbalize and step back and think why or how they may be doing something that leads to deeper to thinking for the child” (T: int.1.pg.2). I observed Carrie insisting that children do this hard work and thinking when watching her teach how to stick to one topic in writing. In a whole group writing mini lesson, Carrie modeled how to eliminate sentences unrelated to the topic. She made sure that the children could articulate what she did to make the necessary revisions. During an individual writing conference, Carrie asked a prolific six year old writer to reread her work like she had modeled during the mini lesson. She then asked her to find the sentences that were unrelated to the topic and then tell her why they were unrelated. When the child struggled with finding the sentences, Carrie, knowing the child was capable of completing this challenging task on her own, did not make additional adjustments to the task. She let her struggle with finding the sentences on her own. When she finally found them and could explain why and how she was going to change her writing, she was obviously pleased with herself. She quietly proclaimed, “This is good. I should share this at share circle time” (C: obs.1.pg.1). When asked the question, “Does Carrie have high enough expectations, Jess responded, “No question. Her expectation is to get them to grade level expectations or beyond” (J: int.1.pg.6).

Because she holds these standards constant and expects students to meet them, for some students the data are also clear that she differentiates student instruction based on their needs. After the child’s needs are analyzed, Carrie works with her learning partner

to design differentiated instructional plans for students not meeting standards. She says, “Ok what do they need? This is so and so and they are struggling and this is how they are struggling. What do we need to do to individualize for this kid?” (C: int.1.pg.2). Carrie also explained that she is able to differentiate by matching the curriculum to meet their needs. “For example, we have *Read Well*. I would not put everyone in *Read Well*, but it does meet some children’s needs who need that scripted, phonics based approach. We have *Read Naturally* for some kids that are not picking up on their fluency component” (C: int.1.pg.3). Jess, her principal, summarized Carrie’s ability to use a variety of resources versus one set program to meet individualized needs when he said,

You cannot point to any one thing. This is what she is. She is a combination of all that stuff together and she will pick the best parts. Not every kid does *Four Square* (a writing approach) all the time. There are story webs or other types of planning kids can use and she allows that (J: int.1.pg.3).

He later summarized, “It is not following the book or following a set of lessons. It is following the needs of kids in the classroom” (J: int.1.pg.6). Her learning partner also indicated that, “She really focuses individually on kids – one at a time and based upon monthly DRA assessment that is continually changing. She uses all of her resources so effectively to meet the needs of kids” (T: int.1.pg.1).

Data suggest like Diane, Carrie carefully scaffolds her instruction. Carrie’s instructional decisions for students not meeting standards are based upon clearly understanding what she wants the child to know and be able to do, and then providing instruction that is designed to move the child from where they are to where they need to be. “You need to start where they are successful. That has to be the point you start. You

ask yourself, what are they successful doing and what's the next little jump for them" (C: int.1.pg.3).

In order to create an environment where children can struggle with learning a concept or take the risk to expose their thinking even if it is incorrect, the data indicate Carrie, like Diane, believes that instruction has to take place within a safe, positive community. "The environment is set up with their success in mind. They know I love them and so they are willing to take some risks to become successful. Also I don't let others speak unkindly in my classroom, which encourages risk taking" (C: int.5.pg.1). This supportive community was evident when watching Carrie work with students. Like Diane, after asking one student a particularly challenging question, she insists that others wait while he gathers his thoughts and responds. Instead of letting others move quickly to their own ideas, she slows them down enough for them to acknowledge what the speaker before them said before adding their thinking. She asks others to "help out" when someone is stuck and expects that same student who received help to help someone else during that same lesson. All of these small actions contribute to a positive learning community. When I asked Jess "Would she be the kind of teacher who kids will remember five to ten years from now? Jess responded, "I think there is not any question that she would be. When they look back and remember first grade it will be with a positive frame of mind" (J: int.1.pg.6).

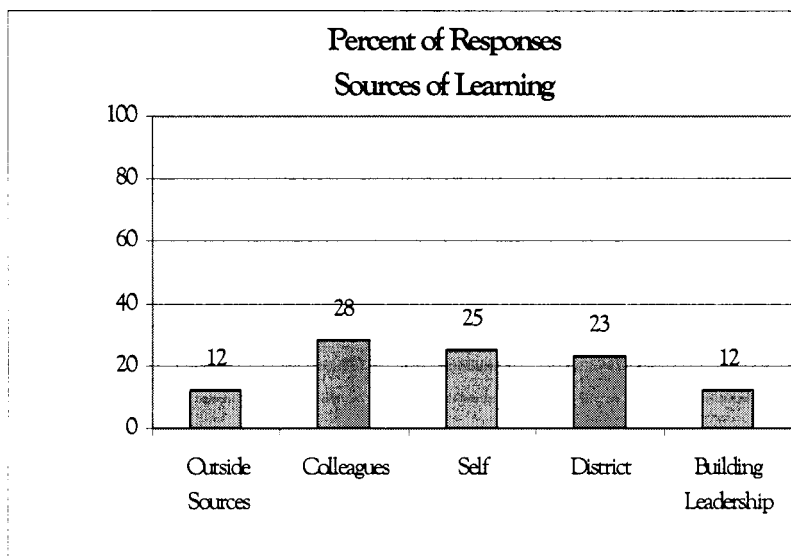
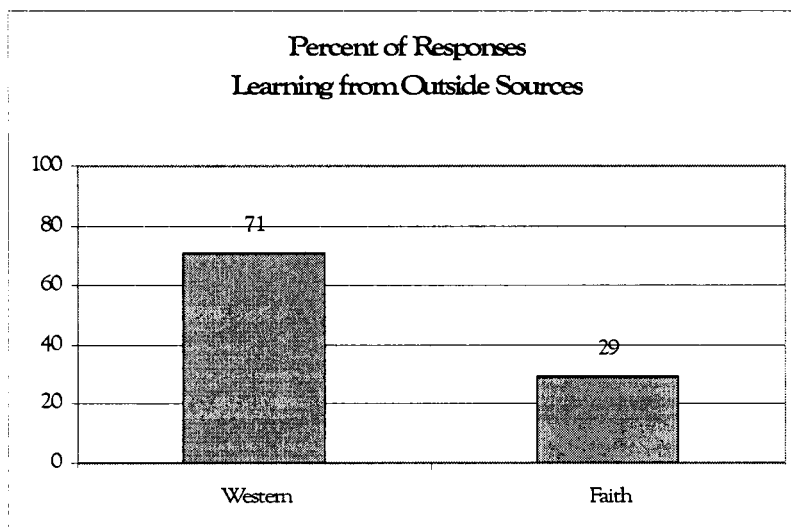
When looking at all of Carrie's instructional decisions and actions, in summary the data affirm she would be described as a teacher who has incorporated current research on how children learn into her practice. She operates from a clear conviction that if the students are not learning, she is responsible. High quality assessment practices are the

foundation of her instructional decisions. Based upon the assessment information, coupled with clear learning targets and high expectations for student success, Carrie differentiates instruction based upon student needs. Teaching and learning take place in a positive learning community.

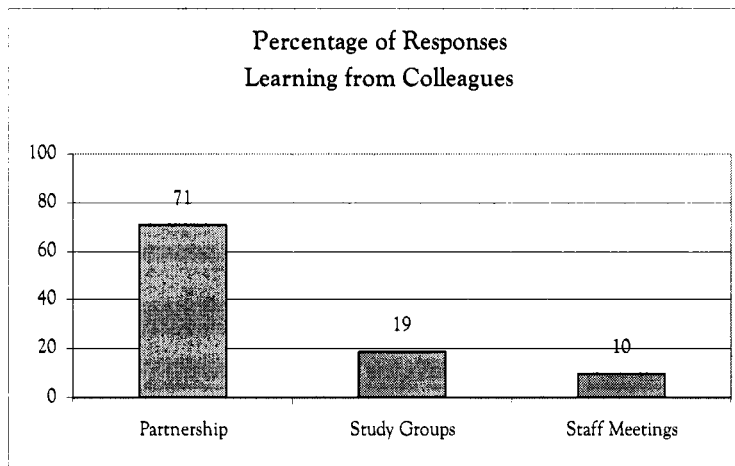
### Carrie's Sources of Learning

Carrie, like Diane learns from a variety of sources, but unlike Diane, what she relies on most frequently is the learning that emanates from outside sources (Learning from outside sources includes the influence of Carrie's faith, so while it does not appear to be significant when looking at the percentage of references, Carrie will say it is her greatest source of learning.); and colleagues, most predominately her learning partner Tessa; and the district.

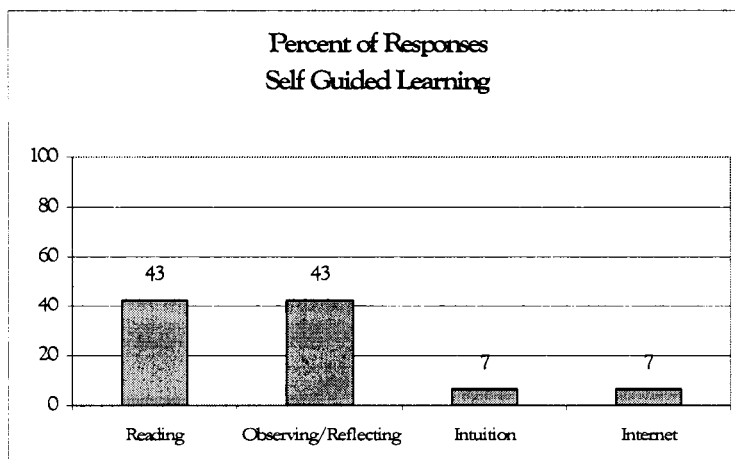
The following tables depict 1) the percentage of responses related to the five sources of learning, and 2) the major sub categories in each of the sources. The section following the tables describes these five sources beginning with the most influential on Carrie's practice (learning from outside sources and colleagues) to the least (learning from building principal).

**Table 7: Carrie's Sources of Learning****Table 8: Carrie's Learning from Outside Sources**

In this chart, "Western" refers to all the comments made about Carrie's experiences either while at Western in the masters program or with her "masters group" (who are former students who meet monthly). "Faith" refers to the comments made about the impact of her religious beliefs on her practice.

**Table 9: Carrie's Learning from Colleagues**

Learning from “Partnership” refers to the comments she made about the importance of her learning partner. “Study Groups” refer to the comments Carrie made about the importance of study groups (reading professional books together with other teachers) within or outside her school. The “Staff Meetings” took place weekly at Carrie’s school and these comments referenced the learnings she obtained by participating in or leading these meetings.

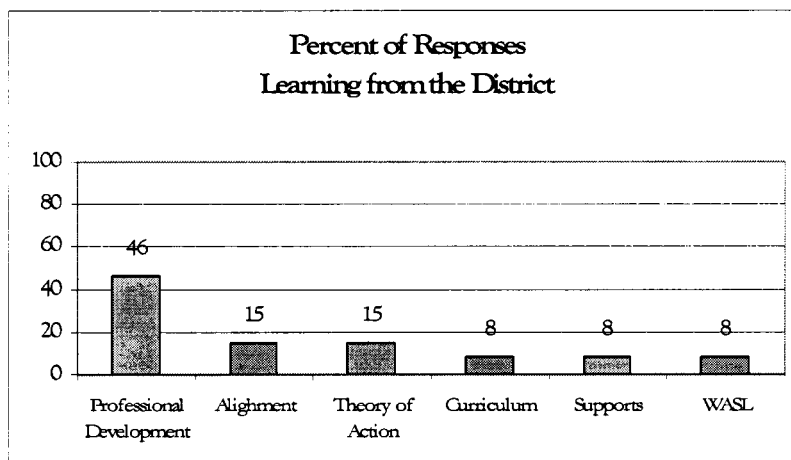
**Table 10: Carrie's Self Guided Learning**

“Reading” refers to readings that she did on her own. “Observing and Reflecting” refers

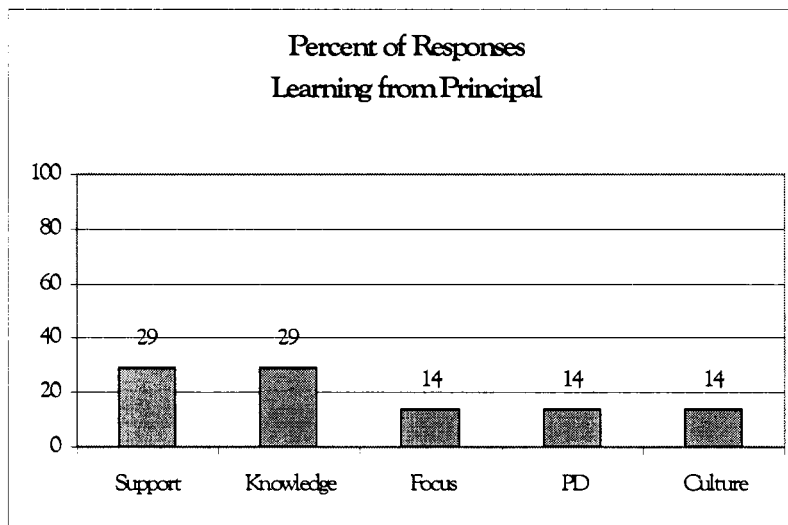
to the times she watched students and thought about their responses to her instruction.

“Intuition” refers to the times Carrie mentioned anything about “gut feelings” or “I just know.” “Internet” were the references Carrie made about going on line and looking up a particular book or resources to help solve a problem she was facing.

**Table 11: Carrie’s Learning from the District**



“Professional Development” refers to all the learning opportunities sponsored by the district. “Alignment” refers to the work the district did in ensuring the curriculum, assessments, and instruction aligned to the grade level expectations. “Theory of Action” refers to the comments made that were a result of the district’s way of working with staff members. For example, when Carrie mentioned that all teachers knew that they had to implement the literacy model, this was noted under this category. “Curriculum” refers to the literacy materials that were purchased by the district to support student learning. “Supports” refers to the resources that were provided for before, after, or summer school sessions. “WASL” refers to the district use of results to develop district and school plans.

**Table 12: Carrie’s Learning from Principal**

In this chart, “Support” refers to the resources that were purchased with building dollars. “Knowledge” was noted when Carrie talked about discussing a particularly difficult situations with her principal and how she utilized his suggestions as part of her learning. “Focus” refers to the common focus of the school’s improvement plan. “PD” refers to the professional development provided only at the building level and “Culture” refers to the positive environment that the principal created and supported throughout the building.

#### Learning from Outside Sources

In talking to Carrie about her sources of learning, the data show she would always talk about the power of working with others, but towards the end of the first and second interview, after she had explained more traditional sources of learning that you would expect to hear about in a school setting, she articulated that these other sources of learning were secondary to the learning she derived from her faith which included the importance of caring for children and her personal responsibility to ensure their success.

At the end of the first interview when I asked her specifically about outside sources of learning and what would have the most impact she replied, “I would have to say my faith and then my masters group” (C: int.1.pg.3). After explaining about all other sources of learning during our second interview, she stopped mid-sentence when talking about her drive to help all children succeed and said,

Ok wait a minute. I have to go back to something that I may have not said five years ago, maybe not even three years ago, but one of the things that impacts me the most is my faith. I would have to go back to that as number one. As I mature I am learning more and more about myself. My faith impacts my practice because it impacts my drive, my interactions with people, how I value my students, Oh yeah ,that is huge. All of that relationship building that you have to do in a community and the valuing of them – that all comes I think from my faith, so I would have to say that is number one (C: int.2.pg.5).

The data point out that learning occurred from Carrie’s masters program in literacy instruction at Western Washington University. She frequently referred to this year and a half in her life as “very impactful on my practice and pretty intense” (C: int.1.pg.1). While in the program she was influenced by Professor Larry Antell. “I think about what Larry Antell at Western taught us about the components of good literacy instruction – what kids need to do, but also having the knowledge to decide what to use was part of my masters program” (C: int.1.pg.3). When coming up with a dilemma in teaching literacy, she still thinks about what the professors in the program would say about the problem and still consults with them when she feels it is necessary. “When I get stuck, I e-mail professors at Western to get ideas” (C: int.1.pg.6).

Another benefit of her masters program is the teacher support team that developed and is in existence today. Carrie explains how this group remains a component of her ongoing learning.

We get together for social reasons, we call it our “masters group.” We started meeting over five years ago. We get together once a month and teaching always comes up - our struggles. It is not necessarily with the instruction as it is with the behaviors and how to deal with student behaviors to help them be successful. It is one thing we all have in common. The highest teachers are in eighth grade and we all have student behaviors that in order to teach you have to be able to manage. You still have to be able to work with colleagues who may be you know do not think the same way that you do. We all have issues with the administration because there is still that push and pull there. I think that talking to other people from different districts allows anonymity, so if I want to talk about things they do not know - the kids, the teachers, but there are similarities in their building and district and we are able to problem solve, which is very helpful in being successful (C: int.2.pg.3).

### Learning from Colleagues

The data indicate an abundance of references to learning with colleagues. She talked about a collegial study group that she participated in at Mountain View Elementary, a study group that she organized and participated in at Sunnyside, and learning from colleagues at staff meetings. But the data were clear. The impact of these learning opportunities on her practice is minor in comparison to the impact of Carrie’s

partnership with Tessa, another first grade teacher at Sunnyside Elementary. At least fifty percent of the references Carrie or others made about Carrie regarding the influence of working with colleagues on changing practice included a mention of Tessa.

I have done so much professional development and it has impacted practice, but my partnership with Tessa has impacted my practice the most because we have a trusting enough relationship that we hold each other accountable, we set goals, we check in with each other, we observe each other, we meet once a week to talk about our practice and the kids learning so we can see if our practice is effective or not effective to see if we have to go another way with our practice That is where I am getting my most growth – with her (C: int.1.pg.1).

When asked directly, what has the most impact on improving your instruction, participating or leading a study group or working with Tessa, Carrie's quick response was

Working with Tessa. What I was doing with Mountain View last year was a practice study, it was not a book study and it impacted my classroom a little bit, but because they were not here, there was not accountability. With Tessa we check in with each other, not to say you are not doing it, but to say how you are doing (C: int.2.pg.2).

In addition to talking each week, Tessa and Carrie also observe each other. "That is where we really get into the nitty gritty also of the kids" (C: int.1.pg.2). If they are "stuck" and cannot figure out what to do next, they research options together. Carrie explained how this occurs.

Last week we were looking at our plans, our goals and it said something where we both said, what does this mean? Then we pulled out a professional development

book and professional standards and we figured out what it meant. There are resources out there that we go and access. Sometimes it is because we have gotten on the internet and found articles or found books (C: int.2.pg.3).

