For my grandparents, who had the foresight, determination, and resolve to set the example we follow each day.

Para mis abuelos, quienes tuvieron la previsión, determinación, y fortaleza de dar el ejemplo que seguimos cada día.
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Research literature on effective professional development points to the promise of professional learning communities (PLCs) in delivering the improvements in instructional practice and student learning sought in school reform efforts. Yet, the extant literature is limited in its ability to demonstrate a connection between collaborative professional development and related changes in teacher practice or student achievement. Ready Schools Miami is the joint effort of universities, philanthropic institutions, health and social service providers, and an urban school district to improve the education and well-being of Miami children from birth through elementary school. This study examined the impact on teacher practice of the collaborative professional development provided to 12 elementary teachers at two schools. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System, a reliable and validated instrument, was used to assess changes in teachers’ classroom instruction twice during the school year, and a diverse subgroup of 8 teachers was interviewed after each classroom observation. In addition, participant observations were conducted at each school’s PLC sessions, and related artifacts were examined to confirm or disconfirm conclusions drawn about changes in teaching practice and school culture.
Constant comparative analysis yielded a grounded theory of school and teacher change that explained the observed improvements in teaching practice in relation to teachers’ participation in collaborative professional development and the receipt of substantive feedback about their classroom practice. Teachers who participated in both showed notable gains in their ability to scaffold students’ conceptual development, provide specific feedback, and stimulate language development. As a result of these improvements, student engagement also improved.

Teachers attributed the improvement to their participation in the collaborative professional development offerings of the Ready Schools Miami initiative and the reform strategies they enacted to improve school culture and teaching practice. In addition, they pointed to certain contextual conditions that either supported or hindered their efforts. This study adds to the growing literature base connecting collaborative professional development to improvements in teaching practice and school culture. In addition, implications for school reformers and professional development researchers are shared.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A Call to Action

Calls for widespread educational reform in the United States are ubiquitous. As in the past, these demands often surface from international comparisons of the American educational system. Recent international assessments of American students’ competencies continue to provide troubling data on the country’s educational performance in comparison to other nations. The most recent administration of the triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2006 focused on science literacy among 15-year olds in 57 countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2007). Results demonstrated that the United States was significantly below average in both the science and math scales, ranking 29th in science and 35th in math out of the 57 participating countries. The most recent administration of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in 2003 painted a slightly better, but still imperfect picture. In the 2003 TIMSS, American students in both the 4th and 8th grade performed above the international averages in the math and science scales, though American students were outperformed by students in other participating countries, some not nearly as industrialized or wealthy as the U.S., such as Singapore (Gonzales, Guzmán, Partelow, Pahlke, Jocelyn, Kastberg, & Williams, 2004).

Much more troubling than the U.S. performance in comparison to other countries is the disparity in achievement these assessments reveal within the American population that are drawn along socioeconomic lines. Looking at between-school differences in the 2006 PISA demonstrates that there was a statistically significant correlation between student performance on the science scale and the PISA index of economic, social, and cultural status, indicating that
socioeconomic status plays a role in determining the level of student performance at each school (OECD, 2007). The 2003 TIMSS study corroborates these findings, pointing out that students in American schools with less than 75% of their students in poverty (as measured by the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch) exceed the international average in both the math and science scales, while students in schools with 75% or more of their students in poverty fall below the international averages (Gonzales et al., 2004).

Poverty is not the only factor in determining the educational success or failure of segments of the American student population on these assessments. Berliner (2006, p. 963) points out that “it is (sadly) not inappropriate to use ethnicity as a proxy for poverty” when examining disparities in student achievement. Reviewing the results of the 2000 PISA, Berliner notes that while U.S. average scores were very close to the international average, mean scores are not a useful determinant of educational performance in a country with such a heterogeneous population. Using disaggregated data, Berliner demonstrates that White students (regardless of social class) scored well above the international mean in both reading and math scales. On the other hand, Hispanic and African-American students finished behind every participating country with the exception of Mexico in math and Luxembourg and Mexico in literacy, well below the international averages in both scales.

Even though such international assessments often shock the country into action, it is not necessary to look to international comparisons to see the great disparity in the performance of certain sectors of the American population. The “achievement gap,” as it is phrased in educational and popular literature, refers to this disparity in the educational performance of students of color and low socioeconomic backgrounds and their more privileged, White counterparts (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). In the 2007 National Assessment of Educational
Progress (NAEP), the gap between students in poverty (measured by eligibility for free or reduced lunch) and their more advantaged counterparts was more than 21 scaled score points on the fourth and eighth grade math and reading assessments. The discrepancies in NAEP performance are also evident along color lines. In fourth grade, the gap between White students and their Black and Latino/a counterparts was more than 25 points in reading scaled scores, while math scaled scores differed by more than 24 points. In eighth grade, the story is similarly bleak with the gap in scaled scores more than 24 points on both the reading and math assessments (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2007). Furthermore, these discrepancies have persisted over time, demonstrated by NAEP data back to 1990.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) argued in her presidential address to the American Educational Research Association that the issue of the achievement gap is actually far more complex than annual discrepancies in test scores. She asserts that people of color have been historically underserved by the U.S. educational system owing to institutionalized systems of oppression and discrimination, such as slavery and Jim Crow laws. Because of this historical legacy, the persistent achievement gap has compounded over time into what Ladson-Billings calls an “education debt,” much as a recurrent national deficit accumulates into a national debt. She contends that this educational debt has historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral dimensions. Further, she argues that the U.S. must address the debt “because it has implications for the kinds of lives we can live and the kind of education this society can expect for most of its children” (p. 9). Indeed, answering this call to action is a moral imperative.

**Answering the Call**

At the heart of many current educational reforms is the desire to close the achievement gap and address the education debt. It is clear that substantial progress in educational equity will also require sweeping social reforms to alleviate the burden of poverty and reduce inequities in
other arenas such as housing, social services, medical care, dental care, mental health services, and after-school and summer enrichment opportunities (Berliner, 2006; Rothstein, 2004).

Nevertheless, there is still much that can be done within the realm of education through school improvement. Attempts at large-scale school reform in the U.S. date back to the 1950s, and there have been a variety of approaches to reform. Each of these attempts has in common the goal of improving teaching practice and student learning through the professional development of teachers. Teachers have the most direct impact on students because of their regular and sustained contact with them; thus, improving instructional practice though professional development must be central to any model of school reform (Borko, 2004; Fullan, 2001).

Developments in the understanding of teacher knowledge and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001) have given rise to the professional development strategy of professional learning communities (PLCs). While the concept of PLCs can be traced back to organizational theory and research pointing to the centrality of learning in organizational productivity and adaptivity (Senge, 1990; Smylie, 1996; Wenger, 1998), the application of PLCs within education is still a relatively new phenomenon whose implementation is spreading across the country. PLCs are promoted as a means to allow teachers to guide their own professional growth by collaboratively resolving the dilemmas they face in their classrooms and improving their instructional practice through site-based inquiry (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Hord & Sommers, 2008).

**Ready Schools Miami**

Ready Schools Miami (RSM) is one such school reform initiative. RSM is a collaborative effort of multiple organizations aimed at creating sustainable and widespread improvement in student learning and healthy child development. The major partners in this initiative include Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS), the University of Florida’s Lastinger Center for
Learning, the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The objectives of the initiative are comprehensive and move beyond a narrow focus on school reform to begin to address some of the factors related to the achievement gap and education debt. These objectives include improving the quality of prekindergarten learning centers and aligning curriculum and instruction within and across grades from early learning centers to third grade to ensure students start school with necessary skills to succeed. The initiative encourages the development of strong learning partnerships with parents to ensure children’s successful transition to and success in school. The program seeks to develop elementary schools into PLCs that focus on developmentally appropriate practice. RSM will improve access to medical health services and social services for child well-being. Finally, RSM will continually assess the progress it has made toward its two main goals of student learning and well-being.

The Lastinger Center for Learning plays a vital role in achieving these objectives. The Lastinger Center model for school improvement centers on the improvement of school culture and the development of genuine PLCs that help schools adopt an inquiry stance toward teaching practice and student learning. The strategies employed by the Lastinger Center aim to foster collaborative communities within schools that promote professional growth. In general, the reform strategies implemented within the RSM initiative include helping schools to develop or strengthen PLCs as sites for school-based, teacher-driven professional development; collecting and disseminating formative data on school culture and teaching practice at the school level; providing necessary health services to children; leadership development at the school and district level; implementing a job-embedded, online graduate program for teachers at the selected school sites; and maintaining collaborations among all stakeholders. A logic model has been included to represent the activities and intended outcomes of the initiative (See Appendix A). All of these
strategies are intended to work in concert to achieve the overall objectives of improving student learning and child well-being.

Currently in its second year of implementation, full participation by 16 schools in Wave I of the RSM initiative began in June 2007. In addition, 52 additional Wave II schools began full participation in June 2008. The third and fourth year anticipate an increase of roughly 50 additional schools, so that by the fifth year, all Miami-Dade County elementary schools will participate in the RSM initiative. The goal is to institutionalize the approach to school reform and replicate the model in other counties in Florida and throughout the country.

**Miami-Dade County**

With a student population of 375,836, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) is the fourth largest school district in the United States behind New York City Public Schools, Los Angeles Unified, and the City of Chicago School District (USDOE, 2006). It also has one of the most diverse student populations, which is representative of one of the most diverse counties in the U.S. – 60.6% Hispanic or Latino, 20.5% Black or African American, 18.6% non-Hispanic White, and 50.9% foreign born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). As a center for newcomer Latinos and Caribbeans, Miami becomes home for a large percentage of the current influx of immigrants, an influx that actually surmounts the number of arrivals of Irish, Italian, and other European immigrants at the turn of the 20th century (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2006). As such, Miami serves as a “strategic research site” for any area of social research since “what Miami now confronts either already challenges or soon will challenge other cities” (Stepick, Grenier, Castro, & Dunn, 2003, p. 10).

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1 If U.S. territories are included, the Puerto Rico Department of Education would rank third, making Chicago fourth and Miami-Dade fifth.
**Purpose of this Study**

Because educational reform is needed in urban areas around the country and Miami is a strategic research site, research on the implementation and effects of a large-scale school reform initiative will be informative for all would-be reformers trying to replicate its successes and avoid its pitfalls. In addition, research on the specific effects of collaborative professional development in the form of PLCs will add to a relatively thin literature base that holds great potential but has not yet definitively demonstrated its promise. Research is still needed that demonstrates the connections between reform efforts and their specific impact on teacher practice and student learning (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2005).