### Self Guided Learning

Another source of learning that the data reveal is learning from and by herself. Carrie initially reflects on her practice and as a result of this reflection determines her instructional strengths and challenges. Once she figures this out, she chooses professional reading materials that help her address her challenge areas. Unlike Diane who relies more heavily on learning from herself by trying something and noting the impact on children, Carrie relies more heavily on professional material (books, research, and videos) as the primary means for self guided learning. When asked to think about herself as a learner, Carrie responded, “When I think about learning on my own, it starts with being reflective about practice. What are my strengths and what are my challenges? (C: int.2.pg.1). (After noting challenges) I decide on what I need to learn. It comes from that tension within me, and then if I have to learn by myself, most likely I would look for resources - look for a book - try some things” (C: int.2.pg.1). She talked about a time that she felt she needed to learn more about conferring. “I know that I am working on conferring so I have been reading books around conferring. I read *Units of Study* and pull things out from there. I have read Carl Anderson’s book, *How is it Going?* on the same topic” (C: int.1.pg.2).

### Learning from District

The data suggest Carrie, more so than Diane, sees the district professional development initiatives, focus, and accompanying supports as a key source of her learning. District professional development initiatives that were most frequently referenced were the district literacy initiatives that took place during the 2004-05 school year. These included the development of a teacher-leader group (studio teachers) and three all district in school grade level institutes. As a studio teacher, Carrie participated in all of the institutes. Her classroom was the training site for the first-grade teachers for both institutes. The studio teachers met one day a month with an outside consultant in a seminar format. During these monthly trainings, participants engaged in a variety of activities including; observing classroom videos on literacy practices, observing and giving feedback in classrooms, looking at student work, and reading professional journals and children's literature. The sessions were based on agreed upon common problems of practice and aligned to the information presented and practiced during the literacy institutes.

Reflecting on these professional development experiences the data show the impact of participating in the studio teacher team. "It is with the studio teacher team where I get a lot of my own personal knowledge. It deepens my learning so I have more things in my fist that I can pull out and use with children" (C: int.1.pg.2). After she spent more time with the studio teacher team and watching Leah Mermelstein teach in her classroom, she elaborated further on the impact of these trainings on her practice.

I think the combination of the studio teachers with Leah helped my practice a lot.

I think that with Anneke (outside consultant who conducted the monthly studio

teacher seminars) we got to see somebody model and practice with our kids - walk in not knowing our kids, modeling practice, being very effective, going back to studio teachers and using it as a base and having Anneke there learning beside us, being able to grab resources for us, being able to do some research for us, being able to bring back stuff to help further us (C: int.2.pg.4).

When just focusing on the impact of having Leah in her classroom Carrie expressed that she was amazed at what she could learn when watching someone else teach her children. “Leah is very similar to the studio group in that she stretches the knowledge I have” (C: int.1.pg.2).

The purpose of the literacy initiatives was to go beyond learning new information, apply the new learning in the classroom, receive feedback on the implementation of the new learnings, and make ongoing improvements based upon the feedback and student achievement. Tony Alvarado, former superintendent of District 2, says it very simply, “You did not learn it until you apply it” (Alvarado 2005). Carrie demonstrated her acquisition of new knowledge by applying the learnings in her practice. Jess observed that, “Carrie pays attention to the information that is given out at the institutes or trainings. She is the first that will come back and implement new things. She is a front runner in that respect” (J: int.1.pg. 1). After each session, studio teachers would set goals. After one session, Carrie’s goal was to incorporate some of the management discussion, phrasing used and conferring strategies (MM.2.05).

In Carrie’s classroom data reveal there was evidence of a link between the goals set after the studio teacher seminars and institutes and Carrie’s practice. During one observation Carrie conducted a writing conference. One of the management strategies

that she tried to incorporate was how to organize the conference to include a specific conference structure (research what the child is doing aligned to the previous mini lesson, determine the teaching point, suggest what the child needs to work on based upon the teaching point, and then tell them when you will be back to check on their progress). Previously she spent too much time on each conference and she was striving to make them more succinct so she could confer with more students during independent writing. When conferring with a student Carrie approached him and asked, “What are you working on and can you show me a part in your writing where you asked yourself does this make sense? (researching to determine a teaching point). Her writing mini lesson was on making sure that the writing made sense and therefore that was what she was looking for in the child’s response. When the child responded, she then said, “Can I show you another thing you can do when rereading? (suggesting what the child needs to work on). She then went on to make the suggestion as to what he could do to make sure that the writing made sense and then told him that she would check back with him before share time to see how he was doing (checking on progress) (C: obs.1.pg.2). This type of evidence was present throughout all the observations in her classroom throughout the school year.

In addition to the professional development in literacy that she participated in during the 2004-2005 school year, data suggest Carrie also took advantage and continued to use the trainings provided previously. When asked about Carrie’s use of other professional development opportunities that she participated in Jess indicated

From the time we started out with the writing notebook five to six years ago. We actually started to focus on something there, and she took that, did what she

could, and then RC Owens, ELIC, then Denver- twice once for reading and once for writing. Four Square – she still uses that (J: int.1.pg.1).

The data indicate that another area where the district contributed to Carrie's learning was the development of student benchmarks (currently referred to as grade level expectations) and the assessments and curriculum that aligned to these grade level benchmarks. When asked if there were other reasons for her success, she responded, "Part of that is because of our work as a building and a district. Some of it has to do with the alignment that we did with our assessments and benchmarks and curriculum" (C: int.1.pg.1). She went on to say,

It is the alignment between the assessment and the curriculum and the grade level expectations. It is because of that alignment that my assessment assesses what I am supposed to be teaching and by having that alignment when I give an assessment, I know where the child is at and I know where the next steps are. I can plan for the next steps (C: int.1.pg.3).

Resources (time and money) were another area that Carrie referred to when talking about the district as a source of her learning.

We have a wide variety of curriculum to match their (student) needs. For example, we have *Read Well*. I would not put everyone in Read Well, but it does meet some children's needs who need that scripted, phonics based very systematic approach. *Read Naturally* - I have some kids that are not picking up on their fluency component. So we have a lot of curriculums to meet different needs (C: int.1.pg.3).

In addition to resources for students, the data also show Carrie believes that “having access to high quality, research based study resources” (C: int.1.pg.3) as well as having the time to plan how to implement the learnings from these resources and the institutes.

The early releases provide built-in time. We do not have to plan it outside of the school day and that is what a challenge is for all teachers - finding time. A lot of teachers would like to collaborate, but they are so busy and they are pulled in so many directions. To sit down and find the time is really challenging. I think the built in time is very important (T: int.1.pg.3).

Tessa summed it up nicely when she said,

Administration is so supportive of Carrie and me - all of us - helping us - giving us any and all resources we need. It has never been an issue of funds - we will find the funds is the attitude. If this is what will help us teach better, the administration will do that. Nooksack supports their teachers in the learning in the process (T: int.1.pg.2).

Although not articulated in the same words, the data indicate that Carrie sees the district’s focus or theory of action as a support for her learning. She said that she could be successful anywhere because of her drive and passion to help children be successful, but part of her success is because “Nooksack is the frontrunner” (C: int.2.pg.2.) Jess indicated that, “Part of her success is because she is in this district because we have done work other districts have not gotten to. All of our staff profits from that” (J: int.1.pg.5). The manner in which the district uses student achievement data, which is a component of the superintendent’s theory of action on how schools change and improve, was also cited

as a source of learning and teacher motivation. When asked what else helps her to learn, Carrie mentioned

WASL and assessments –all of our assessments because when we as a building looked at WASL, ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills), our district writing, we thought about ourselves as teachers and we decided that writing was probably our weakest, so where do we go from here – yeah I think not that it is the end all and be all, not that it is my goal for kids to pass the WASL, my goal is to help kids learn but the WASL helps us figure out how to get kids to think and to express their thinking and that is huge because that is what we want them to do. We want them to think (C: int.2.pg.4).

The district as a source of learning for Carrie was multifaceted. More frequently referred to in interviews and observations was the district professional development initiatives during the 2004-05 school year as an important source of learning, supported by the districts infrastructures (alignment of student benchmarks, assessments and curriculum as well as the time and money that support teacher learning) as well as the district's stance towards the importance of improved instruction as a means of improving student achievement. A common focus between the district and the school, along with principal support was also cited as an important contributor.

### Principal as a Source of Learning

The data suggest another area that is a source of learning for Carrie; the leadership provided by her principal, Jess. The building's focus is the same as the district – powerful teaching and learning in every classroom as the key to improved student achievement, with an initial focus on literacy instruction. Carrie recognizes the building focus as a support to her own personal learning. When asked to talk more about her success, she indicated that one of the factors was, “The focusing in our building on something that the study groups could align to” (C: int1.pg.1). She also indicated that since they were all working on literacy, Jess was comfortable purchasing the resources that were referred to during literacy trainings. Carrie indicated that strength in their school was Jess “who gives us the resources so we team and learn together” (C: int.2.pg.2).

In summary, the data suggest Carrie learns from a range of resources, but she relies more predominately on the learnings acquired through one major outside source; her faith. Other sources of learning emanate from learning with and from colleagues, most significantly, her partnership with her colleague, Tessa. After these two predominate sources of learning, Carrie also gains insights from, learnings acquired from reading professional materials on her own (learning with and from self), and the district professional development efforts and accompanying supports. The support she has from her principal and the knowledge he shares with her is also a source of learning.

### Assumptions about Carrie's Success

Jess summed up the reasons for Carrie's success when he said,

A short summary is that she wants to improve and grow all the time and be the best and she takes advantage of every opportunity to do that. She is not against giving it a try to seeing if she can make it work and if not, modifying or doing whatever else is needed. She works with all the other people that do the same thing in their room and collaborates with other people. She is not afraid to say I do not know what to do with this kid because he is not getting it, and I have run out of ideas (J: int.1.pg.5).

When looking at her instructional practices, the data affirm Carrie is successful in part because she implemented many of the components of a balanced reading program into her classroom. She knows the purpose of read alouds and uses them to have students think and problem solve at a much higher level than they are able to do on their own. She implemented all the components of reading and writing workshop model in her classroom and was able to apply the structures as suggested by experts in this field (Lucy Calkins and Leah Mermelstein). Although Carrie, like Diane, may not be conscious of constructivist teaching learning theory, just implementing this instructional model for writing and reading forces her and her students to engage in these practices. For example, during read alouds children take the time to form their own ideas, show the evidence for their ideas, and most important learn how to talk to each other in ways that cause them to learn, engaging in what Lauren Resnick, director of the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, calls "accountable" talk; talk where students take another's remarks seriously and respond directly to them with supporting evidence (Calkins 2001).

The data did reveal that when she is making decisions about matching resources to student needs, Carrie does not always adhere to principles of a balanced literacy approach. Because she may not have the theoretical underpinnings as to why one approach works better than others (an in depth understanding of Bransford's work on how people learn), she often chooses materials that go against this research, especially with her more challenging students. Even though she tried to explain how well she knew resources and was able to link these resources to the needs of students, it did appear that she was not always discriminating in her choices. "We tried so many different interventions this year. We tried *Read Well*, *Read Naturally*, Guided Reading, and Conferring. We even got information on Slingerland and tried that with some of the kids based on a recommendation from Ian (the school psychologists)" (C: int.3.pg.1).

Carrie epitomizes a professional teacher. She works with others, sharing her ideas and assisting others with difficulties. She volunteers to lead work teams and mentors new teachers. She is an informal leader in her building and is on the cutting edge of reform and is not afraid to take risks to improve education for all students. She models learning by taking classes, engaging in professional development activities and expecting herself to continually learn and grow. She spends additional hours planning and reflecting on her practice and holds herself accountable if students are not successful.

In looking at the all the data in the aggregate surrounding Carrie's success these assumptions begin to emerge.

- Carrie is driven by her faith and her belief that each child can be successful and therefore puts forth a great deal of energy in implementing new learnings without fear of failure and is persistent in providing the supports students need to be successful.

- She has high expectations for children based on the state grade level expectations and holds herself personally responsible if children are not meeting these expectations independently.
- She applies many of the components of constructivist learning theory into her practice.
- She assesses children frequently to determine their learning needs and then, while holding the standard constant, uses all her resources to differentiate instruction to enable children to be successful in each step to reaching the learning target.
- She builds a positive classroom community where children support each other and feel safe making mistakes while learning new ideas.
- She uses other adults to help support student learning.
- She implements a variety of instructional practices in an effort to find the right combination for students still not meeting standards; most recently these strategies are aligned with district professional development initiatives.
- It seems that this ongoing search for what will work for kids is because she is still not completely grounded in one theoretical foundation that applies to all learning situations. If this was the case, she would stick with the instructional model for literacy and trust that with consistent and improved implementation the students will be successful.
- Learning with another dedicated colleague who shares the same beliefs about teaching and learning is the most effective way for Carrie to understand and integrate new learnings into her practice as she sees it. It is also a means to schedule the time to analyze student progress and regularly make adjustments to their learning plan.

- She sees the resources referenced in district trainings (books and videos) and will look for other resources when stuck and cannot determine what to do to help a student make progress.

## Chapter 6

### The Third Case

#### Anne

##### Anne's School Context

Mountain View Elementary has 235 students in grades K-5. Of these students, 38 percent are Hispanic, 15 percent are American Indian, and 45 percent are White. Sixty-four percent qualify for free and reduced lunch, 29 percent for the bilingual program, 16 percent for the migrant program, and 17 percent for special education.

In 2004 Mountain View Elementary saw the first substantial drop in WASL test scores in the area of math, dropping from 70 percent meeting the standard in 2003 to 49 percent meeting the standard in 2004. In 2005 reading and writing dropped 20 percentage points as well. In 2005 49 percent of the students met the math standard (no change from 2004), 63 percent in reading, and 44 percent in writing, which are the lowest test scores Mountain View has had since the test initially was administered in 1998. Interestingly, their science scores were second only to reading with 53 percent of all the fourth grade students meeting the standard, but in looking just at Anne's classroom in 2004 and 2005, 65 percent met the science standard. In 2005 another 3 students scored a 399, just one point below a 400 which is required to meet the standard. If these three met the standard, then 74 percent would have met the standard. When looking at disaggregated scores the largest achievement gap based upon ethnicity is in math. The smallest gaps are in reading.

Mountain View Elementary opened twelve years ago. The staff has been together for a long time, knows each other well, and supports each other personally as well as professionally. Strong friendships have developed among the teachers and for the most part, there is a supportive family atmosphere without much stress or conflict. Visitors comment on the warm, positive feeling tone they receive when walking into the building.

The current principal, Katie, has been at Mountain View for five years. This was her first position in Nooksack, but she had six years as an elementary principal in Helena, Montana. Previous to that, she was the educational director at a Helena children's psychiatric hospital and treatment center. This has remained an interest and passion for Katie in the district as well. She is the only principal who serves on the district's Barriers to Learning Task Force, which is charged with improving these systems across the district with the goal of providing the support for children so they can arrive at school physically and mentally healthy and ready to learn. She also has instituted a system within her school whereby the specialists and teachers meet regularly to review what they can do inside the classroom, school, and community to support the child's learning.

Katie has taken full advantage of all of the leadership and instructional learning offered to the other two elementary principals and, as a result, is knowledgeable and fluent about effective literacy practices. Nonetheless, in comparison with the other principals, Katie plays more of a behind the scenes role with teachers. Sarah, one of her teachers on staff, indicated that when she thought about her year she realized that,

I have not given her (Katie) as much credit as I should have in helping us improve our practice. I have not thought about how much she has gone to bat for us, finding money for books and other things. That takes a commitment that she trusts

the work we do, and that translates down to the teacher that what we are doing is worth our effort; that we are a part of the catalyst change (L: int.1.pg.1).

Another example of support behind the scenes presents itself in the persistent way she worked with teachers more resistant to change and improve their instructional practice. She continued to push upon them because she did not want resisters to affect the hard work of others. She was also adamant and found ways to support an ELL after school program and advocated quite passionately for increased ELL support in her building. She also provided the support and resources for teachers in her building who were interested in attending outside training, organizing study groups, or observing each other in classrooms.

Katie is well liked by her teachers, but because of her low-keyed role, she is hardly recognized for the instructional support she does provide. Throughout all the interviews in her building there was only Sarah's reference to her instructional leadership. This more hands off approach has created a culture where most staff members are willing to work together in grade levels or in partnership on instructional practice, but they do not organize in a way to systemically identify common problems of practice, analyze data around the problem, put school wide initiatives in place to solve the problem, and regularly evaluate the effectiveness based on student results. This lack of systemic, instructional press and intentional teaching in an area that was identified as a weakness for students was cited by a staff member as a factor in the fall of the fourth grade WASL test scores (A: int.3.pg.1). In the building, the test scores still seem to be owned by the fourth grade teachers. As a result some teachers have slipped back to

blaming outside influences rather than looking deeper at their practice, and some have begun to feel helpless.

In summary, compared to the other two elementary schools in the district, Mountain View has the highest percentage of children who qualify for free or reduced lunches and the highest percentage of bilingual students. As of the 2004-2005 school year there is a higher percentage of Hispanic children attending the school than White students. They also have the highest percentage of American Indian students in the district. Based upon the 2005 fourth grade WASL results, for the first time since the test was administered, student achievement dropped substantially. The school staff is very positive and supportive of each other. In pockets they work diligently on improving their instructional practices, but do not appear to work in a coherent systemic way around common school-wide problems of practice.

It is important to note that in the spring of 2005, Katie decided to transfer to Sunnyside Elementary where she would be able to not only lead a K-5 staff, but also integrate into the elementary school the district's Birth to Five Program and Head Start Program. The new principal, who has been a teacher and an assistant principal in the district will be the fourth principal since Mountain View opened eleven years ago.

### Anne's Background

Anne began her teaching career in the district twenty years ago at the age of forty, after her children had entered school. She had a degree in economics from Old Dominion University in Virginia and then went to art school. After moving to Bellingham, she ran the art and lecture series at Western Washington University, but quit to open two kite

stores, one in Bellingham and one in Seattle. When her children were born, she gave up the stores and went back to school to slowly earn a teaching certificate. Anne came from a family of teachers. Her mother had a school for developmentally delayed children and Anne worked there growing up. She originally thought that she would pursue a career in special education like her mother, but in watching her own children's experiences in school, she became interested in elementary education. She attributes some of her success to her previous experiences, but, most significantly, the experiences with her children, one of whom "really struggled in school." She became intrigued that children could be very bright yet "not be able to get a handle on reading or did not conform in a certain way" (A: int.1.pg.4).

After spending a year in England and Scotland, Anne returned to Bellingham, student taught in the Meridian School District in Whatcom County, and the following year was hired on to teach in the district where she has taught ever since.

### Anne's Personal Characteristics

When colleagues talk about Anne they say that she is smart, a tough old broad, no nonsense, business-like, wants people to do what she discovers, gets bored easily, not a coddler does not believe in "fluff," and shows her caring for children in her belief that they can do what she expects. Based upon achievement results, students rise to these expectations. From all these descriptors, one attribute stood apart from all others and that was Anne's proclivity to see teaching and learning as an intellectual, scholarly journey. As a result of this thinking, Anne always looks for information that expands her thinking or helps clarify a concept she is struggling with. She is curious about the world around

her and shares this curiosity with her students. In addition to this overarching characteristic and all it implies, the data further suggest Anne is a professional with a strong work ethic who desires to change the lives of children through the development of their intellects. Most important, she is confident that this can occur.

The data show Anne views teaching as an interesting intellectual journey. She states, “If there was not the intellect I would get bored. It (teaching) is a great adventure” (A: int.2.pg.1). Later on she further explains when she says,

Teaching has to be an intellectual activity. If I come into this room and do the same thing year after year, then I may as well stay in bed. Every year I have to grow and change because if I do not, why am I here? I am not throwing stuff out, but I bring something new to solve the problems. I am constantly trying to find that key and I do not think the key exists (A: int.1.pg.10).

One of her colleagues indicated, “She (Anne) has to be passionate about the topic – something she wants or needs to know something about – an intellectual activity, which fits her personality doesn’t it?” (L: int.1.pg.2).

Because she sees teaching and learning as an intellectual journey, Anne is an insatiable learner. Her principal said it succinctly. She is, “bored easily - always wants to learn new stuff” (K: int.1.pg.3). Her learning is not random and idiosyncratic, but emerges from a problem of practice that she is facing. When she first began teaching reading, she did not really know how to teach successfully, and when she succeeded, she did not completely understand the reasons for her success.

It (reading) became a big focus because I wanted to nail it down and I did not have it nailed down. I felt that I had success with reading, but if I did, I did not

know why and I was not always successful, so I really needed to think that through (A: int.1.pg.7).

Others describe her as “a learner - She is always willing to learn. It is what we enjoy. It is always a new day and there is something you do not know. For her it is a little quest” (S: int.1.pg.1).

The data also affirm that Anne, like Diane, is curious and this curiosity is contagious for children in her room. Katie confirmed this when she described Anne as, “enthused, excited, inquisitive herself and models this enthusiasm all the time” (K: int.1.pg.1). Her interests lie in the teaching of literacy through children’s literature. “Literacy is her first priority and passion” (S: int.1.pg.1). In talking about her interest in children’s literature, Anne explained,

Reading kids books is fun. Again, I read them as an adult so when I am reading a lot of these books there have to be strong elements of character, plot, setting so there is an interest for me as well. I started buying a lot of books for my kids and then starting buying books on my own and reading them and thinking about how I could use them and help them with comprehension (A: int.1.pg.4).

Like both Diane and Carrie, another personal characteristic that the data reveal is Anne’s dedication to the profession. She does not see her job ending when children walk out the door. She describes time spent at home thinking about the work for the next day. “At home I have an hour or two where I am making plans for the next day. For reading I will write down key words of things I make sure I do or talk about” (A: int.1.pg.9). She conveys that same attitude of hard work and reflection on practice when describing what she expects from her student teachers. “I feel that if they are going to be in here they

really have to work” (A: int.2.pg.7).

Again like Carrie and Diane, the data indicate Anne cares for children. Sarah explains. “She cares, she wants to do the right thing, and she is passionate. She is excited about knowledge and she knows that that is powerful and she wants to change these kids’ life” (S: int.1.pg.5). Maybe it is because of the age of the students, but the data further suggest that Anne’s caring is displayed in her desire to change the lives of the children through getting them to use their intellect. She pushes them to think. Sarah said it succinctly when she said, “It really bugs her when she thinks people (other teachers) are doing ‘namby pamby’ stuff. She believes we only have so much time to get kids up to speed” (S: int.1.pg.1). Her principal Katie, when asked about the culture in the room, responded that Anne cares for them by helping them to do “hard work.” She went on to say that Anne was “No nonsense. It is all about the work. Very business like, no parties in the room” (K: int.1.pg.3).

Michael Fullan (1991) talks about the need for hope, energy and enthusiasm if we are going to make a difference for children. In talking to and observing Anne the data show she is one teacher who does not feel hopeless. Just recently when talking about her fifth grade WASL science scores, where over 60 percent of the students met the standard, Anne expressed the same sense of hope and enthusiasm when she said, “they (the scores) will be even higher next year” (A: int.3.pg.1). This hope and enthusiasm is transmitted to children with each class that Anne faces each fall. They too will know that regardless of their past failures they will be able to do whatever is expected from them. How Anne does this is the key to her success.

### Anne's Instructional Practices

Like Diane's classroom, Anne's classroom is packed with books and supplies. There are various teacher made charts posted around the room that serve as supports for students. One chart reminds students that good readers ask questions as they read. Other charts list the characteristics of various reading genres from realistic to historical fiction. There are daily instructions written on the board. Desks are set up in a semi-circle facing the front of the classroom. In the back of the room there is space for small or large group work. The classroom feels calm and organized. The children are focused and ready for whatever the day brings.

Based upon the data collected during this study, Anne's instructional practices, similar to Diane's and Carrie's, are grounded in foundation beliefs and values. The most prominent foundational belief that binds all three teachers is that they all assume personal responsibility if children are not showing evidence of learning. The data show that this is a very strong belief for Anne. She repeatedly expressed this belief and made decisions based with this belief in mind. One of the first things she said to me when asked about her success was,

I try to really respect the kids so that so my first response (when something does not go right) is to really look to see what I haven't done. If a paper or a small group does not go the way I anticipated I have to go back and think why. What was it that I didn't do? We have these great big highs or lows because I have not thought something through. My performance is not always where I thought it should be" (A: int.1.pg.1).

Anne does not blame students for their failures. Instead she goes back to review what she must have done to cause the failure, as well as analyzing why something went particularly well.

Also like Diane and Carrie, the data show Anne believes that the creation of a classroom learning community is the most important instructional decision she can make in order for the children to be successful. If children act out or are not getting along, one of the things she will do is reflect upon the state of the classroom community. The first question during the first interview with Anne was, “Why are you successful?” (A: int.1.pg.1). Anne’s immediate response was,

The climate of the classroom is huge in whatever is going to happen in the classroom. The students have to feel like I respect them, they have to respect each other, they have to respect me. We talk a lot about that at the very beginning; the kind of classroom we want and what our purpose is in being in this classroom (A: int.1.pg.1).

When I observed Anne teach a specific lesson on how to work together as a community, it was evident that she walked her talk. Throughout the lesson, she modeled positive community values constantly. Within a thirty minute period she uttered very specific compliments including; “very nicely done by the way, that was nice of you to do that, team work is not easy. I did appreciate the team work you showed” (A: obs.2.pg.1).

When the classroom is not functioning smoothly, Anne returns to an analysis of the state of the community.

You have to go back to community constantly. I have to be very careful because I noticed a long time ago that if I get upset with a kid out loud that the others are

aware of it, then it affects how they treat that kid and then our community breaks down. I have to be respectful (A: int.1.pg.2).

Because the children are involved in setting the norms for their community, when the norms are not being followed, even if the students do not sense something is wrong, Anne will ask the students to think about the tone. “When I stop and think about it, I do not know if the kids feel it as much as I do. Sometimes I actually talk to them and very often they can’t really tell. Some of the more astute kids can” (A: int.1.pg.1). Consciously building a classroom community was not something Anne started off doing when she first began teaching.

I have not always built community naturally. I started out thinking that I am the queen and everyone do what you are supposed to do, but at the same time I noticed they do not always react the way I want them to react. So knowing that I had to be there with them, and I did not want to be miserable, I had to start to look at ways in which we could cooperate more (A: int.1.pg.2).

Building and sustaining community now is the cornerstone of her instructional practice. This is confirmed by the principal who commented that on any given observation in Anne’s classroom is that it is clear that Anne “makes sure students feel successful and the room always feels relaxed, conversational” (K: int.1.pg.1).

The data indicate another foundational belief that guides Anne’s teaching is with the right instruction, each child can meet expected standards. This belief was evident very early in her teaching career. “I am stupid enough to have high expectations. I may get someone who can’t read, but I am thinking – you can read. There is nothing wrong, you can do this. I am not always successful, but we always make progress” (A: int.1.pg.2). In

order for each child to meet the target, Anne knows that the instruction has to be intentionally aligned to very clear targets and the classroom has to be organized around achieving these targets. She stated that, “It is very clear to everyone that we are here for a purpose and the purpose is learning” (A: int.1.pg.1). I observed Anne getting this point across to children. As a part of her lesson she interjected this belief when she said, “We have to think here don’t we? This is not fluffy stuff” (A: int.1.pg.2).

The data also show Anne is not satisfied with simple recitation of the learning. She does not assume that the learning has occurred until the child can demonstrate deeper understanding. “Most important is that Anne is concerned with kids making meaning” (K: int.1.pg.1). For example, on one occasion, Anne wanted the class to talk about how a fish portrayed in a video could symbolize a classroom. She asked the children,

What did you notice about the people in the video? What they were saying? One of the children responded, ‘They were always happy.’ Anne went on to ask, ‘Why?’ One child responded, ‘They were having a good attitude. It is not just about the fish.’ Anne then probed further and said, ‘I am glad you got that, what does that mean?’ (A: obs.2.pg.3).

She continued in this manner, finally drawing out from more of the children the relationship between the fish in the video and how they could behave in the classroom to develop a strong learning community.

Although Anne takes ultimate responsibility for students’ learning, data reveal she also holds students accountable for reaching these high expectations. “I also have to be aware of being able to hold them accountable and say this is what you need to do or this is your part” (A: int.1.pg.1).

Data indicate having high expectations and accountability structures in the classroom are coupled with organizing lessons with student interests in mind. Anne recognizes that finding what interests students and using this interest to reach the targets supports the learning process. “That perhaps if they couldn’t do it one way, if you had things that were very interesting to them, that you could get to where you wanted to go that way as well” (A: int.1.pg.5).

I started my masters in science because I thought that is what I can do in the classroom that would grab these kids’ attention and make them want to be here and learn. I felt that science would do that. They were always excited to do anything in science. This is an avenue to get at reading (A: int.1.pg.6).

Knowing that people need to have an interest in what they are reading or learning before they can truly master ideas and concepts, repeatedly the data show Anne will attend to student interest also quite intentionally.

If you cannot stimulate them to love reading, if you cannot instill a love of reading and learning, then it is going to be forgotten by the second day out of school. A lot of the time I will forgo some rigorous activity just to get back down to – Do you like it? If kids are going to read and grow themselves, they have to have a basic love of learning and of reading and to me that is more important than if can they write a summary (A: int.2.pg.7).

In reviewing all the data, taking personal responsibility for student learning, creating a positive community, having high expectations and intentionally teaching to these expectations, holding students accountable, and teaching with their interests in mind, matching resources to students based upon ongoing assessments, and infusing

reading into all curricular areas are formidable instructional practices, but in listening to and watching Anne, the data also indicate they are not enough. Anne knows that providing differentiated supports for students is also necessary. Her colleague, Sarah, when thinking about Anne's success says that, "She will leave no stone unturned. She is also a tough old cookie. She has the heart - we all know that - but they know it is not hugs and love... You are here to do it, let's get going and if you are not, what do you need" (S: int.1.pg.1).

When thinking about teaching in first grade, Anne remembered that providing another approach helped some children learn.

I remember in the first grade we were working on maps. Instead of just doing the map, I gave them a piece of paper and that was their building lot. They could make streets and put it on in a huge table and we went from there to talk about directions and maps (A: int.1.pg.5).

Twenty years later, she is more intentional about supporting learning for a wide range of children. For those children who do not spell as well, she will make sure there are references and tools for students to spell correctly. When labeling their reflection journals, she casually stated to the whole class for the benefit of those that needed it, "I put reflection up there so you will not misspell it" (A: obs.2.pg.2). During the same lesson, students were asked to take notes in their journal. Although most students did not need the support, for those that did, she wrote her notes on the board, modeling the expectation (A: obs.2.pg.2).

In summary, the data acknowledge Anne's instructional practices are focused on very precise outcomes which are built into each lesson. The demands are high, but so are

the supports. Students are expected to make meaning, draw conclusions, and make inferences and predictions based upon the content, skills, and knowledge they are working with, but Anne organizes questions to students to guide their thinking and learning. They are expected to take responsibility for their learning, but routines and rituals are present to help them. She believes in the children and their abilities and reinforces them often. Children who were unsuccessful in previous grades or other settings thrive in this environment because there is no other choice. Students learn a great deal under her tutelage.

#### Anne's Sources of Learning

Because Anne sees teaching and learning as an intellectual journey for her as well as her students, the data indicate that she is amenable to learning from a wide variety of sources, even if the ideas do not initially align with her belief system. She is able to suspend judgment, open her mind, and take nuggets from various situations and apply them to her practice. Anne herself says,

I can usually find one thing that maybe just a phrase, or maybe it is just one idea that I hadn't noticed before, but I am ready for right now, so I have been able to take that back, and what I try to do is to use it immediately, not just think about it, but actually do something with my teaching immediately because if I don't, it is gone (A: int.2.pg.3).

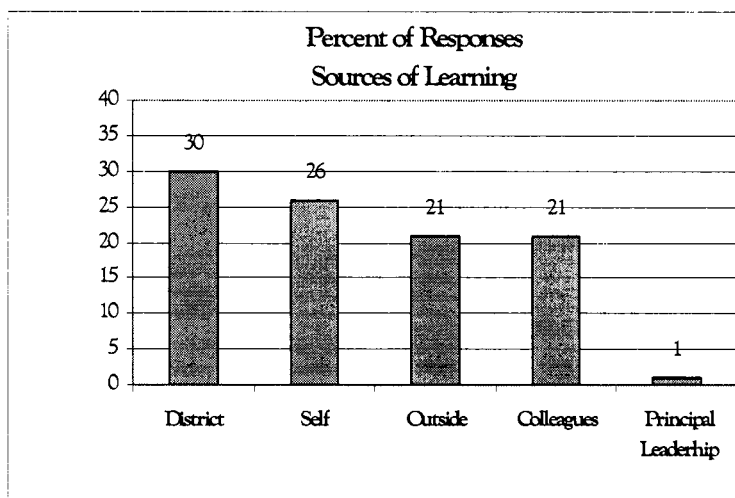
Another time she said just the phrase, "What makes sense?" (A: int.2.pg.5) was what she took out from and applied after a day's training. Sometimes she will even "practice being

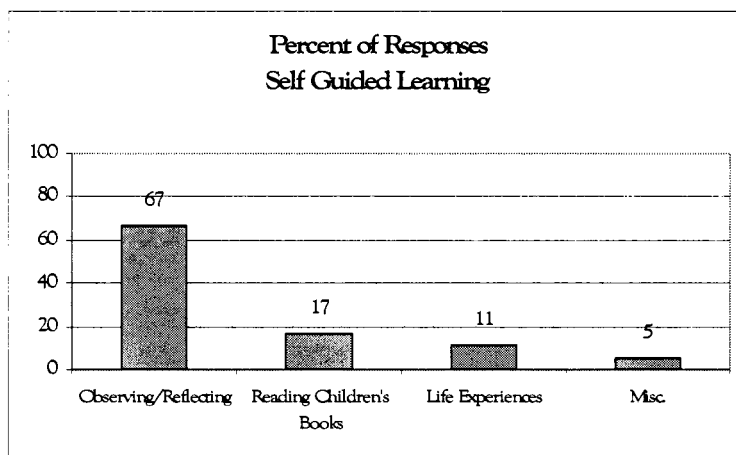
that person for a few days and see how it fits – if I can make it fit I think it is a good idea”

(A: int.2.pg.4).

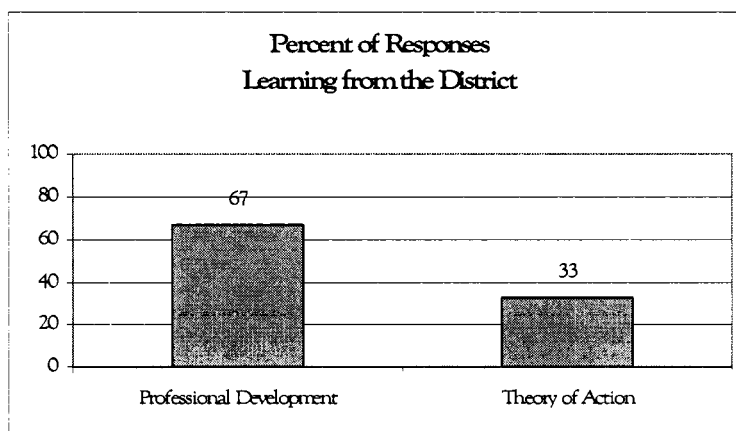
Although Anne is open to learning from numerous sources, based upon the data collected, her learnings originate primarily from herself, the district, outside sources and colleagues. The following tables depict 1) the percentage of responses, and 2) the major sub categories in each of the sources. The sections following each table describe these sources beginning with the source that was referenced the most (self-guided learning).

**Table 13: Anne’s Sources of Learning**



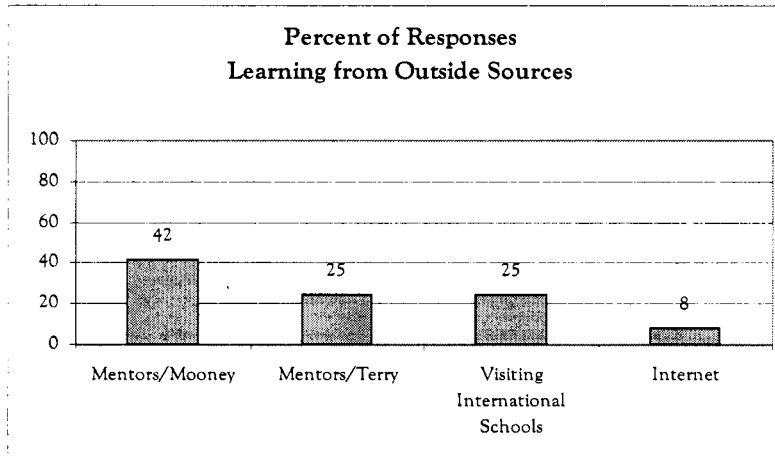
**Table 14: Anne's Self Guided Learning**

“Observing and Reflecting” refers to times she watched students and thought about their reactions to instruction. “Reading Children’s Books” refers to the comments about learning from reading and analyzing children’s literature. “Life Experiences” refers to other work experiences, business ventures, or travels. The “Miscellaneous” category refers to the few comments Anne made about intuition or processing information by writing ideas down for future reference and study.

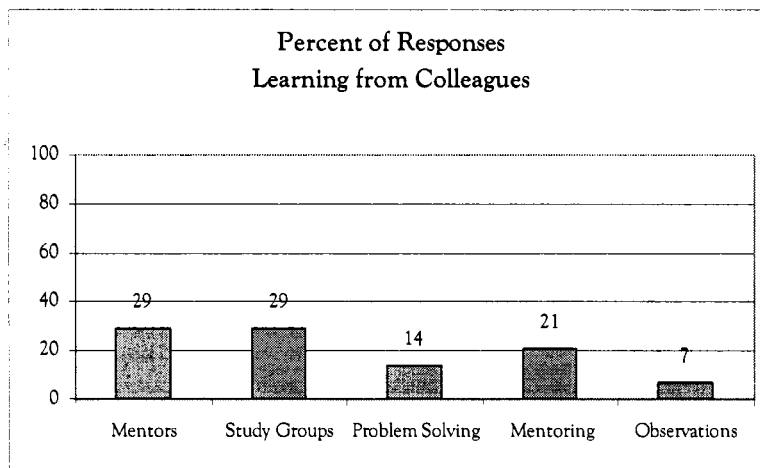
**Table 15: Anne's Learning from the District**

“Professional Development” refers to all the learning opportunities sponsored by the district. “Theory of Action” refers to the comments made that were a result of the district’s way of working with principals or with staff members.