Research is also needed to document, through observation, specific changes in teaching practice and improvements in student learning that result from teachers’ participation in professional learning communities. Research on PLCs too often relies on teacher reports of changes in teaching practice through surveys or interviews (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). The present dissertation study is an attempt to address this gap in the research by documenting in two Wave I schools the implementation of the RSM initiative and to connect those efforts to changes in teachers’ classroom practice. The study will complement the results of an evaluation of the larger initiative, which will address the initiative’s impact on student learning.

The proposed dissertation study will focus on the school-based professional development work undertaken by the Lastinger Center for Learning. The Lastinger Center has committed to working with Miami-Dade County Public Schools to provide the training and resources necessary to develop and/or improve sustainable PLCs at the school and district level, to enhance teachers’ use of developmentally appropriate practice, and to increase student learning. This work will include professional development for teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators.
The interventions enacted by the Lastinger Center include leadership institutes for school leaders; practice clinics focused on developmentally appropriate practice; external professional development facilitators embedded within each participating school; the collection and dissemination of data on classroom practice and school culture to enhance capacity for data-driven decision making; and the promotion and maintenance of a job-embedded, online graduate program. The study will focus on teachers’ participation in such interventions (i.e., PLC sessions, practice clinics, analyzing data on school culture and classroom practice, and the graduate program). Specifically, the study will answer the following research questions:

• What impact does teachers’ participation in collaborative professional development have on their teaching practice?

• What supports facilitate and what obstacles hinder changes in classroom practice?

**Definition of Key Terms**

While the terms listed here will be further examined in the following chapter, each is briefly defined to clarify its use within the present study.

• **School Reform.** School reform refers to large-scale attempts to improve educational outcomes, i.e., teaching practice and student learning, through restructuring or reculturing schools. Restructuring refers to changes in the structure, roles, and formal elements of school organization. Reculturing refers to the process of creating professional community within the school in which teachers routinely assess their pedagogy and make associated improvements (Fullan, 2000; 2001).

• **Professional Development.** Professional development refers to opportunities for teachers to enhance their professional knowledge and hone their instructional practices (Borko, 2004).

• **Professional Learning Communities.** A more nuanced definition will be provided, but that definition is summarized well by Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, and Wallace (2005): “An effective professional learning community has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning” (p. 145).

• **School Culture.** An effective school culture is product of the shared values, beliefs, and attitudes that create an intellectually-oriented professional community that provides for innovations conducive to improving student learning (Newmann & Associates, 1996).
These innovations may include structural changes (e.g., common planning time for teachers) and social resources (e.g., collaborative problem-solving) that provide for a school’s shared vision of effective teaching and collective responsibility for the learning of all students (Louis & Marks, 1998).

- **Teaching Practice.** Throughout the dissertation, effective teaching practice implies the understanding and implementation of developmentally appropriate practice, or teaching that is based on knowledge of child development and learning; of the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the classroom; and of the social and cultural contexts in which children live (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

- **Student Learning.** Student learning is broadly defined in this study as any of the possible intended outcomes of the instruction of teachers. This may include somewhat intangible outcomes, such as improved attitudes toward learning (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001), enhanced social and cognitive development (Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002), improved skills, such as writing ability (Nave, 2000), or enhanced subject area knowledge, such as that measured by standardized achievement tests (Phillips, 2003).

These concepts will be further defined and examined. Together, these concepts form a theory of change spanning from calls for student reform to the ultimate goal of improving student learning. That theory will be explicated in detail in the following chapter. It is worthwhile here to consider a brief overview of the methodology that will be employed to empirically examine the links between the concepts.

**Overview of Methodology**

The study will be under girded by a pragmatic epistemology. Pragmatism straddles the dichotomy between subjectivism and realism in that it acknowledges an external world that impresses upon people, but asserts that the ‘truth’ of a claim is based on the consequences of belief in that claim within a particular context (Crotty, 2004). Pragmatists argue that research is not about what goes on in the name of education or providing recipes for educators to follow. Rather, educators become informed by understanding, using, and doing research that is inextricably bound to educational practice (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Conceptually, pragmatism connects with the study of inquiry-based, collaborative professional development because it
epitomizes the inquiry stance that is being cultivated in RSM schools. Further, pragmatism offers a guide to the selection of research methods based on their usefulness in answering the research questions. Finally, pragmatism advocates a value-oriented approach to research in order to achieve particular ends (e.g., promoting educational equity). Therefore, pragmatism not only blends well with the study of inquiry-based, collaborative professional development, it also allows for the contingent selection of research methods according to their utility in answering the research questions and provides a means to evaluate findings according to their usefulness in achieving larger social ends.

**Sample Selection**

The present study seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of the implementation and impact of the RSM initiative on two target Wave I schools selected using criterion sampling (Glesne, 2006). These target schools were selected from the 16 possible schools according to three criteria: (1) at least 80% of the student population receives free or reduced lunch; (2) at least 80% concentration of a single minority (Hispanic or Black) in the student population; and (3) a student population of 700 or fewer. The two schools will thus represent urban, high-poverty elementary schools chosen to represent the presence of the large minority populations in Miami-Dade County. A student population of 700 or fewer ensures the sample of teachers selected for data collection will represent a greater percentage of the total instructional staff and thus a better overall picture of the school’s faculty.

Three of the 16 Wave I schools had already begun some of the Lastinger interventions through their participation in a pilot version of the RSM initiative known as the Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) program. Thus, an additional criterion specified that the two target schools must be in their first year of program implementation. At each of the two target schools, six teachers were invited to participate. Two teachers were chosen at each
grade level, kindergarten through second grade. Focusing on these grade levels provided insight into the impact of the initiative on the early childhood classrooms that the program targets without undue interference in classrooms assessed by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, the state’s major assessment.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

A variety of data have been collected for analysis and insight into the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice, the supports necessary and obstacles faced in establishing professional learning communities, and the learning that results from participation. First, two systematic observations of all 12 teachers were conducted using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) protocol (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006) to measure the degree to which the teachers exhibited developmentally appropriate teaching practice. The protocol uses successive rounds of 7-point, Likert-style coding on 11 dimensions of teaching practice that are based on qualitative field notes taken during four, 20-minute cycles. These observations were conducted at the beginning of the implementation of professional learning communities at each school and again at the end of the school year. Second, open-ended qualitative interviews (Berg, 2004) were conducted with eight individual teachers to examine their participation in professional development, resultant learning, and perceived impact on teaching. Each interview was conducted approximately one month after each CLASS observation. Third, participant observations (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002) of professional learning community sessions were conducted at each of the target schools to examine the site-based professional development in action. Fourth, any significant artifacts produced as a result of teachers’ participation in professional learning communities or other aspects of the RSM initiative were also collected for a document review.
All four data sources (CLASS observations, individual interviews, participant observations, and the document review) come together to help ascertain the impact of collaborative professional development activities on teaching, what supports are necessary, what obstacles are encountered, and what learning resulted. In addition, the methods selected provide for the triangulation of data, and they are consistent with a theoretical perspective based on pragmatism because they have complementary strengths and weaknesses, which prove useful in providing a robust answer to the research questions.

Data from all four sources were coded using constant comparative analysis to yield a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice. Analysis proceeded in two stages. The first stage, completed after the first round of CLASS observations and teacher interviews, shed light on teachers’ preliminary participation in the professional learning communities. Results of the analysis also informed the second round of interviews. The second stage of analysis edified the results of the first stage and yielded a theory that explained the observed changes in teachers’ practice in relation to their participation in aspects of the RSM initiative and this dissertation study.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

While this study provides direct observation of teaching practice in the classroom in order to confirm teachers’ self-reported changes in teaching practice, the sample of 12 teachers prevents any statistical analysis of the quantitative data produced from the CLASS observations. Thus, the numerical data are simply reported to provide support for the results of the qualitative data analysis. Further, because the findings of the study are ultimately based on qualitative methodology, they are not generalizable to other populations of teachers. However, the study provides insights into the process by which teachers’ learning translates into instructional practice, which will have implications for school reform efforts.
In addition, this study intentionally narrows its focus to the impact of the RSM initiative on teaching practice. While the ultimate measure of any school reform initiative is its impact on student learning, there are numerous complexities involved in such an analysis. First is the difficulty in proving a causal connection between professional development, teacher learning, improved instructional practice, and enhanced student learning (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003); second is the difficulty of measuring student learning at the early childhood age, when students’ abilities are unstable and situationally dependent (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004). Nevertheless, an analysis of the RSM initiative’s impact on students is being conducted as part of a larger evaluation of the initiative, and this study serves to add depth to that overall picture.

**Significance of the Study**

Despite its limitations and delimitations, this dissertation will add to the extant literature base on professional learning communities. First, even though the results are not generalizable, the CLASS observations help to verify teachers’ self-reported changes in practice, unlike many other studies that rely solely on teacher interviews or surveys. Second, the teacher interviews, participant observations of PLC sessions, and the document review shed light on the nature of learning that occurs within this type of collaborative professional development. Finally, the findings of the study are informative to would-be reformers implementing PLCs as a school reform strategy because they highlight the supports necessary and obstacles faced in enacting school reform efforts based on collaborative professional development.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 of this dissertation introduced the context in which the study was conducted. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant scholarly literature to outline a theory of change implicit in the RSM initiative. That theory of change specifies how calls for school reform are translated into improvements in teaching practice and student learning through professional development to
enhance teacher learning and improve school culture. The methodology of the study is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Within that chapter, the research design, selection of the sample, data collection tasks, and data analysis procedures are clarified. Chapter 4 shares the results obtained from the CLASS observations conducted within teachers’ classrooms. Chapters 5 and 6 together explain a grounded theory of school and teacher change. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the study’s findings and their implications for future practice and research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify, summarize, and synthesize literature relating to school reform, professional development, professional learning communities, and the impact of professional learning communities on school culture, instructional practice, and student learning. This chapter provides the theoretical, empirical, and methodological foundations for the research questions centered on the impact of collaborative professional development on teaching practice. The organization of this literature review implies a theory of change regarding the improvement of student learning in schools. Building on the work of Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal (2003); Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon (2001); Kennedy (1998); and Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley (2007), that theory of change is represented in Figure 2-1.

In essence, the theory of change postulates that: (1) Demands for school reform, which are the broad policy responses to calls for the improvement of student learning, point to the centrality of teacher learning and suggest the need for the professional development of teachers. (2) An emerging consensus on the characteristics of effective professional development suggest that professional learning communities embody those characteristics and create the conditions for teacher learning through improving school culture. (3) Professional learning communities result in improved instructional practice. And, (4) Improved instructional practice results ultimately in enhanced student learning.

The theory of change will be supported through the use of research literature related to each topic. Original empirical research included in this review underwent a critical analysis along three criteria: (1) the work was published within the last 10 years; (2) the work relates to improvement of teaching and learning in public schools; and (3) the work has been vetted as a
relevant contribution to the field through publication in a refereed journal or a similar process. Theoretical works, reviews of research, and government reports germane to the topics of school reform, professional development, professional learning communities, school culture, instructional practice, and student learning are also included here. This review proceeds through each of these topics in that order to outline the overall theory of change.

**School Reform**

While American education has been in a constant state of reform since the American response to the Russian launch of Sputnik in 1957, a particular philosophy has been at the core of education policy since the US Department of Education (USDOE) published *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The legislative reaction to that report brought to the forefront of American education a system of external regulation and bureaucratic control that attempted to reform schools from the outside, and such was born the age of accountability (Fullan, 2001; Smyle, 1996). Laura Desimone (2002) characterizes the subsequent reform initiatives in terms of “waves.” The first wave focused on systemic changes that increased standards and regulations, but it was criticized for not building the system’s capacity to meet the new regulations and for relying on top-down approaches. The second wave, which “focused primarily on broadening and deepening the relationships between schools and families, addressing the needs of special groups of students, attracting and retaining effective teachers, upgrading teacher education, and restructuring teachers’ roles” (p. 433), was similarly ineffective at changing school organization and teaching practices. The late 1990s and early 2000s brought a renewed public interest in accountability. Debates about education in the media, in public policy arenas, and within education itself narrowed to focus on outcomes on standardized tests for both teachers and students. The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 solidified that momentum, and “testing had become not
only the means but also seemingly the purpose of accountability” (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005, p. 91).

The growing accountability movement stands in the face of organizational theory and research that “have long told us that formal bureaucratic controls, such as standard work rules and sanctions, are largely ineffective in professional and semiprofessional organizations, such as schools, where work is uncertain, nonroutine, and requires employee judgment and flexibility” (Smylie, 1996, p. 9). Thus, despite the influence of the age of accountability, or perhaps because of its continued failure at improving schools, a third wave of reform surfaced and has continued to the present day. Growing out of the effective schools literature of the 1980s, the comprehensive school reform movement attempts to answer the call for systemic education reform and address the weaknesses of the previous attempts at reform by not focusing only on particular populations of students or particular subjects, programs, or instructional strategies (Desimone, 2002). Such school reform aims to improve entire schools and districts.

Noting that such large-scale undertakings hadn’t been attempted since the 1960s, this third wave of school reform prompted Michael Fullan (2001) to announce: “large-scale reform has returned” (p. 7). There are numerous examples and models of large-scale school reform. In 1998, Congress passed legislation and appropriated funds to begin the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. The passage of No Child Left Behind fully authorized the program and upgraded its previous demonstration status. (USDOE, 2004). Up until fiscal year 2005, the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Program maintained an annual budget in excess of $200 million to fund state and local education agencies in school reform endeavors (USDOE, 2007). This funding led to a proliferation of school reform initiatives across the country. The Catalogue of School Reform Models (Northwest Regional Education Laboratories [NWREL],
2004) contained 26 different large-scale models of school reform upon its final update. A specific example of a large-scale reform model would be the work of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR). According to their website, AISR engages in four areas of work: (1) capacity building in school districts, (2) capacity building in communities, (3) research and knowledge product development, and (4) communications, dissemination, and learning opportunities (AISR, 2008).

Clearly, at the center of this third moment of large-scale school reform is the building of school capacity or human capital. In the words of King and Newmann (2000), “Viewing school capacity as the key to improved instruction offers a parsimonious way of understanding how a long list of otherwise discrete factors affect instruction” (p. 577). These factors, which are referred to in the diagram of the theory of change implied in this chapter (Figure 2-1), include the total of teachers’ learning, the strength of their professional learning communities, and the coherence of their professional development programs. School capacity and human capital refer to all of the knowledge and resources that schools and teachers can apply toward promoting students’ achievement and development. This approach stands in contrast to the school reform approaches that center on accountability. As Smylie (1996) explained, “While the primary change mechanism of regulatory policy is control, the crucial mechanism for building human capital is learning” (p. 10). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) also suggest that capacity building implies a view of knowledge “as constructed by and with practitioners for use in their own contexts, rather than as something conveyed by policy makers as a single solution for top-down implementation” (p. 598). In other words, school capacity to improve student learning grows as human capital accrues through teachers’ professional learning.
In his article “Three Stories of School Reform,” Michael Fullan (2000) describes three processes by which such school reform is accomplished. He argues that in isolation, each of these approaches struggles to accomplish the changes necessary to improve schools. However, in combination, the three approaches create a compelling framework for the capacity-building processes that will improve teaching and learning. The Outside-In Story is the process by which school districts can support, rather than control, their schools in improving their students’ success. Drawing on Bryk and his colleagues (1998), Fullan explains that districts must focus on four main infrastructure elements: (1) the decentralization of policy toward a site-based emphasis, (2) local capacity building at schools to develop teachers professionally, (3) a rigorous external accountability system that focuses on formative assessment for teacher learning, and (4) the stimulation of innovation to enhance instruction. The Inside-Out Story is the process by which schools reorient themselves to access and organize powerful external resources that include: (1) parents and the community, (2) technology, (3) corporate connections, (4) government policy, and (5) the wider teaching profession. Fullan explains (2000, p. 583), “The inside-out story is one of the mobilization of resources and the making of coherence.” The Inside Story is the process by which schools create collaborative work cultures that improve student achievement. Fullan draws on the work of Newmann and Wehlage (1995) to explain that successful schools had administrations and faculties that (1) created a professional learning community, (2) focused on student work through assessment, and (3) adjusted their instruction to get improved results. To accomplish large-scale reform across schools, Fullan argues that all three stories must work in concert as schools build capacity internally, orchestrate outside resources, and work with the district to improve.
It is clear from the context description of the Ready Schools Miami initiative in Chapter 1, that there is significant work occurring in each of these three areas. The Lastinger Center is working with Miami-Dade district officials to support schools from the downtown offices. External funding is provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to support schools in their reform efforts. And, internal capacity building efforts are underway at each of these schools. As the focus of this dissertation is the impact of these internal efforts on teaching practice and the supports needed and obstacles faced in building school capacity, the remainder of this review will narrow its focus to the literature available on the mechanisms that drive reform efforts.

The centrality of learning and capacity building in this overview of the literature on school reform suggests that the professional development of teachers is of fundamental importance to school change efforts (Desimone, 2002; Fullan, 2001). King and Newmann (2000) explain this connection: “Since teachers have the most direct, sustained contact with students and considerable control over what is taught and the climate for learning, improving teachers’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions is a critical step in improving student achievement” (p. 576).

Professional Development

Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

The field of research on professional development is still relatively young, and researchers are just beginning to learn what and how teachers learn from their participation in professional development. Further, the empirical connections between professional development, changes in teaching practice, and impact on student learning is somewhat unclear given the complexities involved in measuring such an impact (Borko, 2004; Garet et al., 2001). Nevertheless, with the wide publication of descriptive works on professional development practices and some study of its impact, it is possible to assemble an initial list of the characteristics of effective professional development and to begin to examine the effect of such
efforts. Desimone and colleagues (2002) even suggest, “A *professional consensus* is emerging about the characteristics of ‘high quality’ professional development” (p. 82, italics added). To date, the literature suggests that effective professional development is:

- **Collaborative.** Professional development activities that facilitate a collaborative work culture prompt teachers to constantly figure out and share what works with each other (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Fullan, 2001; Guskey, 2003). This collective, collaborative work among teachers can foster teacher learning, including enhanced knowledge and skills, which leads to instructional improvement (Borko, 2004; Cordingley, Bell, Thomason, & Firth, 2005; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Collaboration moves professional development beyond enhancing the individual capabilities of each of its teachers to “social resource development” (King & Newmann, 2000, p. 578) toward a shared vision of school success.

- **Coherent.** Professional development activities are more effective when they are connected to one another as part of a set of opportunities for teacher learning and development that are connected to school improvement (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; King & Newmann, 2000; Yoon et al., 2007). This coherence helps schools to avoid a sense of “projectitis,” which causes overload and disengagement (Fullan, 2001, p. 21). Coherent professional development activities demonstrate an important positive influence on changes in teaching practice, even after controlling for the enhanced knowledge and skills gained in professional development (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001).

- **Based on Content Matter.** In order to guide students to a deep understanding of content material, teachers must have deep and flexible knowledge of the subjects that they teach (Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001; Shulman, 1987). Professional development activities that focus on content knowledge lead to the enhanced knowledge and skills necessary to change teaching practice and improve student learning (Borko, 2004; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003; Kennedy, 1998; Wilson & Berne, 1999; Yoon et al., 2007). For example, Desimone (2002) asserts that professional development programs that provide teachers with specific curriculum guidelines are more likely to have an impact on teaching. However, Garet et al. (2001) also note that an emphasis on content knowledge that is not connected to enhanced teacher knowledge and skills results in a negative association with changes in teaching practice, suggesting the reinforcement of traditional teaching practices.

- **Focused on Instructional Practice.** To improve teaching, professional development should help teachers understand how children’s ideas about a subject develop and how to facilitate that development through specific pedagogical techniques (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Kennedy, 1998; Wilson & Berne, 1999; Yoon et al., 2007). This includes both pedagogical content knowledge (Munby et al., 2001; Shulman, 1987) and concrete classroom applications of general ideas (Elmore & Burney, 1999, as cited in Fullan, 2001). Desimone (2002) concludes that professional development initiatives that provide specific examples of teaching practice that exemplify the reform effort are more likely to improve teaching practice, especially if those examples are
provided within the context of the school environment. Such professional development activities result in teachers “who knew more...about the strategies that children use to solve problems, the kinds of problems they find difficult, and different ways to pose problems to students” (Borko, 2004, p. 6).

- **Grounded in participant-driven inquiry, experimentation, and active learning opportunities.** Professional development that allows teachers to identify their own focus and direct their own learning are more likely to result in improved teacher learning and practice (Cordingley et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Garet et al., 2001; Richardson & Placier, 2001). As Wilson and Berne (1999) phrase it, “teacher learning ought not to be bound and delivered but rather activated” (p. 194, italics original). Examples of active learning opportunities within professional development include reviewing student work, obtaining feedback on teaching through classroom observations, or planning classroom instruction (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). These activities allow teachers to construct new knowledge that is based on the professional development experience and linked to the context in which teachers work.