**Table 16: Anne’s Learning from Outside Sources**



“Mentors/Mooney” refers to the references Anne made to Margaret Mooney as an individual inspiration and mentor. “Mentors/Terry” refers to the influence and relationship with a friend that Anne had before she went back to school. “Visiting International Schools” refers to the experiences and learning she obtained from visiting schools in England and Scotland. “Internet” refers to the learning that she obtains by searching on the internet.

**Table 17: Anne's Learning from Colleagues**

“Mentors” refers to colleagues who were more experienced and provided Anne with guidance throughout her early career. “Study Groups” is the comments made about weekly study groups that met before school to study professional literature or discuss common lessons. “Problem Solving” refers to comments made about working with colleagues to solve particularly challenging teaching situations. “Mentoring” refers to what Anne learned from mentoring others, especially student teachers. “Observations” refer to what Anne learned from being observed by others.

In looking just at the graphed numbers it would appear based upon the number of references, that the district is Anne's greatest source of learning, but many of these references were in passing or made about Anne by a colleague, so just relying on percentage of responses is deceiving. In listening to Anne's comments as well as tone of voice, it appears that self guided learning and outside sources are her main sources of learning, followed by colleagues and the district.

### Self Guided Learning

When talking about what she likes to do on her own, Anne is clear on her thinking. She likes to think and work on her own. Anne thinks deeply about her instruction and the impact on student learning. When asked how she gets to the type of instruction that really allows for children to grow intellectually, she responded that, "It involves an incredible amount of reflection on my part" (A: int.1.pg.1). "That is one reason I really like my commute. I think on my way home and on my way here. I am reflecting on the day on my way back. What went well and why, and what I am going to do tomorrow" (A: int.1.pg.8). More often than not, Anne is thinking about how to make learning more accessible for a particular student or why something went particularly well and how it can be replicated. "I was not gathering ideas without thinking about specific kids and what they need and asking maybe this would help. There was usually a child's name attached to anything I do" (A: int.1.pg.8).

Because Anne relies so much on thinking about her practice as a way to learn and improve, data show more than once she does not have a lot of patience for what takes place during many of the district early releases for professional development.

I get so frustrated with the early release. All I want to do is spend the afternoon. I do not want anyone coming in here. I can close out the entire world. I can get so focused on what I am doing. All I want to do is organize my next few lessons, reflect on their goals, and where I want to take them, prod them to go next and there was not any time to do this. I do not need it, especially when it, was things I had already done (A: int.1.pg.8).

Learning from her own children also framed many of her current teaching philosophies. When I asked Anne how much life experiences impacted her thinking her response was,

Huge- I had the experience of my own two kids. One of them really struggled in school. So right then I thought that there are a lot of those kids out there because they do not conform in a certain way. So I think that another thing I started doing right in the beginning is to give a lot of latitude for individual differences (A: int.1.pg.4).

More than the other two teachers, the data indicate that Anne learns from reading children's literature. When she first learned to teach reading and did not have it "nailed down," She read children's books as a way to interest children in reading. At the time Anne taught using basal readers and children were not interested in reading the abridged books. "That (when I was struggled with knowing how to teach reading) is when I started reading a lot of kid's books. I did not know kid's authors. Mostly I read children's books and began thinking" (A: int.1.pg.8). "I started buying a lot of books for my kids and then starting buying books on my own and reading them and thinking about how I could use them with my students and help them with comprehension" (A: int.1.pg.4).

Regardless of the source of information, data show Anne always works on her own to integrate the learnings into her own teaching. Other sources of her learning and fodder for ongoing reflection are innumerable outside sources.

### Learning from the Outside Sources

Of all of the outside sources, three mentors were referred to the most. During a follow-up interview I asked Anne, “What do you think is your most powerful source of learning?” and she responded without hesitation,

I keep coming back to when I first started teaching, my good friend Terry Richardson; she is chairman of the Education Department at Ball State. We raised our children together. She had a special education teaching degree at the time, but she wasn't teaching, and I was thinking about going back to school. My own kids were having difficulty at school, and it was through a lot of conversations with her and a lot of reading. We had lots and lots of discussions and I think probably she rooted me in some ways to have very high expectations for kids (A: int.2.pg.1).

She went on to say, “Terry was very much a mentor. We still talk and e-mail. She was pretty important for me because she got me thinking outside of the box. It did not have to be just this one way” (A: int.2.pg.1). When asked to explain further Anne said, “Terry in particular helped me look at education in a more intellectual way and, because of Terry, I began doing a lot of reading. It intellectualized teaching for me” (A: int.2.pg.1).

Another outside mentor whom Anne mentioned was Margaret Mooney. After Anne moved to third grade and began to spend more time reading children's literature

and wondering how to better teach a love of reading to children, she met Margaret Mooney.

I was always interested in reading, and then I met Margaret Mooney, and she was huge. She was huge because I think what she did was talk about reading in a much more intellectual way than I had heard people talking about, and she refused to give teachers a teacher's manual or questions or whatever. She kept saying – think - you are a professional. It depends on the situation you need to figure out or what questions match that particular book. What are you going to do? I cannot tell you this. It affected me a lot and got me really looking at what I was doing with reading and what reading was all about. I did not know about books back then, so I think it was just starting with Margaret and whatever books she mentioned, I got. I cannot remember a book I read. She said no book would tell you (A: int.1.pg.6-7).

In addition to aligning with Anne's interests and beliefs, Margaret Mooney had an impact on Anne because she showed her respect. "Margaret Mooney was real special for me. Whenever she saw me, she was glad to see me. Why was she glad to see me I do not know? She was very kind to me and I respected her a lot" (A: int.1.pg.8). Again, with the knack of saying it very simply, Katie her principal said, "Anne's guru is Margaret Mooney" (K: int.1.pg.3).

As mentioned earlier, data indicate Anne also learned a considerable amount from her stay in England and Scotland. "English kids can really speak well and can talk about what they are doing – maybe because they are not shut up in classes and they are allowed

a lot of dialogue” (A: int.1.pg.5). During a second interview some later, Anne referenced her time in England again as an important source of learning.

I spent a year in England and during that whole time, just before I started my student teaching, I would spend my days either in the primary school there or I would be at the bookstores spending all day reading educational books and looking at the kind of materials they were having kids do (A: int.2.pg.1).

She also mentioned that she was “also in Scotland (for four months). The head teacher that was there had taught in South Africa and all over the place. I watched and talked to her. There is a lot of that in my background also” (A: int.2 pg.1).

### Learning from Colleagues

Data indicate being mentored by more experienced colleagues and mentoring others is an important part of how Anne learns. Considering that Terry Richardson and Margaret Mooney served as important outside mentors, it may be one of the most significant sources of learning for Anne.

Early in Anne’s career she was a first grade teacher. Next door she had a colleague, Margaret Morris. She was instrumental in Anne’s success those first few years.

I could not have done it without Margaret Morris. She was here at school. I would run into her classroom, and I did not know what I was doing as far as teaching reading. I would run and ask what sound does a short ‘a’ make? I learned a lot from Margaret (A: int.1pg.5).

Not only did she teach Anne how to teach reading, she also showed her, through her actions, what it looked like when a teacher had high expectations for children and her children were successful. “She (Margaret Morris) had high expectations and great hopes. We are going to learn how to read” (A: int.1.pg.6). Through Margaret , Anne also learned how important it was to not only focus on results, but pay attention to the relationships with children.

Another thing she did that I noticed that was so important to kids was that she was very excited when the child did something well. She would grab someone running down the hall and say – listen to this. The kids were just flying. I learned for her that in first grade especially to help them to feel good about what they could do really helped a lot. (A: int.1.pg.6).

Anne also saw the value of mentoring others. When talking about student teachers Anne shared, “I have a really good student teacher now. She is very intellectual, she thinks everything through, and I love it. She is stimulating for me. Right now I am willing to give her my heart, everything” (A: int.2.pg.7). Not only does having a student teacher help hone her practice, but Anne also explained that it helps to understand the processes of teaching. “You just forget how many steps are in place to teach, and when you try to back it down and explain, it is hard. There is so much to it that you do not realize” (A: int.2.pg.7). Her colleague noticed her interactions with student teachers as well.

She loves to mentor student teachers. They are just sponges, but she does not just fuse into them all this stuff. She will say this is what I saw, and here is what you

need to do, and then she will move heaven and earth to get them what they need (S: int.1.pg.4).

Anne's interest and success in mentoring student teachers does not translate into mentoring other teachers in the building. In talking about discussion practice with others in the building Anne said,

I do not talk about that (lessons, practice, etc.) because they (other staff members) do not pay attention to me or they have this idea that I am someplace else. I get a funny feeling sometimes, even in my study groups if I bring too much or talk too much I put people off because they are not there (A: int.1.pg.5).

Sarah recognized that Anne not only has high expectations for herself, but others, which may contribute to the others lack of reception to her ideas. "It is not that she does not have a place for people who are not up her standards, but we are all accountable and she wants others to be accountable too" (S: int.1.pg.5). Although Anne learns by mentoring student teachers, because she does not have this same relationship with her colleagues, others do not perceive her as learning through mentoring colleagues. Once again, her principal said it very simply, for her, "Teaching others (colleagues) is not seen as a way to improve" (K: int.2. pg.2).

Although Anne sometimes feels that she is not always perceived well in study groups, the data show these study groups are still a source of learning for her. "Our study group is probably the most important time to present some material and find out different reactions, and how they would approach it. It is really important" (A: int.2.pg.1).

Planning the study group session is more significant than participating. "I learned more

though planning the study group because I have to evaluate my own analysis of what is being done, so again it is that intellectual interplay of ideas” (A: int.2.pg.7).

### Learning from the District

During the 2004- 2005 school year all the teachers, as part of the district’s professional development efforts in literacy, worked with Katherine Casey, a literacy consultant, formerly from District 2 in New York and more recently from San Diego Unified. Although Katherine did not revolutionize Anne’s thinking and practice, the data suggest she did “rub off the sharp edges maybe” (A: int.2.pg.7). When I asked Anne what has influenced her practice most recently she said, “Recently it has been Katherine Casey because I saw someone stand up there with full intelligence and background knowledge behind her, and she was able to articulate, and I thought she was great” (A: int.2.pg.4). The specific learning included,

Learning about the genres - really knowing the literature and having a very good background on how important it is. I do not think I have been doing that as much with the kids so they really know what the mystery genre was or realistic fiction - being very, very specific that way and the importance of previewing a book with specific steps that you go through. There were a lot of things like that that were very, very clear and I think she helped me a lot (A: int.2.pg.4-5).

She also talked about learning from Katherine’s knowledge of books.

Another thing that showed that I appreciated her was she really knows books. The books and selections that she chose were so well thought out ahead of time. It was not just any old thing. It was something that really got people’s interest and you

have to hook the kids first on something that is interesting to them. If they do not love it, they will tune you out right away (A: int.2.pg.6).

Katie also noticed the impact of Katherine's teachings on Anne's practice. "Katherine has pushed her thinking" (K: int.1.pg.1). "She is clearer on purpose, uses more repetition, and uses text for different purposes. She is using a reader's notebook and even has stronger read alouds. The focus of the shared reading has also changed" (K: int.1.pg.3).

Although not as significant as working with Katherine the data show, being a studio teacher also shaped Anne's practice.

The studio teacher part, I can usually find one thing. Maybe it is just a phrase or maybe it is just one idea that I hadn't noticed before, but I am ready for right now, so I have been able to take that back, and what I try to do is to use it immediately, not just think about it, but actually do something with my teaching immediately, because if I don't, it is gone (A: int.2.pg.3).

In summary, the data portray Anne as an incessant learner who sees teaching and learning as an intellectual journey. She is able to pick up nuggets that she incorporates into her practice from a wide range of learning experiences. The dominant source of learning is from other colleagues, consultants, or friends, who have, in one way or another, shaped her thinking and practice along the way. She successfully serves in this same capacity with student teachers, but is not seen as a source of learning for others in the building. With all of these learning experiences, Anne spends an inordinate amount of time on her own reflecting on the viability of the ideas and planning how to integrate the ideas into her own practice.

### Assumptions about Anne's Success

Anne, like Diane and Carrie, possesses many positive personal characteristics that contribute to her success. Most predominately, Anne assumes ownership for the classroom and students' success, thinks about and reflects on her practice, enjoys teaching and expects students to enjoy learning and, in a caring environment, communicates and expects high expectations consistently.

Specific to literacy, Anne effectively uses reading and writing workshop as her instructional model. Within this model, Anne develops clear lesson plans aligned to the grade level expectations and based upon the needs and interests of students, creates and expects a positive and respectful classroom community, holds high expectations and provides supports for students to reach these expectations. She demands a lot from her students, believing "if they are going to be in here (in the classroom) they really have to work" (A: int.2.pg.7). Instead of shutting down, students in Anne's classroom are actively engaged and enjoy learning and, as a result, reach expected standards and are able to perform well on district and state summative assessments.

Anne is also an effective teacher because of her own learning practices. Because she is so reflective, she is able to create a highly effective classroom for herself. In looking at all of the data these assumptions about Anne's success emerge.

- Teaching and learning are an enjoyable, intellectual journey.
- Mentors are important guides, providing theoretical underpinnings as well as practical strategies that enable teaching to produce better student results.
- Working with children who match her interest level is important.

- A fundamental belief that each child should meet standard coupled with taking personal responsibility for students' learning is critical.
- Intentionally creating lessons, especially at the beginning of the year, that build and model community is necessary before any learning can occur.

## Chapter 7

### Cross-Case Analysis

In looking across the cases, I noted the specifics within the common categories and subcategories that materialized during the axial coding process and applied a process of integration of categories as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). As a result of this integration process and through repeated efforts to verify findings with the participants, I developed the suppositions as to why these teachers are successful and the impact of the district on their success. This section includes an explanation of the model I used to develop some initial thinking that could, with further study and research, lead to the development of a substantive theory, the accompanying story of these teachers' success and the district impact, and a more detailed explanation in support of these ideas as evidenced from the data.

Using guidance from Strauss and Corbin (1990) to develop an analytic version of the story, I organized the suppositions into corresponding relationships. The figure below shows how these suppositions relate to each other. In the figure, the column entitled conditions refers to the personal attributes that I identified as common among the three teachers. These conditions interact with phenomena, which refers to the common ways the teachers teach and learn. The phenomena interact with the context, which represents the attributes of the district. Consequences are the result of the interactions among the conditions, phenomena, and context, which leads to the core category of "student focused inquiring professionals" which unifies all other categories and helps to explain why these three teachers are successful and their relationship with the district. The following figure illustrates this thinking process.

Conditions (common personal attributes) which interact with phenomena	Phenomena which interact with context (common ways teachers teach and learn)	Context which interacts with phenomena (attributes of the district)	CONSEQUENCES (results of the interactions between conditions, phenomena and context)
<p>Teachers' attitude toward the teaching profession (professionalism) originating from a variety of sources: (e.g. teaching as an intellectual journey, faith, tenaciousness, sense of responsibility, positive attitude)</p> <p>Enthusiasm for learning</p> <p>Believing that children need to be actively involved in their learning to remain motivated to learn</p> <p>Teachers' recognition of students not making progress</p>	<p>Teaching in a model that is undergirded by constructivist principles</p> <p>Reflecting, reading, studying student work</p> <p>Watching, thinking, and working with outside experts</p> <p>Thinking and talking with colleagues</p> <p>Participating in district professional development focused on literacy and taking advantage of guidelines and supports</p>	<p>Working in a district that provides professional development focused on literacy, has guidelines and supports focused on instruction (e.g. involving teachers in planning, emphasis on opening up practice, assessment guidelines and taking advantage of conditions for working together such as time and resources</p>	<p><b>Student Focused Inquiring Professionals, with district support, who make a difference for student success by creating classrooms based on research (constructivist principles: learner centered, knowledge centered, assessment centered) within a community of learners</b></p>

*Figure 1: Model Showing Development of Limited Substantive Theory*

The following analytic story emerged from the thinking associated with the development of this model, and is introduced first, prior to delving into the specifics of the cross case analysis.

*Student Focused Inquiring Professionals: the story*

*In these teachers' classrooms, in the specific area of literacy learning, most students at the end of the school year meet expected standards. When children are not making progress, these teachers accept professional responsibility and therefore continually search for ways to teach these students until they are successful. This professional attitude towards*

*students until they are successful. This professional attitude towards teaching, which is identified as accepting personal responsibility, putting in the time needed to meet this professional responsibility, and relationships with students, originates from a variety of sources. They either see teaching as an interesting intellectual journey or as a mission, in that they have the responsibility to meet the needs of each child in their class regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic background. In one case, the source of a participant's commitment to the profession is her faith. Even when children are struggling, their instructional decisions do not stray too far from constructivist principles of teaching and learning. These teachers relate that they hold high standards for children and resist a "telling" approach, but rather create learning opportunities that build on what children already know and enable them to construct new understandings by providing opportunities to actively think about and engage in the content. Although in varying degrees, they abide by this approach because they believe that when students actively engage in the learning, they will remain motivated to learn and will be able build sustainable, conceptual understandings. Students are expected to show evidence of their learning and regularly demonstrate their understandings through comprehensive, summative assessments. These constructivist teaching approaches are enacted in a supportive, classroom community where children feel competent and therefore work hard to meet the classroom standards.*

*Fortunately, this search for ways to ensure the success for all students is not a chore. These three teachers are positive, enthusiastic learners and although they learn in a variety of ways and in varying levels of intensity, all of their learning involves reflection, the teachings and influence from outside experts, and, to a lesser degree, collaboration with colleagues. Working in the district contributed to their learning by providing professional development in a literacy instructional model that was used to improve their practice. The professional development also provided content for reflection and resulted in either validation or refinement of their current practices. Working in the district also contributed to their success by providing the conditions for learning (time and resources) as well as the expectations and supports for improving instructional practices. These three teachers can be described as student focused because of their commitment to student success, the positive relationships they develop with students, and how they design their classroom and instruction to meet individualized student needs. They can be described as inquiring professionals because they take the time needed to study, learn, and work together to make sure each child is successful.*

The following section will discuss, in more detail, this story of these three teachers' perceptions of why they are successful, and, more specifically, their perceptions regarding the influence of district efforts that contribute to that success.

## I. Personal Characteristics

Within the major category of personal characteristics, three categories emerged:

1) attitude toward the teaching profession; 2) enthusiasm for learning; and 3) relationships with students.