- **Sustained.** Sustained and intensive professional development activities are more likely than shorter activities to have an impact on teaching practice (Cordingley et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey, 2003; Richardson & Placier, 2001). In their review of the literature, Yoon and colleagues (2007) found that teachers that receive “substantial professional development – an average of 49 hours in the nine studies” (p. 1) significantly improve student achievement. This is because longer activities are correlated with more coherent activities, opportunities for active learning, and emphasis on content knowledge, which in turn lead to enhanced knowledge and skills and changes in classroom practice (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001).

- **Embedded in the school with input from external expertise.** In his review of 13 lists of the characteristics of effective professional development, Guskey (2003) stated that the majority of lists stress that professional development should be site- or school-based though research suggests otherwise. He cites a review from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, which demonstrated that when decisions about professional development were school-based, staff members gravitated toward programs that resembled their current practice rather than those that generated results. Guskey argues, “A carefully organized collaboration between site-based educators, who are keenly aware of critical contextual characteristics, and district-level personnel, who have broader perspectives on problems, seems essential to optimize the effectiveness of professional development” (p. 748). Beyond district-level personnel, other external expertise may come from university collaborators and from the design teams of specific professional development initiatives. These external influences can help to maximize the implementation and outcomes of an initiative (Cordingley et al., 2005; Desimone, 2002).

Together, these seven characteristics paint a picture of the type of professional development necessary to promote enhanced teacher learning, effective classroom practice, and the redesigning of the teaching profession. Such professional development fosters reflective,
intentional collaboration toward effective instructional practice and collective responsibility for the learning of all students.

**Impacts of Effective Professional Development**

The empirical literature provides some evidence of the potential of professional development to impact teacher practice and student learning, though this literature base is limited. Here three articles will be reviewed: one survey study and two literature reviews. A longitudinal survey study conducted by Desimone and colleagues (2002) examines the impact of professional development on teaching practice, falling short of analyzing the impact on student achievement. The two reviews (Kennedy, 1998; Yoon et al., 2007) investigate the empirical research connecting professional development efforts to student achievement.

Desimone and colleagues (2002) built on the results of a national, cross-sectional study on the characteristics of effective professional development (Garet et al., 2001). These studies concluded that six key features of professional development were related to increases in teachers’ self-reported knowledge and skills and changes in teaching practice. Three of these features were labeled “structural features” dealing with the form or organization of the activity – whether the activity is a *reform type* activity, such as a study group or task force; the *duration* of the activity, both in terms of contact hours and the time span over which activities took place; and whether the activity involved the *collective participation* of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level. The remaining three features were labeled “core features” relating to the substance of the activity – the extent to which the activity offered opportunities for *active learning*, the degree to which the activity promotes the *coherence* of teachers’ professional development, and the extent to which the activity has a *content focus*. For five of the six features, Desimone and colleagues used the exact same measures to be able to cross-validate the longitudinal data with the previous cross-sectional data on relationships between professional
development and teacher outcomes. The sixth feature, content focus, was measured more precisely to examine the areas of technology, instructional practice, and student assessments.

A sample of 207 math and science teachers from 30 schools was surveyed at three points over the course of three school years from Fall 1996 to Spring 1999. The researchers estimated the effects of professional development using a hierarchical linear model at two levels (strategy-level and teacher-level). Results of this analysis suggest that professional development that focused on a particular technological, instructional, or assessment practice increased teachers’ self-reported use of the practice in the classroom. In addition, while no effects were found for duration in this study, the study provided further supporting evidence for four of the remaining five key features of professional development identified in the previous cross-sectional studies. That is, the results indicate that professional development is more effective in improving teachers’ classroom practice when it has the collective participation of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level; provides opportunities for active learning; lends coherence to the overall professional development agenda; and implements a reform type strategy. The authors acknowledge that the small sample size may have prevented them from finding additional effects because of low statistical power and that the data are based on self-report surveys. However, they point to the study’s strength in that it echoes the findings of the previous cross-sectional study. Also, the professional development features and classroom practices measured within the study have previously been associated with gains in student achievement.

In her seminal review of the impact of math and science professional development, Kennedy (1998) narrowed her focus to review articles that take the analysis further to examine effects on student achievement. She only examined studies that included evidence of student learning. This narrowed the review to include only 12 studies. Her review focused on the
relevance of the content of professional development, which she defines not in terms of subject-area content, but rather “the topics that are dealt with in a program” (p. 1). Thus, the studies were organized into four groups: (1) those that prescribe a specific set of teaching behaviors that apply generally to all subjects; (2) those that prescribe a set of teaching behaviors that seem generic, but are being applied to a specific subject area, such as math of science; (3) those that provide generic guidance on curriculum and pedagogy for teaching a particular subject, grounded in knowledge about how students learn that subject; and (4) those that provide knowledge about how students learn a particular subject, but do not provide specific guidance on the teaching practices that should be used to teach that subject. Using pooled within-group standard deviations, Kennedy then calculated standardized effect sizes for each of the studies and an average effect size for each of the four groups. From this meta-analysis, she concluded that “programs whose content focused mainly on teachers’ behaviors demonstrated smaller influences on student learning than did programs whose content focused on teachers’ knowledge of the subject, on the curriculum, or on how students learn the subject” (p. 17). That is, groups 3 and 4 had a larger impact on students’ achievement than did groups 1 and 2.

More recently, Yoon and colleagues (2007) conducted an additional review for the Southwest Regional Education Laboratory to examine the literature base that has grown since Kennedy’s (1998) review. This review was not only a more recent overview of the literature, it also examined the impact of professional development in the three core academic areas identified by the No Child Left Behind Act: math, science, and reading/language arts. The review also applied the rigorous evidence standards of the What Works Clearinghouse to ensure that studies reviewed are supported by scientifically based research. These criteria led the authors to narrow the pool of 1,300 potentially related studies to nine studies that met evidence standards, a figure
the authors claim attests “to the paucity of rigorous studies that directly examine the effect of in-service teacher professional development in the three core academic subjects” (p. 6).

Standardized effect sizes were calculated using the formulas of the What Works Clearinghouse so that effect sizes expressed the increase or decrease of achievement in standard deviation units. An improvement index was calculated to compare the percentile rank of the intervention group mean to the percentile rank of the control group mean. Thus, the improvement index can be understood as the expected change in achievement for an average control group student if his or her teacher had received the professional development intervention. Overall, the studies reported an average effect size of 0.54 across math, science, and reading/language arts, which indicated a moderate effect on student achievement. The improvement index indicated that average control group students would have increased their achievement by 21 percentile points if their teacher had participated in the professional development initiative. Because of the lack of variability in form and great variability in duration and intensity across the nine studies reviewed, the only structural feature of professional development that could be highlighted was time: the studies that contributed to this moderate effect on student achievement averaged 49 contact hours with teachers.

Taken together, these three articles suggest that professional development that embodies the seven characteristics highlighted above can have a significant impact on instructional practice and student achievement. Nevertheless, despite research demonstrating its impact, such professional development strategies are not representative of the opportunities available to most classroom teachers across the country. The difficulties in providing such professional development are highlighted here.
Problems with Professional Development

Despite the evidence outlining the characteristics of effective professional development and demonstrating its potential for improving teaching practice and student achievement, most teachers around the country are not receiving it. In closing their review, Yoon and colleagues (2007) pointed to the gap between the amount of professional development found effective in the studies they reviewed and the average amount received by elementary school teachers. Garet and colleagues (2001) provided more specific numbers from their national, cross-sectional survey study involving 1,027 teachers. They found that 79% of teachers participating in district activities participated in traditional types of professional development, which they found to be less effective in promoting self-reported changes in enhanced knowledge and skills and changes in teaching practice. In addition, 74% of teachers participating in external professional development from universities or non-profit organizations experienced activities that were traditional in form. The overall percentage of teachers participating in reform type activities, which were more effective, was still relatively small. Desimone and colleagues (2002) also found that despite their longitudinal survey results suggesting that changes in teaching would occur if teachers experienced “consistent, high-quality professional development,…most teachers do not experience such activities” (p. 105). These sorts of findings have led researchers to conclude, as Borko (2004) did, that “the professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate” (p. 3).

In addition to these findings on the professional development available to individual teachers, Desimone and colleagues (2002) found that much of the variation in professional development and teaching practice is between individual teachers within schools, rather than between schools. This finding suggests that schools do not have a coherent approach to professional development that builds consistency among its teachers. This lends further support
to Wilson and Berne’s (1999) argument in their review of the professional development literature that “teacher learning has traditionally been a patchwork of opportunities – formal and informal, mandatory and voluntary, serendipitous and planned – stitched together into a fragmented and incoherent ‘curriculum’” (p. 174).

There is a professional development strategy that meets the characteristics of effective professional development outlined in the previous section and whose implementation is increasingly evident across the country: professional learning communities. The literature defining professional learning communities will be used to demonstrate that it is an effective professional development strategy that promotes teacher learning. In addition, the available empirical research examining the impact of professional learning communities will be reviewed to demonstrate the strategy’s potential as a professional development strategy that can have an impact on teacher practice, student learning, and school culture.

Professional Learning Communities

There is a small, but growing literature base that connects the work of professional learning communities (PLCs) with changes in teacher practice, student learning, and school culture. There are numerous descriptive works that outline the characteristics of genuine PLCs and the facilitation methods that promote their development. While quite limited in scope, available empirical studies will also be reviewed to examine the ability of PLCs to deliver on their promise. The following is not an exhaustive review, but should suffice to provide an overview of the literature available on PLCs.

Defining Professional Learning Communities

In their review of professional development literature, Wilson and Berne (1999) lament the “semi-ahistorical tone in contemporary work” (p. 202) on learning communities. It must be duly noted that the origin of the concept of PLCs can be traced back to theory and research on
organizations in the 1960s. Smylie (1996) cites the work of Argyris and Schon (1978) whose historical perspective showed that this body of work has long emphasized the central role of learning in organizational productivity and change. In addition, Senge’s (1990) work on learning organizations in the business sector found learning to be a key factor in organizational adaptiveness and survival.

More recently, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s (1998) study of communities of practice in a variety of professional fields has further emphasized learning as a key element in organizational capacity and the growth of professional knowledge. Lave and Wenger coined the term “communities of practice” to describe the contexts in which these sort of learning interactions take place: “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Learning takes place within communities of practice because the communities have three central characteristics: (1) the domain – Membership in a community of practice implies a commitment to a shared interest and competence in a certain body of knowledge; (2) the community – The interactions between members of a community of practice are built upon a foundation of relationships based on mutual respect and trust that provide for the joint activities of the group; and (3) the practice – Members of a community of practice not only share a common topic, or domain, they also focus on developing a particular practice, which includes a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, stories, and documents shared by members that allows the community to work efficiently within its domain (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002).

This growing body of literature on organizational change and productivity certainly informed developments in educational literature which point to the significance of teacher
learning in maintaining the quality of schools (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; King & Newmann, 2000). The centrality of teacher learning to the school’s effectiveness necessitates a reconceptualization of teachers’ roles within the school. Wood (2007) points out that since Waller’s (1932) classic study, “one sociology of teaching after the next has portrayed the relative power and powerlessness of teachers” (p. 709). That is, while teachers wield a great deal of power in their classrooms over curriculum and instructional practice, they have little power over educational policy at the district, state, and federal level. Historically, a more formal conception of teacher knowledge has dominated, and educational expertise has been situated in the hands of university researchers while teachers are relegated to the roles of technicians who implement others’ ideas. Developments in the understanding of teacher knowledge that move toward a more situated notion of expertise, such as “knowledge of practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), call for a new vision of teaching. Schön (1983; 1987) introduced the concept of the “reflective practitioner” and argued that “reflection-in-action” is central to the notion of professional teaching activity. More recently, Gutmann (1999) argued that teachers should demonstrate “democratic professionalism,” meaning that teachers should have the autonomy and authority to not only teach their students a democratically created common culture, but also to instill the capacity to critique that culture and engage in democratic deliberation; “in short, teachers serve to shed critical light on a democratically created culture” (p. 76). Because this vision of teaching runs contrary to well over a hundred years of public school practice, it requires “a professional development agenda that doesn’t simply equip teachers with techniques, but widens their professional responsibility and hones their professional judgment” (Wood, 2007, p. 709). Further, it requires professional development that takes into account what we know about teacher learning.
Out of this concern for professional development centered on organizational productivity and teacher learning came the concept of PLCs. The literature on PLCs is inextricably bound to the literature on school reform because they are the mechanism through which schools are not only restructured, but also recultured. Michael Fullan (2000) draws a useful distinction between these two terms. Restructuring is “changes in the structure, roles, and related formal elements of the organization…Reculturing involves going from a situation of limited attention to assessment and pedagogy to a situation in which teachers and other routinely focus on these matters and make associated improvements” (p. 582). Fullan suggests that restructuring is much easier to accomplish because it is change that can be mandated from the top-down, but alone restructuring does not improve the effectiveness of the school. This notion is echoed in the work of Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001) who claimed, “Structural arrangements alone cannot teach people how to interact differently” (p. 990). Restructuring teachers’ roles is neither a means to enact changes in instructional practice (Smylie, 1996). To accomplish this task, schools must be recultured into adaptive learning organizations that center on collective problem-solving.

The literature on effective professional development and teacher learning suggests that the way to reculture schools is through increasing inquiry-based collaboration among teachers to systematically resolve the dilemmas they face in their practice and grow their professional knowledge (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994). In Hargreaves’ words, “the principle of collaboration has repeatedly emerged as a productive response to a world in which problems are unpredictable, solutions are unclear, and demands and expectations are intensifying” (p. 245). At the essence of successful collaboration is reflection. Reflection allows teachers to surface the tacit knowledge and understandings that inform their classroom practice and subject them to critique (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Further, reflective critique must
be informed by the intentionality (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) of improving the effectiveness of the practices being analyzed. Thus, effective collaboration is not merely a matter of teachers working together. Effective collaboration is the development of an inquiry stance that embodies reflective and intentional practice and a focus on formative assessment. Collaborative groups of teachers that employ an inquiry stance toward professional development provide for the development of professional knowledge that is not only grounded in educational theory but also in the lived experiences of classroom teachers. This intersection of the formalized knowledge and the practical knowledge is the epitome of “knowledge of practice” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999).

**Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities**

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are a way to empower teachers, generate professional knowledge, and capitalize on this movement toward collaborative, inquiry-based professional development. There are numerous descriptions of the defining characteristics of a PLC. Those descriptions are distilled here to a list of five intertwined characteristics that are commonly referred to in both descriptive and empirical literature on PLCs. Successful PLCs are marked by:

- **Shared values and goals for student learning among school staff members.** (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Grossman et al., 2001; Hord & Sommers, 2008; King & Newmann, 2000; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Newmann & Associates, 1996; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). DuFour (2004) says that this shared vision of student learning exists when everyone in the school engages in answering three crucial questions: “(1) What do we want each student to learn? (2) How will we know when each student has learned it? (3) How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?” (p. 8).

- **Collaboration toward collective responsibility and decision-making.** (DuFour, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008; King & Newmann, 2000; Kruse et al., 1994; Grossman et al., 2001 Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). A general premise of PLCs is that teachers take collective responsibility for student learning and decision making when there are “opportunities for staff members to influence the school’s activities and policies” (King & Newmann, 2000, p. 578).
Reflective professional inquiry. (DuFour, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008; King & Newmann, 2000; Kruse et al., 1994; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008; Wood, 2007). This includes “reflective dialogue” (Kruse et al., 1994, p. 4) in which members of the community come together to discuss the challenges they face, develop a plan of action, and monitor their effectiveness. In an inquiry-based PLC, teachers frequently examine and critique their practice, seek new knowledge, convert tacit knowledge into shared knowledge through interaction, and apply new ideas to solve problems that address students’ needs (Stoll et al., 2006).

Focus on the improvement of teacher practice and student learning. (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2000; Little, 2002; Stoll et al., 2006). PLCs engage in a process of ongoing formative assessment by which they monitor the effectiveness of their practice and the related levels of student achievement. Fullan (2000, p. 582) argues that PLCs must build teachers’ “assessment literacy,” which he defines in two parts: “1) the ability of teachers, individually and together, to interpret achievement data on student performance; and 2) teachers’ equally important ability to develop action plans to alter instruction and other factors in order to improve student learning.” This focus on results leads teachers to collective professional learning and knowledge generation.

Transparency of practice. (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kruse et al., 1994; Little, 2002; Vescio et al., 2008; Wood, 2007). Kruse and colleagues (1994, p. 4) explain, “By sharing practice ‘in public,’ teachers learn new ways to talk about what they do, and the discussions kindle new relationships between the participants.” The extent to which teaching practice is made transparent and available to critique shapes the possibilities for teacher learning within a PLC (Little, 2002).

Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, and Wallace (2005) summarize these five characteristics in this definition of a PLC: “An effective professional learning community has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning” (p. 145).

Implementation of Professional Learning Communities

While most initiatives label these collaborative teacher groups as PLCs, “learning communities,” or “teacher learning communities,” they can be enacted in a variety of ways, including critical friends groups (Bambino, 2002; Wood, 2007) and study groups (Nolan & Hoover, 2004). The Critical Friends Group (CFG) concept created by the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) represents a version of the implementation of a PLC. CFGs share all the characteristics of PLCs in that they “help people involved with schools to work collaboratively in
democratic, reflective communities” (Bambino, 2002, p. 25). NSRF provides willing teachers with training on how to facilitate groups by building trusting relationships between members and engage in productive conversations about the complexities of teaching through the use of protocols that guide conversations on school culture, teaching practice, and student work. In contrast to CFGs, which focus on examining instructional practices currently in use, study groups bring teachers together to collectively consider ideas, theories and practices not in current use for possible future implementation (Nolan & Hoover, 2004). Study groups can focus on a wide variety of topics, such as building teachers’ subject matter knowledge through book study (Grossman et al., 2001) to evaluating a proposed curriculum (e.g., Success for All) for implementation (King, 2002). Both CFGs and study groups share the characteristics of a PLC outlined above. Therefore, regardless of implementation method, all literature pertaining to PLCs, CFGs, and study groups will be considered relevant to the analysis of the impact of PLCs within this review. From this literature, it can be argued that PLCs represent the best of what we know about effective professional development: “We know from research on staff development that cooperative, job-embedded learning has the greatest potential for improving teacher performance and, eventually, student learning” (Spillane & Louis, 2002, p. 93).

Impact of Professional Learning Communities

Despite belief in this great potential, however, empirical research connecting the work of PLCs to changes in teacher practice and student learning is limited (Borko, 2004; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008; Wood, 2007). Stoll and colleagues (2006) note that because the purpose of PLCs is to enhance teachers’ professional ability for the ultimate benefit of students, the outcome of PLCs must be experienced by students. Yet, in a study of a district-wide PLC initiative, Wood (2007, p. 717) found that when asked to explain the impact of learning communities on teaching practice and student learning, most teachers and administrators said
that it was “too early” to judge (despite the fact that the initiative was in its second year of implementation) or that the PLCs were making only superficial changes. In a recent review of empirical literature on the impact of PLCs on teaching practice and student learning, Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) located only eleven articles from refereed or vetted sources. While all eleven sources supported the assertion that PLCs impact teacher practice, only five documented specific changes implemented by teachers. Encouragingly, eight of the eleven studies demonstrated connections between the work of PLCs and increased student learning, and all the studies noted the improvement of school culture. As can be clearly seen from such mixed results, the link between PLCs and their impact on teacher practice and student learning must be more firmly established through further research. However, a closer inspection of the results of current research show that in general, PLCs offer a promising path forward, especially in their ability to transform school culture. The remainder of this literature review will define and examine the impact of PLCs on school culture, instructional practice, and student learning. Continuing with the theory of change that is described by this literature review, this path to enhanced instructional practice and student learning flows through an appropriate school culture.

**School Culture**

**Importance of School Culture**

King and Newmann (2000) point to the centrality of school culture in school reform when they note,

> If teachers within a school differ in the learning goals they pursue, if they are unable to work collaboratively, if they fail to participate in rigorous professional inquiry about how to improve, and if they lack authority to design instruction according to their best professional judgment, we would expect lower-quality instruction. (p. 578)

Little (2002) makes a similar case for the conditions necessary for school reform:

> Researchers posit that conditions for improving teaching and learning are strengthened when teachers collectively question ineffective teaching routines, examine new
conceptions of teaching and learning, find generative means to acknowledge and respond to difference and conflict, and engage actively in supporting professional growth. (p. 917)

Together these statements outline not only the characteristics of PLCs described above, but also the features of a school culture that promote enhanced teacher learning, instructional practice, and student learning. They represent the convergent claims of researchers that effective schools have school cultures that promote shared goals, collaborative work, intentional inquiry toward professional growth, and teacher autonomy (Grossman et al., 2001; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008; Wood, 2007). Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) note that findings regarding a positive change in school culture are significant despite the limited research of the impact of PLCs on instructional practice and student learning. These changes in school culture signal “a fundamental shift in the habits of mind that teachers bring to their daily work in classrooms” (p. 84). Thus, the results of these studies are promising for a new line of research that could fill in the gaps and strengthen the case for PLCs as an effective form of professional development.