### Common Category 1: Attitude Toward the Teaching Profession

In looking at the category of attitude toward the teaching profession, three subcategories developed. These were: a) accepting responsibility for student success; and b) spending time beyond the school day; and c) having a positive attitude.

#### *Accepting Responsibility for Student Success*

Of all of these subcategories, accepting personal responsibility for student success was the most predominant personal characteristic. This belief undergirded not only their attitude towards the teaching profession, but all other areas as well. All three teachers believe that if they know children well enough to plan for differentiated needs and if they are well prepared enough to provide this instruction, then each child in their classroom should be able to reach the expected standards. "All children can learn" is not just a slogan for these teachers. Diane, for example firmly believes that if children do not have a good day then the teacher needs to ask herself, "What did you do to cause that?" (D: int.1.pg.2) This does not mean that these teachers have never blamed outside forces for a child's lack of success, but the more successful they were, the less they made even subtle excuses for their students' lack of progress.

Although all these teachers exceed the success rate for other teachers in the district overall and were identified by the principal as one of the building's most

successful teachers, in looking at the 2005 DRA scores as one indicator of success, Anne had the highest percentage of students meeting the expected standards. In pouring over the data that I had available on Anne from all the sources, I could not find a reference that could be construed as an excuse for a student's lack of progress. Carrie, on the other hand, who had the lowest percentage of students meeting standard on the DRA among the three teachers, although she prefaced the communication with wondering what she had done wrong, did mention outside reasons as a possible explanation for the difference in scores. She indicated, "More kids came in lower than previous years and several had behavioral challenges" (C: int.3.pg.2).

#### *Spending Time Beyond the School Day*

Another predominant category that developed was all three teachers devoted a considerable amount of time beyond the school day. They all either stay after school or come in early to make sure they are well organized and prepared, but there are differences in use of additional time as well. Diane spends an inordinate amount of time meticulously planning units based upon the interests and needs of children. "She does not leave on Friday until her week is planned. If she does not stay at that time, she is back on the weekend" (M: int.1.pg.1). All learning modalities and resources aligned to the interests and needs of students are considered. Anne, on the other hand, spends time reflecting on the day's successes and challenges and then plans the next day based upon this information, sometimes even scripting out details of what she is going to say to students during a lesson. "If it is something new, I actually script out my dialogue just like I did when I first started. I have little note cards" (A: int.1.pg.9). Of the three, Carrie seems to spend the most additional time reading professional materials or viewing

professional videos. One example she gave was in explaining what she does when she cannot find a solution to a particular problem. "I will grab Debbi Miller's videos and watch them even if I watched them in a group. As you are more reflective, you have different questions, so you watch it through different eyes" (C: int.2.pg.1). It was clear that all three teachers have a very strong work ethic and are not clock watchers. They have a professional mentality, taking the time it takes to complete the job vs. an hourly employee mentality of merely putting in the specific time requirements of the job, which is seven and a half hours a day including a half hour before and after school.

### *Positive Attitude*

In looking at the data across all three cases, all three teachers convey a positive attitude. They are optimistic, hopeful people. They know that they can make a difference and therefore work hard to do so. After just one day in school, Anne expressed that she had a great group of students and, although only 49 percent of the fourth grade students in the building met the state reading standard, she expected more than 65 percent of the same group as fifth graders to meet the state WASL science standard by the end of the 2006 school year (A: int.3.pg.1). Diane is clear that she has and will continue to make a difference in children's lives. She is convinced that if she has two years to work with students, all should reach standard. "Give me the space and they will be ok in two years" (D: int.1.pg.1). Carrie, buoyed by her faith, also has an unrelinquishable "can do" attitude.

### Common Category 2: Enthusiasm for Learning

A second category that emerged was that these three teachers, consistent with perceptions of their principals, and colleagues, perceive themselves to be continuous learners. Anne sees teaching as an intellectual journey, reading and thinking about the biggest ideas in education to the smallest detail. Anne mentioned numerous times that she enjoys teaching because it is a way for her to continue to learn and grow. “If I was to be here (in the classroom) I did not want to be bored either” (A: int.1.pg.1). She does not repeat lessons from year to year even if they fit the needs of the children because she wants and needs to infuse new ideas to keep herself from becoming bored. She has a passion for good children’s literature. She chooses books for her students to read that hold interest for her as well. “I am reading a lot of these books. There has to be strong elements of character, plot, setting so there is an interest for me as well” (A: int.1.pg.4). She shows this enthusiasm for learning to children. They know which books she is reading, what she is thinking about, and what she is curious about.

Diane loves to study and learn about the world. Her interest and passion is non fiction, which she conveys to children. Together they discover all kinds of interesting information about animals, tides, or plants. Children become hooked on learning new ideas, obscure facts, or strange phenomena. Colleagues have said, “She is passionate about her own learning. If she is going to do a topic with students or a unit of study, she consistently becomes informed about it herself” (J: int.1.pg.1). This personal curiosity about the world is transferred to her students. When leaving the classroom reading *Jack and the Beanstalk* one little girl told me that her “teacher likes me and likes plants at the same time” (D: obs.1.pg.2).

Carrie will search high and low for answers to classroom challenges. She will seek outside experts, colleagues, her principal, books, videos, whatever it takes to find solutions to problems she is facing. She will not stop until she finds an idea, suggestion, or strategy to try. Her learning partner affirmed Carrie's affinity towards professional readings and research when she said,

She is constantly striving to get the new research. If she does not know how to teach effectively, she finds resources – studio teachers, if she hears of new books, she asks Jess, she asks the administration for resources, she knows that we need it and that we can all benefit. She is on top of the new resources (T: int.1.pg.2).

Because she knows these resources well, she knows which ones apply to a particular problem or challenge she is facing. “I also have the knowledge to decide what to use part of that is the reading of the books *What Matters Most to Struggling Readers* - the Stephanie Harvey book, *Strategies that Work*. Reading all of those books is building a huge knowledge base for me” (C: int.1.pg.3).

### Common Category 3: Relationships with Students

A third category that was identified suggests that all three teachers perceive an important link between having a positive learning environment in the classroom, and student motivation and learning, and therefore intentionally cultivate positive relationships with and among students. In their own way they develop these positive relationships, but the most obvious commonality among all three is that they devise ways for all the students to succeed, regardless of who they are or what skills and knowledge

they have coming into the classroom. These are classrooms where children feel smart and come to believe that they are. They begin to have faith in themselves as learners.

Diane accomplishes this by offering students choice in what they read or learn. Diane explained that allowing them to choose what they want to study motivates them to read and it is the reading that matters, not the content. Choosing what to study “hooks them and so therefore that is what makes them read or want to read. I do not care what they read. It is the ‘want to’ that matters” (D: int.1.pg.10).

She also reinforces them when they are successful, making sure they treat each other respectfully, knowing about their life circumstances and asking about family events, and having fun with them each day. Her principal indicated that

She does not teach lessons, she teaches students, and she believes strongly with connections with family. She does home visits. She talks to them, particularly with the ELL families. She requests that she keep all siblings in a family. She builds trust. She delivers a strong message about learning – about life. She is seen as very protective of her students, like a ‘mama bear’ with her kids (M: int.1.pg.2).

Anne continually points out when and how they are treating each other well or mastering a particularly difficult idea. She sets clear expectations and reinforces them when they follow the norms of the classroom. She models good thinking, showing them how to accomplish a particularly challenging task, expecting them to accomplish it on their own and, when they do, telling them over and over how smart they are. On one occasion I saw her model what to say and do to build a positive community. Before getting started on the day’s lesson, as the children returned from lunch she stopped and

asked, “Before we get started with the other things, how did lunch go today? Did you feel pretty good about the noise? How you were doing?” (A: obs.2.pg.1). On another occasion when the children were identifying a turn and talk partner and a few were resisting, she stopped and reminded them that, “If you did not get a partner that is not your best friend, it is not a bump in the road. We will work through it,” (A: obs.2.pg.1) which was enough to get the resisters back on track.

Carrie thinks about what success looks like for each individual child, makes sure students can think out loud and make mistakes without ridicule from others, and tells them all the things they are doing well. I observed a student writing conference where this was evident. Before correcting a child’s writing, she first said, “Let me tell you one smart thing you did and can I give you a suggestion” (C: obs.1.pg.1). When she walked away, it was apparent that the student felt smart and was ready to incorporate Carrie’s suggestion.

#### Summary: Personal Characteristics and Teachers’ Perceptions of Success

In studying these teachers, some common personal characteristics surfaced, connected to their perceptions about why they consistently realize student success. These teachers do not make excuses, but instead firmly believe that all of their students with good instruction and the right supports can meet expected standards. They hold themselves personally responsible almost all of the time if children do not meet these standards. They put in the time necessary, even if it is beyond the normal school day to be well prepared for each lesson and/or to read or view professional materials. These teachers genuinely like children and display a hopeful, optimistic attitude. They state that

they believe they can and will make a difference in children's lives. They are learners; reading, taking classes, sharing ideas with others, and they consciously talk about and model this curiosity to their students. Children in these classrooms interact together well and are excited about learning.

The personal characteristics that Diane, Carrie, and Anne possess parallel the broader research on effective teachers. James Stronge, Professor of Education at William and Mary College, reviewed the research on teacher effectiveness and found similar personal characteristics of effective teachers which he categorized under the heading "The Teacher as a Person" (Stronge 2002). This alignment with the research provides confidence that the personal characteristics found in these three district teachers do indeed contribute to their overall success with students.

More specifically, Stronge identified that attitude toward the teaching profession was significant. Similar to what I found in studying Diane, Carrie, and Anne, in his review of the literature, Stronge discovered that effective teachers "view themselves as responsible for the success of their students. The effective teacher truly believes that all students can learn" (Stronge 2002, pg.19). Also similar to Diane, Carrie, and Anne, Stronge found that effective teachers spend extra hours preparing their instruction and believe that this additional time positively affected student achievement. Other similarities include a positive attitude about life and teaching, enthusiasm for learning, and caring for students.

## II. Instructional Practices

In merging and reorganizing the data on instructional practices in literacy although there was a great deal of overlap, for the sake of coherence, the information is organized in three categories: 1) setting the stage; 2) instructional moves; and 3) assessing student progress. Overlaying these more discrete components is the fact that each teacher uses a balanced literacy approach to teach reading and writing, including the use of writing and reading workshop as the primary teaching structure.

### Common Category 1: Setting the Stage

This category includes what a teacher does before the lesson is actually taught. This includes the subcategories: a) knowing each child including their strengths, challenges, interests, etc.; b) organizing the classroom environment; and c) planning the lesson.

#### *Knowing Each Child*

The data suggest that in all cases these teachers know their students very well, and perceive this to be an important part of their success. Because Diane works with both first and second grade students in the same classroom she is acutely aware of the range of student skills. Of all three teachers, Diane talked the most about the importance of using student interests as a motivator and, as a result, she often offers students, even in first grade, choice in what they study. Carrie analyzes students' skill levels on a regular basis and differentiates her approach based upon perceived student needs. Her principal indicated this when he said that Carrie's practice "is not following the book or following a set of lessons. It is following the needs of kids in the classroom" (J: int.1.pg.6). This is

one of the hallmarks of her practice. In observing Anne, it was apparent that she scaffolds the learning for a wide range of learners. She kept students who need reminders to stay focused in close proximity to her. She integrated definitions, spellings, and note taking strategies into her instruction as a matter of course for those students that needed the support (A: obs.2). All three teachers knew their resources well and aligned the various resources to match the instructional level and interests of students.

### *Organizing the Classroom*

Data indicate that organizing the classroom environment to maximize learning is a critical component in the practice of all three teachers, and linked to their perceptions of why they are successful with all students. The rooms were arranged for individual, small group, and whole group work. Routines, even on the first day of school, were evident and students followed them. There was little dallying and students were focused and engaged. The stage was set for learning (A: obs.2; C: obs.1; A: obs.1).

It was also evident from the data that the classrooms were a serious place for readers and writers. There were books and supplies everywhere and the children and the teachers easily grabbed what they needed. The teachers could refer to many authors' books and had these books at their fingertips. Classroom thinking was posted on charts and other charts and signs supported the students when they worked independently. Student work was posted on the walls, organized in student books for all to read, and often on the teachers' desk ready to read to the entire class (A: obs.2; C: obs.1; A: obs.1).

### *Planning the Lesson*

Data show that lesson planning was evident in all three classrooms, and was perceived as important for success with all children. Although the day seemed

disorganized at times, Diane had well orchestrated units. For example, there were general times for reading and writing, and the units indicated the grade level expectations being taught. Although the link between the unit, grade level expectations, and the lessons were clear in Diane's and most of the children's minds, they were not always observable to an outsider. In Carrie's classroom, on the other hand, an observer and the students knew the objective of the lesson, could predict the time for each component of the lesson, and could anticipate next steps based upon the structure of reading or writing workshop. Anne was also very clear in purpose and the purpose was apparent to students and observers. Anne often had scripted lesson plans that included the specific language that she wanted to use with students. The intent of the lessons was also clear to the students. All three teachers often talked to their students about why they choose to teach in a particular way or a particular concept (A: obs.2; C: obs.1; A: obs.1). Anne lets the students know that she wants them to love reading as much as she does. Anne's teaching partner emphasized this focus when she said, "She (Anne) will leave no stone unturned. If you can nurture those kids and bring them along as better readers that will help them in anything" (S: int.1.pg.1).

### Common Category 2: Instructional Moves

This category includes an analysis of the teachers' perceptions, and corresponding evidence, regarding what they attend to while teaching the components within a balanced literacy approach. This entails the subcategories: a) developing and nurturing the classroom community; b) actively engaging students; and c) holding high expectations and instructing rigorously.

*Nurturing Classroom Community*

Across all cases the data suggest all three teachers explicitly taught and modeled expectations in a positive classroom community. In Diane's classroom children were taught and then expected to treat each other with respect, which extended to other students or visitors to the classroom. During an observation when she was working with a visiting classroom as well as her own, she started out the lesson by saying, "My class, tell one thing about our classroom that others might not know about the room" (D: obs.1.pg.1). When asked about it later she said, "It is important for other children to feel welcomed in our room" (D: obs.1.pg.1). Carrie created a supportive community where students were expected to help each other out. When I asked Jess, Carrie's principal, about the culture of the classroom he said,

They certainly help each other. There are times when they ask other kids for help. There are times when they do their own. One girl when I was in there, she was reading to me. It was supposed to be a first read in her book. I asked her if she knew much about this and she said yes another kid in the room read it to me (J: int.1.pg.6).

In Anne's classroom, students talked about the elements of a classroom community and then created what they would expect to see if these elements were present in their classroom. After establishing a positive classroom culture, throughout each lesson she was vigilant in modeling and holding students to these behavioral norms in a thoughtful, positive way. In the course of fifteen minutes I observed Anne comment repeatedly on positive things she saw when observing their behavior. Stating to the class, "Very nicely

done by the way and I did appreciate the team work you showed. Team work is not easy” were just two small examples (A: obs.2 int.1).

### *Actively Engaging Students*

The data also show all three teachers taught in ways that actively engage students. The students were not being told what to think, read, or write, but through teacher questioning the students had to think for themselves. In all three classrooms I heard the teacher ask: “What do you think? How do you know? What do you think my purpose is? What do you think this means? What did you notice?” (A: obs.1-3; C: obs.1; D: obs.1). I observed in all three classrooms students presenting their ideas to the entire class and not passively waiting for someone to give them the answer. During read alouds or shared readings after being taught what high quality student talk looked like, students were regularly turning and talking to a partner to share ideas or clarify their thinking.

### *Holding High Expectations*

It was evident from the data that teachers in these classrooms communicate high expectations for all students. They intentionally teach to expected standards and let the children know that they believe they are smart and if they work hard they can accomplish these learning goals. When a child reaches a goal, success is publicly celebrated and recognized. Carrie’s teaching partner shared an example of how Carrie holds her students to high expectations. She indicated that “instead of stating something that may be obvious, she has them (the students) do that thinking. By having them verbalize and step back and think why or how they may be doing something leads to deeper thinking for the child” (T: int.1.pg.2). Every day in Anne’s and Carrie’s classroom the same is evident. Children are working hard, thinking about ideas. In Anne’s class I observed a student

asking for additional time to think and Anne reinforced his hard work by saying, “Yes keep your thinking going. Hurrah for you” (A: int.1.pg.2).

### Common Category 3: Assessing Student Progress

This category includes teachers’ perceptions, and corresponding evidence, regarding how and why they assess student learning. The subcategories include: a) effectively using both formative and summative assessments; and b) effectively using the results to inform instruction.

Through analysis of the data it was clear, both from teachers’ perceptions, and corresponding observations of instruction, that each classroom included a central focus on assessment of learning. Based on ongoing formative and summative assessments each teacher knew the strengths and challenges of the students at any given time. If they had to report to parents, they could do so after two weeks of schools as easily as they could at report card time. Their instruction was based upon this knowledge.

Mary, Diane’s principal, indicated that Diane’s knowledge and application of assessment strategies is an important key to her success. “Every lesson is planned looking at student work and how each student performs. She also studies student behavior to decide what comes next” (M: int.1.pg.2). If there are groups of students with common deficits, she works with them in guided reading and writing groups based upon ongoing assessment of their learning instead of relegating students to one group for a fixed period of time (D: obs.2.pg.2). When conferring with students individually and looking at their work, she knows each child’s strengths and challenges and will hold them accountable to what they are capable of achieving. As Diane explains, “I still have a thing with students who start something in writer’s workshop everyday and do not finish anything. I know

who they are, but under my thumb they definitely finish the work” (D: int.1.pg.13).

Carrie’s learning partner indicated that assessment is one of her clearest strengths. “Carrie presents the data and reviews what we have been doing. In the DRA you can tell if they are missing the endings or (if they are struggling with) comprehension. Her instruction is data based” (T: int.1.pg.4) Carrie herself indicated that she can observe the kids and know exactly where they are without a paper and pencil test. “I understood that assessment is ongoing. You are assessing every time you read with a kid” (C: int.dist.pg.4).

#### Summary: Instruction and Teacher’s Perceptions of Success

Many aspects of these teacher’s instructional practices align with research findings on the instructional practices of effective teachers (Stronge 2002) or the research on how people learn (Bransford, Brown et al. 1999). The most obvious link to the research was the alignment with many of the elements of what Bransford has discovered about how people learn – constructivist learning theory. They created student centered classrooms where individuals were presented with “just manageable difficulties – that is, challenging enough to maintain engagement, but not so difficult as to lead to discouragement” (Bransford, Brown et al. 1999, pg.24). Students built on their initial understanding to learn new ideas and therefore teachers needed to know and use students’ prior knowledge to teach a new concept. They also developed knowledge-centered classroom environments. Careful attention was given to what needed to be taught and what grade level competency looked like. These teachers also established an assessment driven classroom where they knew the performance level of their students in relationship

to the expected standard. Most important, the students were in a supportive community centered classroom where the norms of risk taking, support, and cooperation were apparent and reinforced each day.