**Impact of Professional Learning Communities on School Culture**

The research that is available on the impact of PLCs on school culture documents a positive change toward the conditions described. The empirical literature shows that PLCs move schools toward increased collaboration, a stronger focus on student learning, increased teacher autonomy, and/or increased teacher learning and professionalism. Vescio et al. (2008) report that all eleven of the studies they reviewed provide some empirical data suggesting a positive change in the professional culture of the school.

Dunne, Nave, and Lewis (2000) documented that teachers participating in a CFG are more likely than non-CFG teachers to collaborate more with each other through activities such as sharing ideas and student work samples, meeting to discuss professional issues and problems, and working together to develop materials. Further, Wood’s (2007) analysis of a district wide
learning community initiative suggested a wide range of positive effects on school culture, including increased trust among colleagues, a district climate more conducive to innovation, and a greater sense of efficacy. In their text on professional development practices, Nolan and Hoover (2004) cite Clark’s (2001) study that suggests participation in a PLC allowed teachers to become more adept at articulating implicit theories and beliefs, develop a greater capacity for perspective taking, and generate a renewed commitment to putting beliefs into practice.

These conclusions demonstrate that PLCs can promote the improvement of school culture toward enhanced teacher professionalism. This also represents a step forward to the reconceptualization of teaching as a learning profession based on collaboration. Progress toward an improved school culture has the potential to improve student achievement and the teaching practice necessary to effect such changes. For this reason, the diagram depicting the theory of change includes arrows indicating that school culture exerts influence over instructional practice and student learning. (Figure 2-1.)

**Teaching Practice**

**A Vision of Teaching Practice**

Because effective teaching looks different at different grade levels and the focus of this study is on kindergarten through second grade classrooms, effective teaching practice must be examined within the early childhood education context. No framework for teaching practice has been as influential in the field of early childhood education as the concept of *developmentally appropriate practice* (DAP). The original position statement released by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) was published in 1987 (Bredekamp, 1987), but a revised statement was published 10 years later (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Within this revised version, NAEYC defines DAP as the result of decisions being made about the education and well-being of children based on three dimensions of knowledge:
(1) knowledge of child development and learning, (2) knowledge of the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child, and (3) knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live. This position statement stipulates that these three dimensions are dynamic, which means that teachers must be lifelong learners that continually update their knowledge in order to be effective. Decisions that are to be made about children’s education and well-being require the integration of knowledge from all three dimensions. For that reason, DAP will not look the same for all learners or within all contexts. In other words, what is considered appropriate is contingent upon the particular circumstances of the child; his/her development; the context of the classroom and school; the sociocultural context of the child’s background including the family, neighborhood, and ethnicity; the resources available within the program; and the knowledge and skills of the teacher (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Hatch et al., 2002). According to this definition, DAP is in line with a vision of teaching that is based on the conception of knowledge of practice described by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999).

More specifically, DAP is the practical application of empirically-based principles of child development and learning. Twelve such principles are listed in the NAEYC position statement (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). These principles are derived from the research and theory of developmental psychologists. Examples of these principles include: “Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world around them” (p. 7); and “Development advances when children have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills as well as when they experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery” (p. 9). To clarify the application of these principles in practice, the position statement also provides guidelines and examples of appropriate and inappropriate practice for early childhood teachers.
The guidelines discuss practice along five interrelated dimensions: creating a caring community of learners, teaching to enhance development and learning, constructing appropriate curriculum, assessing children’s development and learning, and establishing reciprocal relationships with families. Nevertheless, because appropriate practice is contingent upon the particular circumstances in which educational decisions are made, DAP does not demand specific content or methods of teaching. These guidelines serve as suggestions, not prescriptions.

**Cautions about Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

Nevertheless, DAP is not without pitfalls. Many of the foremost scholars and critics of DAP note these cautions in Hatch et al.’s (2002) publication of a colloquium session from the 2001 Annual Meeting of NAEYC entitled *Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Continuing the Dialogue*. These scholars weighed in on the state of DAP, its value, its dangers, and where the field should go next. While some contributions served only to remind practitioners that DAP should not be misinterpreted as a definitive recommendation for particular practices or a “bible” of early childhood education, others levied significant critiques against the foundations of DAP. Christina Lopez Morgan pointed out that at the time that DAP was first conceptualized, the empirical research on which developmental theory was based was conducted by Western European psychologists on White, middle-class children. Although the conclusions drawn from the research might not be universally applicable to all children, “they were simply accepted as the way things were” (p. 445). She goes on to argue that there have been recent attempts to broaden the knowledge base necessary for DAP, but the discussion of cultural relevance as a criterion for appropriate teaching practice pales in comparison to descriptions of appropriate and inappropriate practice that are based on the same old developmental principles.

Jor’dan argues that further guidance is needed about how to integrate knowledge of the cultural and environmental backgrounds of children, families, and communities in making
decisions about DAP. Otherwise, stereotypes and assumptions persist about certain communities, “leading to the conclusion that there can’t be anything ‘appropriate’ here” (Hatch et al., 2002, p. 444). Finally, in addition to further consideration of culture, Lubeck points out that there is no discussion of poverty anywhere in the NAEYC position statement’s description of cultural context even though the United States has the largest number of children living in poverty of any industrialized nation. Moreover, the effects of poverty (e.g., lack of health insurance) play a crucial role in the contexts in which children live. She argues that poverty should “deserve more prominence in the position statement of a professional association concerned with the well-being of children” (p. 453).

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Classroom**

These cautions withstanding, the overall principles and guidelines of DAP have provided a framework by which to judge the quality of teaching in early childhood classroom. Research in the field has sought to operationalize the concept of DAP to measure the developmental appropriateness of early childhood classrooms. From their research and an extensive literature review, a research team led by Pianta and La Paro at the University of Virginia have developed a measure of developmentally appropriate practice involving four domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support, and Student Engagement (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006; Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). Drawing on the research, these scholars suggest that the domains “are based on developmental theory and research suggesting that interactions between students and adults are the primary mechanism of student development and learning” (Pianta et al., 2006, p. 1). Therefore, rather than focus on the physical environment or available materials, the domains examine how teachers use the materials and the environment in their interactions with students to promote their social and cognitive development.
Emotional Support measures the qualities of the interactions that teachers have with children, such as how sensitive the teacher is to student needs or the overall tone of the classroom climate. Emotional support is essential in teacher-student interactions because children’s social and emotional development play an important role in their academic development. La Paro, Pianta, and colleagues (2004) draw on the literature to show that teacher responsiveness has been related to higher levels of student self-esteem, and sensitive teachers with positive classroom environments tend to be more familiar with the academic needs of their students. Further, children who are more motivated and connected to others develop more positively in both social and academic domains (Pianta et al., 2006).

The domain of Classroom Organization focuses on teacher behaviors related to the management of time and activities. Effective teachers establish clear routines and expectations for student participation and behavior, and they monitor and prevent misbehavior so that students spend more time engaged in productive learning activities (La Paro et al., 2004). Pianta, La Paro, and colleagues (2006) base the domain of classroom organization on the work of developmental and ecological psychologists who examine the role of the environment in developing children’s self-regulated learning. The authors draw on research to show that classrooms with positive behavior management have students who spend more time on instruction, are more actively engaged in learning, and make greater academic gains.

The Instructional Support domain focuses on the quality of instructional interactions and feedback. Effective teachers not only monitor their students’ performance through constant assessment, but they also provide additional explanation, ideas, feedback, and questioning to guide students’ learning (La Paro et al., 2004). The theoretical foundation of the Instructional Support domain comes from research on children’s cognitive and language development. This
research base demonstrates that children’s cognitive and language development are contingent upon opportunities that adults provide them to develop “usable knowledge” and practice increasingly complex skills. In addition, research shows that children’s academic development depends on their ability to develop metacognition related to their own thinking processes. Pianta, La Paro, and colleagues (2006) point to research using indices of Instructional Support to show that it predicts students’ academic functioning in literacy and general knowledge.

The Student Engagement domain is comprised only of a single dimension and examines the “degree to which all students in the class are focused and participating in the learning activity presented or facilitated by the teacher” (Pianta et al., 2006). While student engagement was not measured as a separate domain in early testing of the CLASS instrument, the current organizational structure comprised of the four domains of Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, Instructional Support, and Student Engagement has been used to observe instructional quality through classroom interactions in early childhood contexts. It has been validated in over 4,000 prekindergarten through third grade classrooms (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2003; 2005). In their research, Pianta, La Paro, and colleagues (2002; 2006) have shown that these domains of instructional quality are predictive of academic outcomes, such as literacy and math competence and student engagement, and behavior outcomes, such as teacher-reported social competence.

**Conclusions about Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

The research conducted by Pianta, La Paro, and colleagues adds to a research base that points to the benefits of quality developmentally appropriate practice. Noted researcher Craig Hart points to findings across numerous studies that indicate that students in developmentally appropriate classrooms exhibit fewer behavioral problems, are more motivated to learn, and do better academically than students in more didactic classrooms (Hatch et al., 2002). In particular,
students taught with DAP approaches fared better on academic achievement tests over time. In their review of literature on the effects of developmentally appropriate practice, Dunn and Kontos (1997) also added that children in DAP classrooms scored higher on measures of creativity, developed better verbal skills, and were more confident in their own cognitive skills.

Overall, the literature makes a strong case for the use of developmentally appropriate practice as a method to promote quality instruction in early childhood classrooms. Nevertheless, despite the apparent promise of such an approach, such quality is not the norm in classrooms across the United States. In fact, instruction in early childhood classrooms is tremendously variable in quality. After their investigation of 223 classrooms in 3 states, Pianta, La Paro, and colleagues (2002) concluded simply “there was no typical kindergarten classroom” (p. 235). They explained that their findings confirmed the results of earlier studies of classroom quality. In a study of 103 classrooms, Bryant and colleagues (1991, as cited in Piata et al., 2002) found that only 20% of the classrooms met established criteria for DAP. In another study, Meyer and colleagues (1993, as cited in Pianta et al., 2002) found that even though the quality of instruction was related to student achievement in kindergarten, there was a wide range of quality in the classrooms observed. It is clear that despite what we know about quality instruction in early childhood education, there is little of it occurring in most classrooms.

Thus, the question becomes: how do we promote the improvement of practice in schools? PLCs may hold some promise. There is a limited body of research that examines the potential of PLCs to improve teaching practice. While not all studies of PLCs measure the instructional improvement in terms of DAP, the available literature will be reviewed here to suggest the potential of PLCs as a method to enhancing the use of DAP in early childhood classrooms.
Impact of Professional Learning Communities on Teaching Practice

While the overall outlook of the potential of PLCs to improve teaching practice is positive, some studies have mixed results. Both Armstrong (2003) and Curry (2003) document the shortcomings of PLCs in meeting their potential. Both reports were case studies of Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) that suggest CFGs limited teachers’ opportunities for growth in subject matter knowledge and led to a sense of diminished returns in the eyes of participants. Nevertheless, two further studies (Nay, 2002; Tice, 1999) suggest weak support for the improvement of instructional practice. While Nay (2002) used interviews and Tice (1999) used surveys, both documented teacher reports of changes in practice and an increased willingness to take risks. However, neither study’s results were confirmed through direct observation. Three other studies reviewed (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; Meyer & Achinstein, 1998; Nave, 2000) provide more substantial evidence of the positive impact of CFGs on teacher practice. Two of the studies (Meyer & Achinstein, 1998; Nave, 2000) provide specific examples through the description of significant changes in professional growth leading teachers to reframe the way they thought about classroom practice and to bring that change into the classroom.

Vescio et al. (2008) argue that, in general, research on PLCs makes a case that teaching practice becomes more student-centered over time. They report five studies (Dunne et al., 2000; Englert & Tarrant, 1995; Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, & Towner, 2004; Louis & Marks, 1998; Strahan, 2003) that use a variety of methodologies to document this shift in the focus of teacher practice. For example, Englert and Tarrant (1995) documented a teacher’s shift in literacy instruction from using skill sheets to incorporating an author’s center with mixed age groups, using a group story format, and employing choral reading strategies. In contrast, however, three of the five studies (Dunne et al., 2000; Hollins et al., 2004; Strahan, 2003) reported no data on the initial practices of the teachers studied, making it impossible to interpret
changes in practice beyond teacher perceptions of change. Together, the research available on the impact of PLCs suggests that a positive change in teaching practice is not a guaranteed result, but the research certainly confirms that the development of an effective PLC has the potential to positively affect teaching practice.

**Student Learning**

**Importance of Student Learning**

An analysis of what constitutes and counts as student learning is beyond the scope of this literature review and this study. This study seeks to examine the impact of collaborative professional development on teaching practice. Nevertheless, because the main goal of any school reform effort is the improvement of student learning and the impact of any reform effort must be measured by its effect on student learning, three conclusions are drawn from the literature already reviewed to indicate the potential impact on student learning. First, student learning is not yet at a desirable level, or else there would be no need for school reform efforts. Second, there is evidence that the use of DAP can enhance student learning and development, but there is limited use of DAP in classrooms. Third, PLCs hold promise to improve teacher learning and teacher practice. By association, the suggestion is that PLCs have potential to increase the use of DAP in the classroom and thus improve student learning. What follows here is an analysis of the limited literature that examines the impact of PLCs on student learning.

**Impact of Professional Learning Communities on Student Learning**

Grossman and colleagues (2001) argue that the most important effect of a PLC on student learning may not even be measurable. It may be the intangible impact on a student of having a teacher model a genuine commitment to lifelong learning. Other studies are more concrete. Tice’s (1999) survey results document 70% of teachers perceiving a positive effect on student achievement, though that impact was not confirmed by direct observation. However, Nave
(2000) analyzed examples of student work collected over two years and found evidence of improvement in student writing samples that were not evident in the work samples from the students of teachers not participating in a CFG.

Vescio et al. (2008) confirm the potential for an improvement in student achievement as a result of teachers’ participation in a PLC through the studies they reviewed. Eight of the studies that document the impact on student learning (Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005; Bolam et al., 2005; Hollins et al., 2004; Louis & Marks, 1998; Phillips, 2003; Strahan, 2003; Supovitz, 2002; Supovitz & Christman, 2003) demonstrate an improvement in achievement using various methodologies. Five of the studies (Berry et al., 2005; Bolam et al., 2005; Hollins et al., 2004; Phillips, 2003; Strahan, 2003) used standardized achievement tests to report dramatic improvements in student learning because of the development of PLCs. For example, in a middle school case study, Phillips (2003) documented an increase from 50% of students reaching proficiency in subject area exams in 1999-2000 to over 90% of students reaching that mark three years later. Two studies (Bolam et al., 2005; Louis & Marks, 1998) were able to link the strength of a school’s PLC to the gains in student achievement it recorded. In the Louis and Marks (1998) study, the strength of the PLC accounted for 85% of the variance in student achievement scores between schools. Further, two of the studies (Supovitz, 2002; Supovitz & Christman, 2003) were able to explain differential gains in student achievement in terms of the focus maintained during PLC work. Those schools that engaged in highly structured PLC work with an unwavering focus on student learning saw greater gains in student learning.

**Conclusion**

The connection between the work of PLCs exhibiting the five characteristics described earlier and positive changes in teacher practice and student learning is being established, and the outlook for future research is promising. Nevertheless, the small number of studies that currently
support this connection and the difficulty in establishing a causal connection between the work of a PLC and the impact on teacher practice and student learning still make any conclusions tenuous. However, the research does point to some firm conclusions about the positive impact of PLCs on school culture.

This chapter has followed an overall theory of change that links school reform efforts to improvements in school culture, teaching practice, and student learning. Current school reform efforts and the accumulation of organizational theory and research point to teacher learning as a cornerstone of organizational productivity and adaptivity. The need for learning suggests the vital role of professional development in improving schools. Effective professional development should be collaborative, coherent, based on content matter, focused on instructional practice, grounded in inquiry, sustained, and embedded within the school context. Further, effective professional development is based on new developments in the understanding of teacher learning and knowledge. Teacher learning within the context of school reform should be understood as knowledge formed from teachers’ collaborative inquiry into the particular dilemmas of their practice with reference to theory generated by external researchers.

PLCs are a strategy that both fit the criteria for effective professional development and employ this new understanding of educational expertise. Successful PLCs are marked by shared values and goals, collaboration and collective responsibility, reflective inquiry, a focus on results, and the transparency of practice. PLCs transform school cultures toward teacher collaboration, autonomy, and professionalism. Beyond these improvements in culture, PLCs also demonstrate potential for improving instruction toward developmentally appropriate practice that is more student-centered. Finally, these improvements in school culture and
teaching practice can result in improvements in student learning, the ultimate goal of any school reform initiative.

Nevertheless, while firm conclusions may be drawn about the positive impact of PLCs on school culture and extant literature points to their potential to improve teaching practice and student learning, research is still needed to document specific shifts in teacher practice and to corroborate studies that connect PLCs to improved student learning. Within the Ready Schools Miami (RSM) initiative, there is an ongoing evaluation component conducted by researchers from the Lastinger Center and SRI International that will address the impact on student learning. For this reason, the proposed study will focus on the Lastinger Center’s efforts to develop PLCs within the partner RSM schools and the impact of these efforts on teacher practice.

This study seeks to add to the literature base that largely relies on teachers’ self-reported changes in practice that are not confirmed by direct classroom observations. Pianta, La Paro, and colleagues (2004) suggest that within early childhood education classrooms, such as those that are the focus of this study, a measure of the quality of instruction that is predictive of child development outcomes might have more validity than academic assessments of students. They argue student assessments at this early age are often technically inadequate in terms of reliability and validity because children’s competencies are unstable and situationally dependent. Therefore, a direct measure of instructional quality in combination with participant observations of PLC meetings, individual teacher interviews, and a document review will not only add to existing studies that examine the impact of collaborative professional development and PLCs on teaching practice, it may even be preferable to a study that attempts to measure its impact on student learning in terms of academic achievement gains.
Figure 2-1. Theory of Change connecting school reform to student learning. Derived from literature review.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology and methods used in this study. It highlights the pragmatic inquiry approach and the methods employed to collect and analyze data. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the Ready Schools Miami (RSM) initiative on teaching practice as well as illuminate the supports that facilitate and the obstacles that hinder changes in teaching practice. The chapter will explain the procedures used to investigate the topic and will consist of the following sections: (1) Research Perspective, (2) Research Context, (3) Research Participants, (4) Data Collection, (5) Data Analysis, and (6) Subjectivity and Trustworthiness.

Research Perspective

Conceptually, Deweyan pragmatism connects with the study of inquiry-based, collaborative professional development because it epitomizes the inquiry stance that is being cultivated in RSM schools. Dewey defined inquiry as “the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (1938, p. 108, original emphasis, as cited in Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 59). This definition highlights two essential points about pragmatic inquiry. First, inquiry begins with an indeterminate situation, or felt difficulty, which is acknowledged as problematic and in need of correction. In the case of the present study, that dilemma involves the perennial underperformance of students of color and low-income backgrounds and the need for developmentally appropriate teaching practices, as detailed in the previous chapters. Second, the definition acknowledges that engaging in inquiry is not merely a mental operation. Rather, the process of inquiry actually transforms the situation.
under investigation in an effort to resolve it. What separates inquiry from trial and error is that inquiry is *controlled or directed* through reflection. Biesta and Burbules (2003) point out that inquiry thus consists of the cooperation of two kinds of operations: existential operations, which actually transform the situation, and conceptual operations, the reflection or thinking. According to this definition, inquiry requires not only cognition, but also action. If the problem of underperforming students was simply reflected upon, without action being taken, the problem would remain indeterminate and no closer to resolution. If on the other hand, action was taken without reflection, that trial and error undertaking would add nothing to understanding and, even if it were successful, would not lead to more intelligent action in the future.

The current study keeps in this tradition of inquiry as a transformative process, seeking not only to understand the problem under scrutiny, but also to amend the situation. This tradition reflects the investigative spirit that generates “knowledge of practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) that is being cultivated within RSM schools. Embracing a pragmatic inquiry approach to research brings about important implications relating to research methodology and methods, four of which will be considered here.