These constructivist principles were also inherently present in the use of the components of balanced literacy. As part of this instructional model, teachers regularly have students think about what they are learning and why, rather than being told what they should think and learn. For example, during a read aloud in any of these classrooms, the teachers will pose questions and students will talk to each other about their understanding, not waiting for the teacher to tell them the correct answer. During workshop time, the teachers expect students to read independently, use the reading strategies that were taught independently, and record their understanding of what they are reading. This approach to teaching literacy was also noted by Stronge as a specific strategy that effective teachers use when teaching reading and writing (Stronge 2002, pg.89). The approach also aligns with the research on effective reading instruction as described by Allington and Cunningham (2002).

## Differences

### *Personal Characteristics*

These three teachers, as described, have many personal attributes in common in terms of their perceptions of why they are successful, but they also display some distinct differences. This study focuses on what these teachers have in common, but noting these differences paints a more complex picture and surfaces ideas that, if explored further, may prove to be equally important. These differences also remind us how difficult it is to

fully understand how and why personal characteristics contribute to success and the complexity of the relationships between the teacher as a person and the children as a group of unique individuals each with their own personal characteristics that contribute to the story. The story continues with these noticeable differences.

Carrie, Anne, and Diane have different ways of thinking about and interacting with children. For example, I have no doubt that Anne likes children, but the main way she shows her caring is by pointing out to children how “smart” they can be when they put forth the effort. She is not intentionally trying to make sure children are happy all the time. Diane, on the other hand, believes that she has to make sure the kids are happy before they can learn. Maybe this has something to do with the age level they teach, but as a result of this characteristic, Anne’s classroom is much more business-like than Diane’s.

Although they are all learners, what they choose to study and learn varies as well. Anne and Carrie read and study professional materials on their own much more than Diane, but Diane spends time deepening her content knowledge. All three read and know children’s literature, but Anne seems to read children’s literature for her own pleasure as well.

Carrie’s religious beliefs and their influence is an area that, on the surface, is substantially different from the other two teachers. It would be interesting to explore if the responsibility the other two feel for the success of their students has any similar underpinnings.

Another difference is that Anne and Diane have had many more life experiences before teaching when compared to Carrie. The impact and influences of these experiences is another area to consider further.

### *Instruction*

As with personal characteristics, there are instructional differences as well, but overall these differences were more subtle than substantive. Although all three teachers know their students, it appears that the emphasis for Carrie and Anne is more on knowing each student's interests, skills, prior knowledge, and how they learn in order to design effective lessons. Diane, on the other hand, knows the children's families because she often had siblings in a previous class. She knows about family events and celebrates children's personal accomplishments; losing a tooth, learning a new skill, dancing in the recital. Like Diane and Carrie, she uses this knowledge to plan effectively, but she also uses this knowledge to build a family oriented community. This may be intentional or it may be a natural outgrowth of having children for two years in a row, teaching many of her students' siblings, or having an abundance of parent volunteers.

There are also subtle differences in how each teacher organizes her classroom. Although Diane and the children easily work in the classroom environment, Diane's classroom environment appears less organized. Unlike the other rooms, there are various spots in the room for individual, small group, and large group work. Sometimes they gather in one location and the next time in another. Carrie's classroom is the most organized with places and routines for everything.

When analyzing how each teacher implements the instructional model for literacy, there are more noticeable differences. Carrie is newer to the profession and, as a

result, does not seem to have as much craft knowledge and philosophical understanding to guide her instructional decisions. Recently she implemented components of a balanced writing program in her practice. With excellent modeling and resources to draw upon, Carrie implemented these components well, but like a beginning cook, she more closely ‘follows the menu’ and therefore the implementation of the model is more standardized than I found in Diane’s or Anne’s classroom. Diane also teaches writing using a balanced approach, but because of her experience and deeper understanding of the philosophy underlying the practice, her writing components, although they all exist in one form or another, are not as apparent. In Carrie’s classroom you know when she is conducting a writing mini lesson or formally conferring with children, but in Diane’s class I would have to ask to know for sure which component she was practicing. In Anne’s classroom you can identify the discrete workshop components, but because of her deep knowledge, understanding, and years of reflection on her practice, she seems to easily adapt these components to align with the immediate needs of the classroom or a particular child.

Carrie does not seem to have the same deep understandings as to why one practice works over the other and, compared to the other participants, she has more variance in the materials she selects for children. For example, instead of continually improving her reading or writing workshop instructional practices because she has the knowledge and belief that the approach aligns with how children learn, she will search for other resources that are based upon a completely different philosophy. For example, if a child is struggling with fluency in reading, she may have him work on a fluency curriculum instead of having him continue to read materials on his own instructional level during the independent time during reading workshop.

All three teachers assess each student frequently, but Anne and Carrie seemed to be more organized and systematic about how they collected assessment information, regularly recording their observations. Carrie more regularly uses the data to problem solve with colleagues, while Diane and Anne rely on more personal reflection to make changes in their instruction if a student is not making anticipated progress.

### **III. Sources of Learning**

In studying the most common properties around the major category “sources of learning” the corresponding categories emerged in the individual cases: self-guided learning; learning from colleagues; learning from outside sources; learning from the principal; and learning from the district. In conducting the cross-case analysis, efforts to focus on context and conditions revealed a slightly nuanced set of common categories under the major category of “sources of learning.” These include the following teachers’ perceptions which emerged in the data as contributors to their success and accomplishments with students: 1) the role of reflective practice; 2) relationships with significant outside experts (sometimes actual mentors, other times influential educational experts); 3) the role of collaboration with colleagues, and 4) various district influences.

#### **Common Category 1: The Role of Reflective Practice In Teachers’ Success**

Teacher reflection involves the thinking that occurs before, during, and after the actual enactment of a lesson. Self assessment plays a pivotal role in enabling teachers to become student-centered (Artzt and Armour-Thomas 2002). Diane, Carrie, and Anne are all reflective practitioners. They turn ideas over and over in their heads, thinking about

things from different points of view, stepping back to look at things again, consciously thinking about what they are doing and why they are doing it (Hiebert, Carpenter et al. 1997).

The manner and degree in which Diane, Carrie, and Anne reflect on their practice differs, but it is evident that reflection, or thoughtfulness about one's own teaching practice is the foundation to their success. They all see themselves as students of learning, repeatedly asking themselves questions such as: What do I need to do? How am I doing? How well did I do it? What should I do next? or, in Anne's case, What is the word I should use to explain this idea? Anne talked about the intentionality in which she translates learning targets into very precise language that she carefully chooses to enhance student learning.

I do think that language with kids is so important. That is why I revise and even script a new lesson or new idea. If you use too much language with kids, you lose them and if the language is not crisp and clear, they will not listen to it. You have to be very careful (A: int.2.pg.4).

When asked directly what Diane thinks she does most frequently to improve her practice, she said, "I walk and I think. I garden and I think. Something will click in my mind as I work" (D: int.2.pg.1). Carrie explained her reliance on self reflection as a source of learning. "If I was not being self reflective and if I did not have the drive to be successful - to search out resources - I would not be successful" (C: int. 2.pg.3). As articulated by Stronge, for these teachers reflection is "more than an in-service activity, it is crucial to lifelong learning and a professional necessity" (Stronge 2002, pg. 21).

Data suggest that Diane's, Carrie's, and Anne's reflection on their practice is

perceived to be equally effective, but they go about it in different ways. Anne will mentally review the day while driving to and from work and then at home will often record her thinking and how this thinking will impact her practice. Carrie and Diane will organize their thinking on their own and then share their thoughts with colleagues as a way of making sense out of what they discovered about their practice and the impact on students. Although less frequently, Anne and Carrie especially have benefited by observation and feedback from others as part of their reflective practice. Katie, Anne's principal indicated that, "Anne wants people to observe her because it holds her accountable and will push her practice. When she is on point she does not slack. She responds to questions and respects the questions we (the observers) ask" (T: int.1.pg.1). Carrie, after any observation in her classroom, asks for specific feedback that she can think about and use in the future.

Reflection leads to uncovering problems of practice, which often leads to, again in varying degrees, the review of professional literature for answers. Carrie favors reviewing the professional resources that she has available but was not quite ready for or needed at the time she received them. For example, she talked about the time Leah came into her class to demonstrate interactive writing with children.

When she came in and did interactive writing with my class I went oh my goodness. I have a whole book on interactive writing that is sitting on the shelf, but it was like - oh that fits a need because I have been trying to figure out when do you do handwriting, when do you do spelling, when do you focus on some of this stuff outside of the mini lesson, conferring, and the share circle (C: int.1.pg.2).

If she does not find answers in these resources, she will ask others for additional professional journals, books, or videos that may help. Anne and Diane will also look at professional resources but will spend more time on their own to adjust instructional approaches before searching for answers in educational books or journals. This may be because both Diane and Anne firmly believe that there is no manual or book that can help all the time, and therefore as a professional you need to think through solutions based on your own analysis and craft knowledge. This line of thinking originated from their experiences with Margaret Mooney. Anne was particularly clear about this when she said, “She (Margaret Mooney) kept saying, ‘Think, you are a professional. It (your decisions) depends on the situation you need to figure out. What are you going to do? I cannot tell you this’. It affected me a lot” (A: int.1.pg.6).

Reflecting on practice also leads to solutions that are dependent on searching for new student resources or to looking again at the resources they have with a new set of eyes. All three teachers know their student resources well, but Anne and Diane seem to seek out additional student resources (children’s literature, content materials, etc.) or go back to older materials with a new purpose more readily. Diane has the benefit of organizing all the children’s books for the entire school years ago, so when she has a new skill to teach (e.g. mental imaging) she can think back to which books would be best for teaching a particular idea. “I know the resources. I put those (book) closets together” (D int.1.pg.9). Anne has a wealth of knowledge of children’s literature and can easily identify the books she could use to teach various learning targets. “She (Anne) is successful because she knows children’s books very well and can create interest on the kid’s part. She hooks them into various authors” (K: int.1.pg.1). Carrie does this also, but

doesn't have the same repertoire built up to draw upon. What appears critical is that all three teachers, as a result of thinking deeply about their practice, will spend time getting to know or using all their student resources in a variety of ways, beyond what the publisher may have originally intended.

Reflection also is based upon knowing areas of personal strengths and challenges. Challenges need to be surfaced so that the teachers can watch out for behaviors that may negatively impact student learning. For example, Anne, early in her teaching career, did not want to bother with consciously setting up a positive learning environment with rules, expectations, or norms. Over the years she figured out that consciously building community, something that she does not do naturally, is essential for student success.

I started out thinking I am the queen and everyone do what you are supposed to do but at the same time I noticed they don't always react the way I want them to react. So knowing that I had to be here with them, and I did not want to be miserable, I had to start to look at ways in which we could cooperate more (A: int.1.pg.1).

Although it was not talked about with Diane or Carrie directly, Jess, Carrie's principal, did indicate that he helped her notice her strengths and challenges. Knowing areas of personal strengths and challenges was addressed by Diane in the interviews.

#### Common Category 2: The Role of Outside Others in Successful Practice

In addition to reflecting on practice as a source of learning, the data show all three have been influenced by other more expert educators. All of these people pushed Diane's, Carrie's, and Anne's practice in ways they had not previously considered.

Diane was the only teacher who claimed to have only one person who has influenced her thinking. This person was Margaret Mooney. She was so influential for Diane, that other ideas coming from expert educators after her were either accepted or rejected based upon the perceived alignment to Mooney's ideas and philosophy, which eventually became Diane's way of thinking also. Carrie often cited her Western Washington University Professor, Larry Antell, as teaching her the components of good literacy instruction. She still e-mails Larry when she is having a problem (C: int.1.pg.3). In addition to Larry, Carrie often cites district literacy consultant, Leah Mermelstein, as a more recent influence. Anne has had many mentors who influenced her throughout her career, beginning with her friend and educator Terry Richardson, followed by master teacher and colleague Margaret Morris, Margaret Mooney (Margaret Mooney was real special for me" (A: int.1 pg.8), and most recently, district literacy consultant, Katherine Casey. "I learned a lot from her (Katherine Casey). She focused a lot of what I was thinking. She pinpointed some things for me that were still a little fuzzy" (A: int.2. pg.4).

All of these influential people had some common attributes. They all were successful teachers or, in the case of Dr. Antell, had taught students concepts that led to their success as teachers. Margaret Mooney, Leah Mermelstein, and Katherine Casey were nationally recognized experts. Margaret Morris and Terry Richardson were recognized for either their depth of knowledge in education (Terry Richardson) or their success with students (Margaret Morris). They were all intelligent, well respected in their field or classrooms, encouraging, and prompted Diane, Carrie, and Anne to think deeply about teaching and learning. Their ideas and suggestions also made sense, made a

noticeable difference for children, and aligned with what these teachers experienced on their own.

It is also notable that Diane, Carrie, and Anne in varying capacities have mentored others, which was also mentioned by all three as an important source of learning. For example, Anne's working with student teachers helps her to explain why they make the instructional choices they make. She said, "(when you work with student teachers) you just forget how many steps are in place to teach and when you try to back it down and explain. It is hard" (A: int.2.pg.7). It also helps to bring to the conscious surface teaching moves that have become automatic, which then become more intentional and effective for her as well. Diane and Carrie have worked with student teachers for the same reason.

### Common Category 3: The Role of Collaboration with Colleagues in Promoting Success

Although to different degrees, the data reveal that all three teachers work collaboratively with other staff members. They are willing to share their ideas and assist others. Although they have all participated or led teacher study groups and indicated that the groups had some benefit, none of them said that these groups significantly contributed to their learning. Anne used the study groups to learn how her colleagues' approaches were similar or dissimilar to hers. She also said that it was helpful to share resources across grade levels. This activity provided a means to learn what teachers at different grade levels were doing and which resources they were incorporating into their lessons. In a study group that Anne participated in "all (participating teachers) brought resources, student work, and professional resources. We made copies so you get a real cross section.

We had picture books - different novels. That has been the most organized way we found to work across the levels” (S: int.1.pg.1). Anne also expressed some frustration with colleagues in these settings. As long as they are willing to think deeply and work hard to teach children what they need to know to be successful she will collaborate with them fully, but a colleague of hers stated,

It really bugs her (Anne) when she thinks people are doing ‘namby pamby’ stuff.

It is not that she does not have a place for people who are not up to what they are doing, but we are all accountable, and she wants others to be accountable too (S: int.1.pg.3).

At times, because Anne’s colleagues did not have the same background knowledge or had not spent as much time looking deeply into one approach or another, they did not understand what she was talking about. So far she has not found a means or determination to make herself understandable. This barrier for Anne was evident from the data, although others suggested that this was a challenge area for Diane as well.

All three were studio teachers last year, and in this capacity they worked with colleagues in other buildings. Studio teachers work with an outside consultant monthly, studying, observing, and implementing the components of a balanced literacy program (read alouds, shared reading, and reading workshop). Although Diane and Anne were able either to solidify what they already were doing or take away one or two ideas, for Carrie, this training was significant. When asked about the impact of her change in practice most recently she said, “I think I would have to say that it was that combination of Leah, Anneke, and the studio teachers. I bring back the information to Tessa and the building. We talk about it during early releases”(C: int.2.pg.4).

Working with partners in the building was another avenue for collaborating with colleagues. Carrie took advantage of this relationship the most and learned a great deal from these relationships. When asked: What is your most significant learning experience? Carrie consistently said, “Working with Tessa. With Tessa we check in with each other continually”(C: int.2. pg.2). The relationships that Diane and Anne had were less equal. Because of their experience and reflective practices, they were often the supporters rather than the recipients of new knowledge or skills. For example, when I asked Diane about her partnership with a colleague, this sentiment was clear in her response. “I am working with Natalie on the tide pool. She is interested in my thought process (D: int.1.pg.2).

In looking at the data surrounding the sources of learning for successful teachers in the district, three common categories related to sources of learning were present; reflective practice, mentors or influential educational experts, and to a lesser degree, collaborative relationships with colleagues.

#### Common Category 4: The Relationship of the District’s Efforts to the Teachers’ Success

Even in the early phase of this investigation, it appears that the district’s efforts to improve teaching and learning have made a difference for these teachers, but in varying degrees and ways. They all benefited by the district professional development in literacy, but used the information differently to improve their practice. Carrie applied the entire literacy model that was demonstrated, Anne took small ideas and incorporated them into her practice, and Diane used the information for reflection on her own practice. An identifiable subcategory under “learning from the district” which emerged was “providing high quality resources”, but for one it meant teaching materials and for

another it meant children's books or professional resources. Bimonthly early releases made a difference for their learning and success, but one had a picture of how the time could be spent differently based upon teacher needs. The district's expectations and supports made a difference, but again one teacher felt the positive impact of knowing the district expected them to do a great job, while another was impacted by the emphasis on classroom observations.

In looking at the district's efforts to improve literacy instruction and the perceptions of success held by these three teachers, common influences emerged, including: a) perceptions that the content of the district professional development included instructional strategies that were incorporated into practice sometimes small ideas, a phrase or reminder, and other times entire organizational structures; b) perceptions that the district professional development provided content for reflection on current practices; c) perceptions that the district involved teachers in district planning; d) perceptions that the district had expectations for administrators related to student success; e) perceptions that the district had assessment guidelines; and, f) perceptions that the district provided conditions for working together (time and resources).

The first two have already been thoroughly discussed in the individual cases. This section will focus on the last four areas of influence.

#### *Involvement of Teachers in District Planning*

The participants talked about the influence of participating in district decisions on their practice. For example, at various stages, Diane, Anne, and Carrie participated in the district literacy committee which was responsible for writing district grade level benchmarks and developing district initiatives in literacy. In order to determine grade

level benchmarks, the teachers spent a lot of time discussing the meaning of the benchmarks and how they changed from one grade level to the next. Because of this deep analysis and study, the teachers involved were able to more effectively incorporate these benchmarks in to practice. Carrie indicated,

When we rewrote the reading benchmarks, it was very much based on good practice and what we were reading in the research, but maybe because we knew them so well it was just natural to use them. Maybe that is why we were able to put them into practice. We knew the document inside and out because we studied about them, so we knew everything that backs them up (C: int.dist.).

After the benchmarks were written, the group began to discuss the instructional approaches that would enable students to meet these benchmarks. In order to deeply understand effective literacy practices, part of the district's approach to improving the knowledge of all was to support the learning of a few key teacher/leaders on this committee. Two key leaders initially were Diane and Anne. They were supported by and participated in the learning cadre with Margaret Mooney. They brought this knowledge back to the committee where ongoing dialogue about the approach ensued until it became the accepted informal instructional approach for the district. With this tacit model in mind, grants were applied for that provided the resources to spread this thinking to others in the district. That was over ten years ago and, since that time, this tacit model has become the explicit model for all district professional development initiatives in literacy and the model that is expected to be implemented in all classrooms.

Once this model was articulated and all teachers in the district were expected to move towards full implementation, the committee members who were responsible for the

development of this model and were already using many of the components in their own classroom, including Diane, Carrie and Anne, shared their knowledge and practice with others. Once they opened up their practice to others, they implemented and taught more intentionally. Anne directly talked about how the observations of others, including student teachers, helped to hone her practice. “It keeps me on my toes. I cannot be sloppy” (A: int.2.pg.7). Her principal indicated that “Anne wants people to observe her. It holds her accountable and helps her improve” (K: int.1.pg.2). Her colleague, when asked why Anne was successful, indicated “You cannot deny the fact that we have shared leadership at all of our meetings, school, district, small groups. When you have responsibility you behave in a different manner” (S: int.1.pg.4). In a similar manner, Carrie talked about how she took the information that she was learning with studio teachers and brought it back and explained it to staff members. “We did basically what we did with teachers. We took those transcripts and all the teachers were going ‘wow – yeah’. That is where I am deepening my knowledge and skills and am able to pull it out and use with kids” (C: int.1.pg.2). She also has opened up her practice for other’s learning. With the continued push for teachers to implement the literacy model Carrie indicated that she now has more, “colleagues coming in to see the workshop method” When asked if she felt comfortable with hosting visitors for their learning, she confidently said, “Yeah come watch me” (C: int.dist.).

During member checks with the participants where the preliminary suppositions were shared, they indicated that regardless of which district they worked in, they would always search for ways to make their practice stronger, but did confirm that some of the district’s efforts made it easier to be successful. For example, when asked if their

involvement in defining the district's direction in literacy impacted her practice Anne said, "Maybe indirectly, but I was always searching for what was the best way of teaching. I am always looking for something that is going to make sense and bring it back and add to my own experience" (A: int.dist.). But she did point out an unintended and unrecognized benefit of this process of moving from teacher/leaders studying and researching best practices to committee discussion and eventual district implementation.

The fact that Nooksack is small and administration is accessible and that they were ready to listen to individual teachers was an enormous boost. The respect was incredible because of the realization that you could make changes instead of someone saying, 'Here is your book'. Asking people to think about your kids and make intelligent decisions that helped a lot. It was enormous (A: int. dist.).

#### *Administrative Expectations*

Administrators have also been involved in professional development focused on instructional leadership; more specifically how to ensure that the district's instructional model in literacy was applied in each classroom. After they received the knowledge and support around leadership in literacy, they were held to district expectations that they would hold teachers accountable for full implementation of the instructional model. The superintendent developed administrative expectations which require the following:

1. Principals will devote no less than 25 to 30 percent of their time on focused, direct work on improving teaching and learning, with particular emphasis on what we know to be powerful constructivist instructional practices. These activities include observation, coaching and consulting, evaluations, and collaboration with teams,

examining student work and other assessment data, etc. This requires increased time in classrooms.

2. Know where every staff member “is at” with regard to established and emerging instructional frameworks and models, and develop improvement plan(s) and strategies (teams, school wide, individual). More specifically:
  - Principals will know and have documented the self assessment from the teacher standards, literacy and assessment guides, and literacy teacher skills assessment (specifically for reading), growth goals for each teacher, plans to support teachers’ growth and achievement of their goals, and the evidence collected that demonstrates that they are achieving their goal(s).
  - The professional development plans (teams, school wide, individual) will be periodically reviewed and shared with other administrators.
  - Supervision tools will be used as applicable to work with staff members to achieve goals.
3. Attend all pertinent district wide professional development opportunities, and incorporate learnings into school professional development plans (teams, school wide, individual).
4. Active implementation of established (literacy model) and emerging models or frameworks of powerful instructional practices.
5. Supervision, evaluation, coaching, and other professional development practices (Johnson 2005).

This document, and follow-up conversations with the superintendent, was intended to cause principals to plan initiatives at the building level for full implementation of the

literacy model in all classrooms. The data show these expectations impacted practice, but not as much as intended. Carrie indicated that she knew of these principal expectations and was assuming that they were helping the principal develop individual implementation plans for those who were not incorporating these practices in their classroom, but realized that this was not always the case. In the past there was little follow through.

The talk was happening, not the walk. We knew that this was the expectation, but there was no follow through. There were things I thought were happening because of the expectations. I knew that we were expected to implement these practices, so I assumed that it was happening. I thought everyone was implementing some form of the workshop model, but I find out that is not happening. I thought everyone was teaching the comprehension strategies, but that was not happening. I am a little shocked (C: int.dist).

With a new principal, Carrie feels “she will be more direct” (C: int.dist). Because of this increased attention by the new principal, Carrie is now being asked by colleagues if they can come in and observe her literacy practices, which is helping Carrie hone her practice even further (C: int.dist).

Anne held a similar sentiment.

Katie, in order to lead us, she did not do that (follow administration expectations). Everyone was left to their own devices. She did not get us together to think about students or do observations and it shows. It is not that our teachers have not been working just as hard (as teachers in another elementary school) but just not as smart. It saddens me in a lot of ways for I do not like that feeling when I know we

can do better. The principal has to get into the classroom and make hard decisions. This is what we need to do here. (A: int.dist).

Talking about the success of all the students at Cascade Elementary (all but six students passed the fourth grade WASL and they were just awarded a national Blue Ribbon School award) Anne went on to say that the principal, Mary had a great deal to do with their success. The way she held teachers accountable but supported them in the same way made the difference for students. “The way Mary does this is extremely supportive, nonthreatening and she does it in ways they (the teachers) do not even know. She is an amazing woman” (A: int.dist). She also indicated that she did not previously think that a principal was that critical to classroom and school performance but has come to realize that the principal is critical. “Before I thought that the principal had very little to do with school, but I have so changed my mind. They are the driving force. They do reflect the success of the school” (A: int.dist).

#### *District Assessment Guidelines*

In kindergarten through grade two, the district established common assessments which guide decisions about teaching and learning. The data indicate that teachers perceive that district expectations to incorporate high quality assessment practices into their instruction lent some support. Carrie said, “I think it part of was a push from the district to align the assessments at grades K-2 helped with my assessment practice. I think all of us in grades K-2 are strong in assessment because we have an assessment notebook” (C: int. dist). The district also has developed a written assessment guide that outlines effective assessment practices. Training has been provided in what these guidelines look like in practice. Carrie explained this further when she said,

We have done learning around formative and summative assessment. We have learning around different types of assessment so people started valuing anecdotal notes and observations. I can observe the kids and know exactly where they are without a paper and pencil test and people understood that assessment is ongoing. I understood that assessment is ongoing. You are assessing every time you read with a kid. (C: int.dist).

Along with providing an assessment guide and accompanying training, all teachers set an improvement goal in assessment, which also helped Carrie focus her learning and improvement in this area. Carrie indicated that “(I)t did help that one of our learning goals had to be in assessment. It helped improve my assessment practices” (C: int.dist). For Anne, the setting of goals did not help to improve her practice, but the district focus on assessment helped to initiate several school based book studies on assessment. “We did a book study on assessment last year and the year before. We spent a lot of time talking about assessment. It did certainly affect our practice” (A: int.dist.).

### *Conditions for Working Together*

Three years ago the district implemented a bimonthly early release schedule. Staff members use this time for a variety of activities. The only guideline for this time is that it is time to work together to learn about and focus on teaching and learning. Across the district an observer would see whole staff analyzing data to see if their interventions were impacting student success, working in smaller study teams either looking at student work, or pouring over a professional resource, or working together in vertical teams to ensure that the curriculum is aligned across levels. Carrie indicated, “early release days were excellent learning days. For me it (the learning) was focused around our assessment goal

and our literacy goal. Early release days we would get together as our team and do a lot of work in these areas” (C: int. dist). Although she appreciates the time, Anne feels very strongly that there needs to be built in time for teachers to think about and reflect on and plan carefully for the students that face them every day. She explained this quite emphatically.

I need to think in my practice, to really take journals, texts whatever and really look at them and thoughtfully plan my next steps. It takes a tremendous amount of time and that time is not provided for within the school day. If I was not lucky enough to not have kids and a husband who does not care about dinner, I would not have the time to do that kind of thinking. You take the young teachers who have babies at home or husbands who want to go out. How can their practice be as strong as it could? Whatever time we have (early releases, staff meetings, etc.) is structured and they cannot do that kind of work. That to me, even though I know administrators are nervous about teachers going in their rooms and just grading papers, it is probably not true anymore. To be a really good teacher it takes a lot of thinking time. There needs to be a place for professional development things, but there also needs to be a place people can look at their children, select the correct books, determine next steps, ask - how can I teach this in a way that they really understand. If that is not provided, it does not happen. It is becoming more and more critical I think. I do think everyone would do this. I am not sure everyone would choose to work alone. This lack of thinking and planning time may be one of the reasons we are not doing as well. They are not looking at the classroom, but only at the book or what they are teaching. You also

have to realize that teaching is intellectual and intellectual activities need to have time for thinking and study. This is new work. (A: int.dist).

The district has also provided professional resources that align with the instructional models. These resources ranged from outside consultants (“the people you brought in were very valuable” (C: int.dist.) to professional videos that model components of reading workshop to books that are used for weekly study groups. Student resources to teach using a balanced literacy approach have also been provided and seen as beneficial by all three teachers. Data suggest that these resources supported their learning.

It appears that these teachers believe they would have been successful anywhere, but they indicated there was added value by working in the district. Overlaying all other advantages, the culture of the district supports and enhances these teachers’ instructional practices and how they best learn. Carrie explained this when she said,

Nooksack is known for its professional development. It is known that the teachers will be learners and I think that came through when we were interviewing people for the positions last spring. Those teachers knew that Nooksack was known for its professional development. They knew that professional development was important to the district. When you look at a district you should also know their focus and it is known that Nooksack is huge on professional development. The learning culture is huge. The community out there knows. We know. (C: int.dist.).

### Conclusions and Limitations of the Study

This study sheds some light on the personal attributes, instructional practices, and sources of learning of three effective elementary literacy teachers in one school district. It is important to note, however, that due to various concerns connected to the inquiry, results must be understood as tentative, and the suppositions formulated herein only exhibit elements of very early substantive theory generation and would require further exploration in order to develop a substantive theory regarding teacher success and the relationship to the district (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). These concerns, when researched and studied become the next steps in creating substantive theory. These concerns include: 1) the limited size of the sample of cases; 2) the constraints of a narrow subject area focus (literacy); 3) the researcher's position of authority in the particular school district context, 4) the lack of attention to contrary cases, and 5) not fully exploring participants' differences.

With regard to the sample, while the three teachers under study here varied in important ways, before generalizing to substantive theory from three cases, more teachers would have to be studied, including, but not limited to, teachers who were not as successful, teachers newer to the profession, teachers newer to the district, and teachers from varying grade levels. Second, because these teachers were confined to literacy instruction at the elementary level, in order to move from interesting suppositions to explore to initiatives that the district could put into practice, the study and exploration may need to extend to other subject areas as well as other grade levels. Third, while my efforts in using a grounded theory approach and multiple member checks were designed to temper my own subjectivity to the greatest extent possible, because I am studying my

own district and therefore very immersed in the nuances of the district, my interpretation of findings must be seen in this light. In addition, areas for further exploration could have been inadvertently overlooked. My own lenses as a district employee and administrator in a position of authority, undoubtedly clouded aspects of this research and analysis in ways that I may not even be aware of. Fourth, although the time and breadth of this study did not provide for studying teachers who were not as effective, it would have lent depth to this study. Finally, although in this study I focused on the commonalities among the participants, there were interesting differences that were not explored fully. Further exploration of these differences could have provided an even deeper portrait of the teachers and more depth to the analysis.

In spite of these limitations, the study did provide a starting point for further inquiry and study into how to improve teaching and learning for the adults and students throughout the system. The next chapter will focus on some of these possibilities.

## Chapter 8

### The Possibilities

Even though this study focused on only three teachers, their story provoked ideas that the district could study further. Randy Bomer, coordinator of Teacher's College Writing College at Columbia University, talks about teaching being more than magic (1995). Diane, Carrie, and Anne have shown this to be the case. They have worked hard to hone their craft. They did this by thinking deeply about their responsibilities to children, reflecting on their practice in order to understand what they had to learn and do to fulfill this responsibility, and strengthening their practice until children became engaged and excited enough about learning to see themselves as successful learners. A district that is able to create the culture and conditions for the adults to be students of their own craft is challenging to actualize, but is essential for student success. The first section of this chapter will focus on ideas for further exploration for strengthening the district's current efforts to develop and support highly effective teachers and the following section will explore future possibilities.

#### Current Possibilities

##### *Creating the Habit of Reflection*

Randy Bomer, when talking about craft knowledge in *The Teaching of Literacy*, refers to a habit of reflection (Bomer 1995). He talks about watching children for the purpose of imagining what the teacher can do to help that child become a good reader or writer and the importance of establishing the habit of spending time reflecting on what they have observed (Bomer 1995). For this purpose, he encourages teachers to use a tool

similar to what students use – a writer’s notebook or a teaching journal. Like Anne who thinks on her way home and then writes down her thoughts as a way to plan for the future or like Diane who walks and thinks or Carrie who talks to her partner as a way of reflecting on the learning lives of children, we can build time into all professional development to create the habit of reflection. What Bomer learned from powerful teachers is similar to what I learned from Diane, Carrie, and Anne – the power of “pulling back and asking: Where are we? What are we trying to do? and then plan a new future (Bomer 1995). This habit could more effectively be incorporated into all professional development across the district. If this improvement were incorporated effectively, at a session on use of data for example, we would build in adequate time for staff members to think about how they would use the information and then create a plan to incorporate the information into their practice. When returning, we would start with staff members writing in their learning log or sharing their reflections with others on the effectiveness of the changes they made in their classroom. Similar to a powerful classroom, we would slow down, go deeper, and provide the time for honest, thoughtful reflection on how the information may or may not impact practice. The ultimate goal would be to restructure all learning opportunities so that the “habit of reflection” would be the foundation of learning, not the last thing done before going out the door or in thinking about Anne’s suggestions, there would be additional time provided for this specific purpose and focus.

### *Knowing Principles of How People Learn*

The study of the mind in the last few decades has implications for education that has seeped into the decisions in the district but has never been made explicit for all. This cognitive research has implications for teaching and learning and, if understood, could

bring coherence to the converging instructional models that are developing in all the content areas across the district. If this research were threaded throughout all professional development, staff members would have a deeper understanding of why particular approaches work better than others. Diane discovered on her own that giving student choices in what to learn resulted in better student learning. Anne recognized that creating community was essential to student success. Carrie realized that carefully and frequently assessing students allowed her to carefully monitor progress and make adjustments before children failed. All of these actions link to student success because they are in alignment with current research on learning. In the district, the models that are implemented incorporate components that also link to this current research. Sharing this research could strengthen staff understanding of why we are expecting them to incorporate these models into their classroom. We are not just pulling models out of the air, but are choosing models that align with what the cognitive research shows on how people learn. The hope would be that staff members, especially elementary teachers that are responsible for all subjects, would see an instructional thread throughout all of the approaches in various content areas and be able draw upon the similarities as a source of strength rather than a source of conflict.

### *Focusing on Assessment*

The teachers in this case were convinced that it was their responsibility if children were not learning and in order to teach the children well, they all had to know each child well – their academic strengths and challenges, their interests, their approach to learning. Once they knew the gaps between what they were teaching and what children were learning, they were motivated to make adjustments to their practice. Teachers’

knowledge, practice, and use of formative assessment are essential and aligned to the research of how people learn. “Studies of adaptive expertise, learning, transfer, and early development show that feedback is extremely important. Student thinking must be made visible and feedback be provided” (Bransford Brown et al. 1990, pg.140.) Feedback is needed to build the self assessment skills of students, design next instructional steps, and provide guidance for students to revise their thinking. Good assessment practices help teachers realize the need to rethink their teaching practices. All professional development in the district, whether the topic is on effective read alouds or the implementation of a share circle during writing, could be strengthened by always incorporating an assessment strand. This could be accomplished by consistently asking the question: How would you know this activity was effective and impacted student learning? and then providing the time to authentically answer.

#### *Learning from the Experts*

Diane, Carrie, and Anne all learned from listening to or watching others who were more expert in their craft (Margaret Mooney, Leah Mermelstein, Katherine Casey).

Answering the question: What does this look like in practice? could be a powerful strand in all professional development. This would necessitate more video taping of teachers and more careful identification of the components of the demonstration. Additionally, the district needs to be mindful of continually bringing in outside experts to ensure that staff is continually learning and applying new thinking.

#### *Building in Collaboration/Planning Time in All Professional Development Activities*

Slowing down and building in time for processing and planning is recognized as important, but is often eliminated from professional development efforts. If the district

were building into the learning what Diane, Carrie, and Anne do naturally, all learning opportunities would incorporate the time at all learning meetings to ask the question: So what? What do you need to do to incorporate this learning into your practice? What do you need to consider? By intentionally building in the time as part of the learning, immediate implementation of ideas could be expected and collaboration with colleagues would be more focused. Principals would also know what each staff member is intending to do with their learnings and how to support their implementation plans.

Based upon an analysis of the practices and thinking of effective teachers, creating the habit of reflection, knowing the research on how people learn, strengthening knowledge and use of assessments, creating opportunities to learn from the experts, and structuring collaboration and planning time into learning meetings are some immediate means to strengthen professional development efforts and impact student learning. These recommendations are present sporadically in many of the district's professional development activities; often dependent on the knowledge and focus of the person organizing the experience. It would not take a lot of effort to intentionally incorporate these suggestions into professional development practices throughout the district.

### Future Possibilities

Diane, Carrie, and Anne brought clarity to what the district could do to improve current professional development efforts but, more far reaching, they surfaced ideas for future study involving more comprehensive professional development design. With the understanding that these components are not quick fixes or adjustments to current

efforts, but require careful thought in development and clear processes for implementation, these future possibilities are as follows:

*Develop Professional Development Based on the Needs of Teachers*

When stepping back and looking at the process Diane, Carrie, and Anne went through to move from novice to expert teachers, they took similar paths. Although in varying degrees, their practice really began to improve when they found, connected with, and often times watched an outside expert. For Diane it was Margaret Mooney and for Carrie, her Western group and more recently Leah Mermelstein. Anne has a series of outside experts that influenced her practice along the way. By either listening to an expert describe a strategy and then deeply reflecting on the implication for practice or by actually seeing the expert model the strategy with children, these teachers were able to effectively incorporate these strategies into their practice.

For example, Carrie solidified the use of the instructional strategy by talking about the strategy with colleagues which allowed her to more confidently use these strategies in her practice. “I have done so much professional development and it has impacted practice, but my partnership has impacted my practice the most because we hold each other accountable, we set goals, we check in with each other, we observe each other, we meet once a week to talk about our practice and the kids learning so we can see if our practice is effective or not effective” (C: int.2.pg.1). Carrie also relied on ongoing observation of Leah Mermelstein and emulated what she saw. “Leah stretches the knowledge I have. Watching her has given me something else in my fist to help kids” (C: int.1.pg.2). Through reading and reflecting, talking to a colleague, or watching an expert model instruction and reviewing more closely the same teaching segments on videos,

Carrie was able to use the instructional strategy independently in a variety of contexts and eventually teach others, serving as a mentor and expert herself. Her learning trajectory moved from a reliance on others to independently incorporating strategies into practice, to the point where she was able to teach and coach others. She observed exemplary instruction, she watched videos of effective practice or read professional information, discussed the ideas with colleagues, practiced the use of the strategy and talking about implementation with a colleague, and then began to share her expertise with others.

Although not as discretely recognizable, Diane and Anne also experience a similar learning pattern. They listened to, dialogued with, or observed outside experts, read professional literature, incorporated strategies into practice with the support of their own reflection or in some cases with colleagues, and then began to use these strategies as a matter of course. They are now able to share their learning with others.

What they created for themselves or what was created serendipitously is a learner centered model that involved a variety of learning activities that moved them from relying on other's practice for support to incorporating new instructional practices independently. They all, in some capacity, became mentors for others. If a learner centered, gradual release model of professional development were intentionally incorporated into the district's efforts then teachers' learning experiences would be differentiated based upon their level of practice. Some teachers would be spending their professional development time developing a vision of effective instruction and what it looks like in the classroom. Once an external image becomes clear, they would be more likely to create a vision for their own instruction. At this state of the gradual release continuum, professional development begins with observations, study groups, and

collaborative planning (Sweeney 2003). Others would be spending their learning time implementing new approaches which would include in-classroom coaching, observations and continued study. Teachers would be working with professional developers or coaches right in the classroom. Similar to effective student learning, the learning between the coach and teacher would be shared. Still others would be implementing strategies independently and the coach would help teachers sustain the work on their own. They would be leading professional development initiatives and coaching and working with others.

In order to implement this component the district would need to have a way to more clearly identify where each staff member is along this learning continuum and make transparent why there are varying opportunities for individual teachers. The system as well as teachers would need to articulate what they need to know and be able to do to move across this continuum. This would necessitate designing professional development aligned to a clear instructional model, but based upon the individual learning goals and next steps of the teachers. It would necessitate the development of an environment where staff members feel safe and supported, where teacher choice based upon skill and interests within a common vision and instruction focus is honored, where feedback is an integral part of the school culture, and where there is a clear set of shared goals and anticipated outcomes. It would necessitate that content coaches are available to help teachers directly in the classroom and a structure for teachers within the district, when they are ready, to provide ongoing leadership and coaching for others.

In addition to developing learner centered professional development around a particular instruction strategy, this study also points to the need to create professional

development based upon student results. Effective teachers are not only implementing instructional strategies that are linked to student success, but effective teachers are those who consistently are able to show their students can reach expected standards. The next component focuses on the future possibility of creating professional development opportunities not only based on the act of teaching, but on the results of the teaching as well.

### *Align Professional Development to Student Results*

Effective teachers spend a great deal of time reflecting on the impact of their instruction on student success. In order for their reflection to impact student outcomes, they have to be able to gauge student learning effectively, know enough about how students learn the particular content they are teaching, and assuredly know the standards that guide their work in order to create plans that improve student achievement. Currently our professional development efforts in literacy focus on learning how to implement instructional strategies that linked to student success, but we need to begin with assessing the needs of students, knowing which students on regular intervals are meeting standards and those who are not, and then focusing and adjusting the learned instructional practices based upon the student assessment information. In addition to learning the components of effective instruction for reading and writing, we need to augment this learning with learning how to develop and use regular assessments that indicate whether or not our instruction is making a difference. If the instructional moves are making a difference, we need to understand why so they can be replicated in other situations. Based upon the data from our highly effective teachers, this analysis would be more complete if it were done with colleagues.

One way to accomplish this goal is for staff members to work together to develop common classroom assessments. By developing common classroom assessments, teachers would be discussing their lessons together, learning about and incorporating the elements of high quality assessments, and designing a tool that they own that would demonstrate how students are doing at various points throughout the school year. Over time, the analysis of results can provide substantive feedback on students' mastery of grade level expectations and can provide a broader and richer sampling of the teacher's impact on students. Analyzing the classroom patterns of student learning would then be another source for teachers' professional development (Tucker and Sronge 2005). The use of classroom data can also be a source for generating the intrinsic desire to improve. The teachers in this case accomplished this independently.

The ongoing analysis of student achievement as a determiner of individual professional development would necessitate a system that balances the competing demands of fairness and accountability with support. Design and implementation of such a system is daunting and necessitates careful consideration of the multiple issues that influence student learning and assessment, but nonetheless seems to be where districts need to move towards in the future.

#### *Build in Adequate Conditions for Learning*

Creating school cultures that value professional learning will require school leaders to initiate changes that place professional development at the core of teachers' work to ingrain the value of continuous professional learning throughout teachers' careers (Scribner 1999). All three teachers in this case spent an inordinate amount of time beyond the school day to reflect, study, learn, and plan to ensure that their instruction

aligned with effective practices and met the needs of students. If time for reflecting and learning is a critical factor, then time for professional development needs to be part of a teacher's daily job responsibilities. Time is the most important support and often the most difficult for districts to provide, but if time is not provided, then learning rarely moves beyond surface-level implementation. Although the district has eleven early release days throughout the year and resources for teachers to work together in various configurations, this is an area that needs a more viable, long-term sustainable solution.

## Epilogue

### A Picture of the Future: Getting Started

What would the life of a teacher look like if these possibilities became reality? What would it look like if teachers had the opportunity during the school day to be serious students of their own learning? What it might look like if administrators and teachers worked together to create a system that makes quality adult learning a sustainable reality?

Teachers and administrators would need to come together to develop a system to determine how to measure the impact of teaching on student achievement or how to calculate student learning gains. This team would have to meet regularly over the course of a year to not only develop this system but also create a communication system for gathering feedback from other staff members. Similar to the processes that effective teachers take when learning a new skill, this team would study existing research on what other systems have done to assess the progress of students over a year's period of time and how these systems provided feedback for teachers not only on the act of teaching, but

also on the results of teaching. Systems that are already in place are limited, but they do exist in Oregon, Colorado, Virginia and Tennessee (Tucker and Sronge 2005). Once outside systems have been identified, the team would meet with an outside expert who would help guide the development of a similar system that fits of context of the district. The team would develop their recommendations and present these recommendations to teachers, principals, superintendent, and school board for input. The final recommendations would be piloted with a small group of teachers. The pilot project would be closely studied and the information gathered would be used to adjust the recommendations accordingly.

Knowing that a value added system needs to rely on common assessments aligned to the grade level expectations, concurrently a team would work on strengthening the district's current assessment system or developing other common assessments that can be used to gauge how students are achieving throughout the year. Once the assessments are decided upon, the teachers piloting the results based system would incorporate these assessments into their work for the year.

A more difficult task would be to develop a systemic way to fairly and equitably use the individual teacher's student results along with an assessment of their knowledge and skill in implementing the district's instructional model in literacy to provide differentiated professional development opportunities. Without further study, I could not speculate how this could be accomplished, but I do know that it would take considerable focused study and close review to create such a system. Because it will take considerable thinking and time, this study should part of the ongoing work of the team that is creating the district's system for calculating student learning gains.

Even without knowing how we would get there, considering the learnings from Diane, Carrie, and Anne, the professional development opportunities would utilize the gradual release model and therefore would range from individual study and reflection to group study and development of common lessons and assessments to one on one coaching to teaching and leading others.

Although the activities would vary based upon differentiated needs, the district would also need to figure out how to allocate adequate time for teacher learning. Although also difficult, this could be accomplished through weekly early release of students combined with the hiring of additional highly competent teachers to cover classes for extended periods of time. Resources would have to be reallocated from other areas to cover this expense.

Imagining all of this in place, a day in the life of two teachers could look like this:

*Teacher Number 1*

Teacher number one has consistently demonstrated through an analysis of state, district, and classroom assessments that at least eighty percent of her students are meeting the expected standard and the students who are not, based upon where they entered the classroom are making considerable progress. This teacher, through observations by the principal and a mentor/coach from outside the district, combined with self reflection against the indicators effective instructional practices in literacy has shown that she is incorporating these indicators into practice. She is only working half a day with students and spending the remainder of her day coaching others, reflecting on her own practice, or working with a coach who spends time only working with those in the district who have reached a similar level of expertise. She works a team of four to six teachers on

implementing effective strategies in their classroom. These teachers identify a common problem of practice and the coach is helping them to design lessons and incorporate instructional strategies to solve this challenge. Depending on needs, she will either demonstrate lessons or provide feedback to others. At other times she may be working one on one with a teacher from this group, either co teaching, providing just-in-time feedback while they are teaching the lesson, or observing and providing feedback after the lesson. She will also work with this group of teachers to assess students regularly to analyze the impact of their instructional moves on student achievement.

The purpose of all of these activities is to help these teachers independently incorporate instructional strategies into their practice and continually analyze the impact of their instruction on student success. After the eight week cycle, she will help them create their own professional development plans that they will continue to implement on their own without her, but will check in with them periodically to provide additional group or individual supports. She will then work with another group in a similar fashion.

#### *Teacher Number 2*

Teacher number two, based upon analysis of her student achievement data, has students who come into her class almost at the same level as when they leave. She has tried some of the effective instructional practices in literacy, but has not sustained these practices in her classroom. She participated in study groups, observed high quality lessons, believes in the model and feels frustrated by her students' lack of achievement. In looking at the gradual responsibility model for adult learning that is used in the district to determine professional development options for teachers, with her principal she determines that she would greatly benefit by guided practice with the school coach in her

classroom. The school coach is assigned to work with her for a five day period of time during her literacy block. Initially the coach teaches the lesson, but on the second and third day they co teach a lesson together. By fourth day, the teacher is teaching independently, but the coach transparently stops the flow of the lesson to make just in time suggestions. By the fifth day the teacher is teaching on her own and is provided direct feedback after the lesson. For the following week, they co plan lessons together and the coach provides time to periodically check in on progress. This support is provided until the teacher is comfortable sustaining the strategies on her own and her students are beginning to show progress.

For this scenario to become a reality will take brave leaders who push forward for the sake of the children even if it causes consternation for the adults. Hopefully it will not take a new generation of teachers to create these schools, but instead we will all find it in our heart and minds to do what we know we should do rather than what we are in the habit of doing.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### **Teacher Interview**

##### Introductory – open-ended questions

1. To what extent do you attribute your strong academic success your students over the past five years?
2. What supports contributed to your success?

##### Specific areas for follow-up questions

- Changes over the last 5 years
  - How has your work as a teacher changed from 5 years ago?
  - How is the school/district different now than 5 year ago
- Teacher collaboration
  - To what extent do teachers discuss learning goals/progress?
- Professional development
  - How do you plan for professional development as the school/district?
- Teacher accountability
  - How do you keep track of student achievement?

##### Final Questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add that was not brought up during this interview?
2. If you were in another district, do you think you would have been as successful?
3. What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask? (Abbott, Baker et al. 2004).

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### **Principal Interview**

##### Introductory – open-ended questions

1. Why do you think that (the teacher in their school) is consistently successful with students?
2. As a principal, what role did you play in this process??
3. What other supports contributed to their success?

##### Specific areas for follow-up questions

- Changes over the last 5 years
  - How has your work as a principal changed from 5 years ago?
  - How is the school different now than 5 year ago
- Teacher collaboration
  - To what extend do teachers discuss learning goals/progress?
- Professional development
  - How do you plan for professional development as the school/district?
- Teacher accountability
  - How do you keep track of student achievement?
- School Governance
  - How has the governance system been helpful, or not helpful in the success here?
- Morale
  - How would you describe the morale at the school?

##### Final Questions:

- Is there anything else you would like to add? (Abbott, Baker et al. 2004)
- Do you think that this teacher would have been as successful in another district?

**Appendix C**  
**Follow-up Interview Guide**

1. What type of learning do you typically do on your own?
2. What type of learning do you typically do with colleagues?
3. What type of learning do you typically do with outside of school with others?
4. What else can you tell me about your source of learning?
5. Of all these sources, what impacts your success with students the most?

**Appendix D**  
**Coding Index**

Participant		Data Sources	
Carrie (participant)	C	Interview	int.
Jess (Carrie's principal)	J	Observation	obs.
Tessa (Carrie's colleague)	T	Documents: (Meeting Memo)	MM
		Memo: (notes to myself)	Memo
		Date: used with meeting memo and memo to myself	Month.Year
Anne (participant)	A	Number references: 1	First interview or observation
Katie (Anne's principal)	K	Number references: 2	Second interview or observation
Linda (Anne's colleague)	L	pg.	Page number where the reference was on the transcript
Diane (participant)	D		
Mary (Diane's principal)	M		
Sarah (Diane's colleague)	S		

**Examples**

1. A: int.1.pg.3

Anne: first interview: third page of the transcript

2. C: obs.2.pg.4

Carrie: second observation: fourth page of the transcript

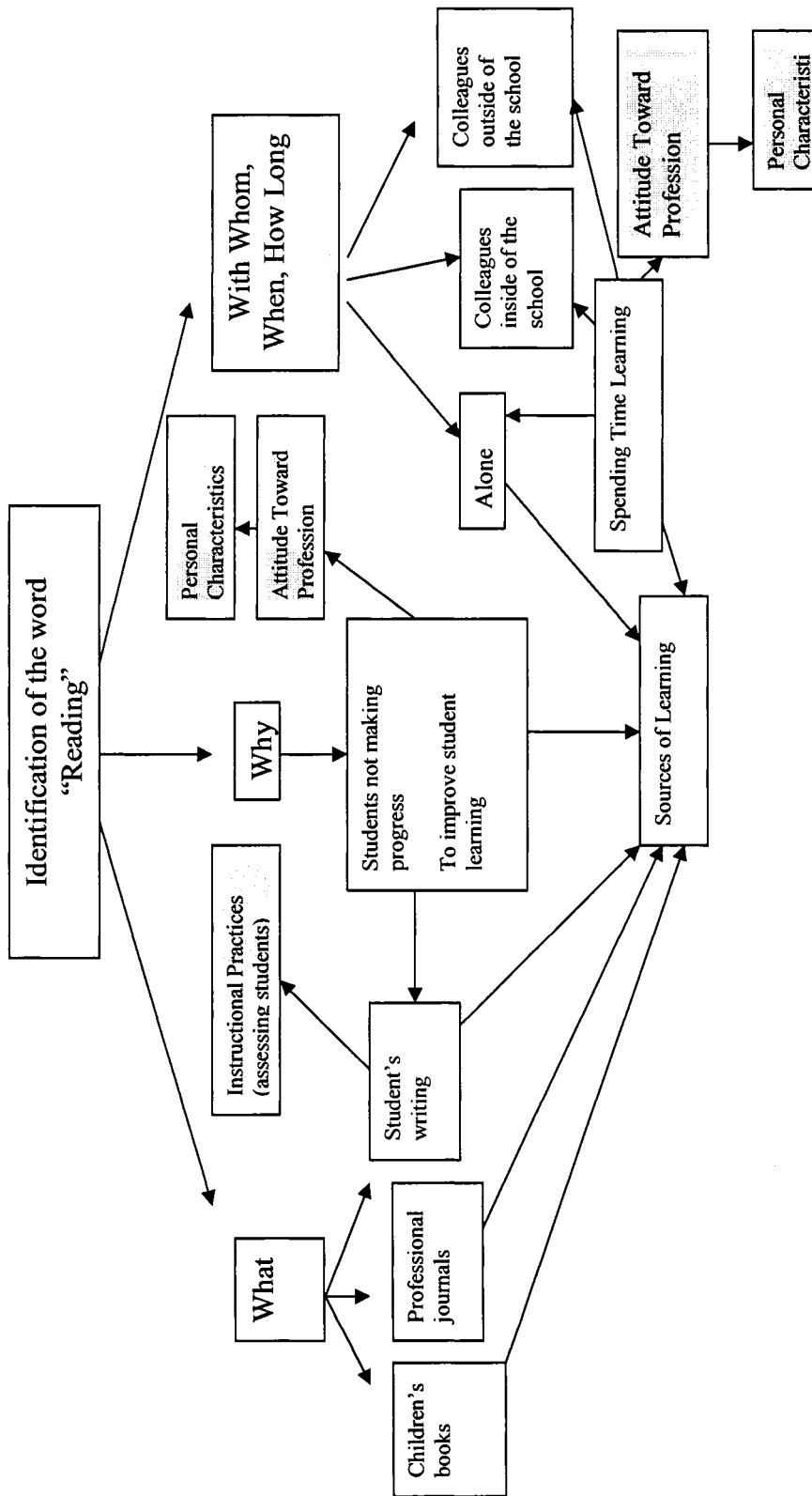
3. MM: 2.05

Meeting memo – February 2005

4. (Memo: 3.05).

Memo to myself – Marc

### Appendix E: Axial Coding Example



## Vita

Sandra Austin

Education	University of Washington 6/02-present	Seattle, WA
	Doctoral Candidate	
	Seattle Pacific University 9/97-6/99	Seattle, WA
	Superintendent's Credential	
	Western Washington University 12/92-6/93	
	Bellingham, WA	
	Administrative Credential	
	Chapman College 12/74-6/77	Orange, CA
	Masters of Arts; Special Education	
	University of Southern California 9/72-6/74	Los Angeles, CA
	Masters of Education	
	Secondary Credential	
	University of CA. at Los Angeles 9/70-6/72	Los Angeles, CA
Bachelor of Arts		
San Diego State University 9/68-6/70	San Diego, CA	
Professional experience	Nooksack Valley School District	Everson, WA
	Assistant Superintendent 9/99-present	
	Responsible for	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design of Curriculum and Assessment Initiatives</li> <li>• Design of District Staff Development</li> <li>• Special Programs</li> <li>• Director of Gates Foundation Grant</li> <li>• Leadership Training for Principals</li> </ul>	
	Director of Educational Services 9/96-6/99	
	Responsible for	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of Curriculum and Assessment Initiatives</li> <li>• Implementation of Staff Development Initiatives</li> <li>• Special Programs</li> </ul>	
	Assistant Middle School Principal 9/95-6/96	
	Interim Elementary Principal 9/94-6/95	
	Special Education Teacher 9/93-6/94	
	Blaine School District	
	Blaine, WA	
	Principal Intern and Special Education Teacher 9/92-6/93	
Special Education Middle School Teacher 9/91-6/92		
Northshore School District		

Bothell, WA  
Special Education High School Teacher 9/88-6/91  
Dresden School District  
Hanover, NH  
Special Education High School Teacher 9/84-6/88  
Spokane School District  
Spokane, WA  
Special Education Teacher 9/82-6/84  
Bonner County SD  
Sandpoint, ID  
Special Education District Consulting Teacher 9/78-6/82  
Santa Monica SD  
Santa Monica, CA  
Special Education Elementary/Middle School Teacher 9/75-6/78  
Windward High School  
Santa Monica, CA