**Value-Oriented Research**

First, pragmatism advocates a value-oriented approach to research toward achieving particular ends (e.g., promoting educational equity). In other words, pragmatism points in a particular ethical direction when engaging in inquiry to resolve problematic situations toward achieving an equitable participatory democracy. Garrison (1994) explains,

> Democracy was for Dewey the most logical form of government; it was less about voting than about equal participation by all in the conversation of humankind. Initiation into this conversation is the purpose of education, and it is the purpose of educational research to provide tools that aid this task (p. 13).
A pragmatic approach further stipulates that not only should educational research take aim at achieving equity, it should do so using methods that are more equitable by involving members of various ethnic groups, races, and social class backgrounds. Doing so helps to transform the problematic situation that pragmatic inquiry seeks to resolve. The current study champions this goal of democratic educational equity by aiming to improve the instructional quality of a diverse group of teachers working with students of color and low-income backgrounds.

**Abductive Reasoning**

Second, pragmatism represents a new perspective on the connection between theory and data. Some current methodologists, especially those advocating a mixed methods approach to research (e.g., Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), argue that a pragmatic approach represents a third paradigm in research methodology. Morgan (2007) argues that a pragmatic approach moves beyond the “positivist paradigm,” characterized by quantitative research, that dominated educational research up until the 1980s and the “metaphysical paradigm,” characterized by renewed attention to qualitative research, which has been prevalent up through the 2000s. He explains that unlike quantitative researchers who employ a theory-driven, deductive approach to data and qualitative researchers who take a data-driven, inductive approach to theory, pragmatist researchers take an *abductive* approach that moves back and forth between induction and deduction. On the basis of observations, pragmatists make inductive inferences from data much like qualitative researchers. However, from a pragmatic point of view, induction alone is insufficient. The explanatory power of these inferences must also be assessed through action, much like the deductive analyses of quantitative researchers. Thus, abduction leads to a theory that best explains the relevant evidence and guides future action.

The abductive process of pragmatic reasoning may seem mundane to sensible researchers who commonly move back and forth between theory and data when conducting research.
Nevertheless, it resolves the inconsistencies of methodologists who argue on one hand, “Paradigm issues are crucial; no inquirer, we maintain, ought to go about the business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 116). While on the other hand, they admit, “It is unlikely that a practitioner of any paradigm would agree that our summaries closely describe what he or she thinks or does. Workaday scientists rarely have the time or the inclination to assess what they do in philosophical terms” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 117). Deweyan pragmatism resolves these inconsistencies by avoiding a prescriptive approach to research methodology and attempting to reconstruct, or describe, how research is actually conducted. Biesta and Burbules (2003, p. 56) explain that Dewey’s notion of inquiry was

an attempt to articulate the logic of the cognitive mode of experience, the way in which the cognitive mode actually operates. Dewey’s reconstructive view not only implies that an understanding of the “logic” of inquiry should come from an examination of actual processes of inquiry; he took the even stronger position that the forms of logic, the principles and methods we use in the acquisition of knowledge, originate in operations of inquiry (Dewey, 1938, p. 11) and have no status beyond their proven efficacy for human purposes (p. 56, original emphasis).

Pragmatists thus argue that abductive reasoning, clearly evident in the practices of many researchers (even among those calling for rigid adherence to particular theoretical perspectives), has proven useful in previous inquiry in terms of achieving desired consequences, and that success justifies its use in future pragmatic inquiry. Within the current study, the sequential nature of the data collection and analysis process, which will be detailed below, allowed for this abductive process of reasoning leading from observations to inferences that were then tested through further inquiry.

**Pragmatic Selection of Research Methods**

The quote above also leads to the third implication that will be considered. Not only does this efficacy standard apply to the logic of inquiry, it also applies to the methods employed in
generating knowledge claims from inquiry. Pragmatism offers a guide to the selection of research methods based on their usefulness in answering the research questions, rather than the compliance of certain methods with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a particular theoretical perspective. Nevertheless, simply because pragmatism suggests the selection of research methods based on utility, it does not follow that pragmatic research is without rigor. Again, the concept of pragmatic inquiry is an attempt to reconstruct how research is actually conducted.

Denscombe (2008) argues that a research paradigm based on “communities of practice,” borrowed from Lave and Wenger (1991), is consistent with a pragmatic approach, explains the methodological variations within the approach, and provides for understanding the methodological decisions of pragmatist researchers. Denscombe points out that the concept of “communities of practice” resonates with the Kuhnian notion of research paradigms as a community of researchers who share a practice and identity and work on a specific set of problems. Moreover, Denscombe asserts that a research paradigm based on “communities of practice” emphasizes the social dimension of learning and provides the flexibility necessary to accommodate the plurality of methods employed by researchers, including qualitative and quantitative methods. Communities of practice can exist at multiple levels (e.g., academic disciplines, research traditions, university departments) and maintain open membership that allows for members to move between and participate in more than one community at a time. The members of this community interact to maintain the standards of inquiry within their shared domain and designate topics worthy of inquiry. Denscombe suggests that rather than treat methodological decisions as entirely individual choices or purely rational choices, a research paradigm based on communities of practice can explain the social and practical factors that
influence the decisions of researchers, such as the predispositions of funding agencies and the influence of academic colleagues. Further, this pragmatic perspective accounts for influences external to communities of practice that can have an impact on methodological decisions, such as government policy, time considerations, and the availability of resources.

The current study fits within this research paradigm given that the methodological choices detailed below resulted from the researcher’s participation in a variety of communities of practice, including the broad community of researchers investigating professional development and school reform, the community of researchers and practitioners enacting the RSM initiative, and the committee guiding the completion of this dissertation. Along with the external factors of time and resources, interaction within each of these communities has exerted influence over the methodological decisions made in completing this study. Further, the concept of communities of practice resonates with the collaborative professional development that is the focus of this study.

**Transferability of Findings**

The fourth and final implication to be considered here is the nature of the knowledge claims of pragmatic inquiry. While a qualitative approach seeks to describe context and a quantitative approach seeks generalizability, a pragmatic approach seeks the transferability of research findings, a concept that Morgan (2007) borrowed from Lincoln and Guba (1985). Morgan argues,

> I do not believe it is possible for research results to either be so unique that they have no implications whatsoever for other actors in other settings or so generalized that they apply in every possible historical and cultural setting (p. 72).

Similarly, Garrison (1994) draws on the work of Cronbach (1975) to argue that “‘generalizations decay’ both in time and place” and further that “scientific laws are functional and transitory” (p. 12). This perspective on research findings highlights the pragmatic notion of knowledge as contextual, temporal, and based on action. The aim of pragmatic inquiry is the generation of
“warranted assertions,” which are conclusions drawn from the process of inquiry that help guide intelligent action in similar contexts in the future (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Nevertheless, because knowledge claims are always provisional, pragmatists ultimately treat the transferability of warranted assertions as an empirical issue, meaning that the applicability of research findings in novel situations and contexts must be established by further inquiry.

Of course, it is up to the reader to judge the utility of the warranted assertions by reflecting on the similarities between the methods and context of the research and the methods and context in which the reader might apply the findings. However, it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide a thick description of the methods and context of the inquiry. Within the current study, the description of research methods follows this section and the findings will comprise subsequent chapters.

In conclusion, pragmatism not only blends well with the study of collaborative professional development because of its shared conception of inquiry, it also promotes a value-oriented approach to research that emphasizes the advancement of educational equity toward achieving a participatory democracy. Further, a pragmatic approach promotes the use of abductive reasoning that allows for a back and forth movement between theory and data and provides the logic for the warranted assertions drawn from inquiry. In addition, a pragmatic approach accounts for the contingent selection of research methods according to their utility in answering the research questions, their preference by research communities of practice, and the consideration of influential external factors. Finally, a pragmatic approach aims for the transferability of research findings, which can be tested in future inquiry in novel situations. What follows is a description of the actual methods employed in this study that resulted from the application of this pragmatic approach.
Research Context

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What impact does teachers’ participation in collaborative professional development have on their teaching practice?
- What supports facilitate and what obstacles hinder changes in classroom practice?

The study’s objective was to provide an in-depth analysis of the implementation and impact of the RSM initiative on the teachers at two target schools selected using criterion sampling (Glesne, 2006). These target schools were selected from the group of 16 schools according to four criteria: (1) at least 80% of the student population receives free or reduced lunch, (2) at least 80% concentration of a single minority (Hispanic or Black) in the student population, (3) a student population of 700 or fewer, and (4) the school was in its first year of program implementation. The two schools thus represented urban, high-poverty elementary schools chosen to represent the presence of the large minority populations in Miami-Dade County. A student population of 700 or fewer ensured the sample of teachers selected for data collection represented a greater percentage of the instructional staff and a better overall picture of the school’s faculty. The final criterion reflected the fact that three of the 16 Wave I schools had already begun some of the Lastinger interventions through their participation in a pilot version of the RSM initiative called the Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) program.

Patricia Smith Elementary

Patricia Smith Elementary (pseudonym) is a pre-kindergarten through 6th grade elementary school. The student population reflects that of the neighborhood in that it is predominantly Black students from low-income families. The demographic profile published by Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS, 2008) shows that of the students that attend Patricia Smith Elementary, over 90% of students are Black and receive free or reduced lunch.
While MDCPS does not statistically distinguish between Black students and students of Haitian descent, the extremely low percentage of Limited English Proficient students (<1%) demonstrates that the population is predominantly comprised of African-American children and not those of Haitian immigrants, who speak Haitian Creole.

The demographic profile published by MDCPS (2008) also shows that instructional staff at Patricia Smith Elementary average less than 10 years of teaching experience in Florida. The teaching staff is ethnically diverse, comprised of Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian. Though, just over half the teachers are Black (including Haitian). In addition, slightly less than half the instructional staff members have advanced degrees at the Master’s or Specialist level.

Academically speaking, Patricia Smith Elementary has had remarkable success with their students. The Florida School Accountability Report (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2008) shows that in recent years, Patricia Smith has maintained a school grade of A or B according to the Florida School Grading System. The report shows that these grades have been reached by achieving high student scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), the state’s major accountability test.

**Dawkins Grove Elementary**

Dawkins Grove Elementary (pseudonym) is a pre-kindergarten through 5th grade elementary school. The student population of the school draws from two communities and reflects the largely Black, Haitian, and low-income characteristics of the two neighborhoods. The demographic profile published by MDCPS (2008) shows that over 85% of the students are Black and receive free or reduced lunches. The existence of a substantial Haitian population is evident in the percentage of students (over 10%) who are designated as Limited English Proficient.

The instructional staff at Dawkins Grove Elementary also average less than 10 years teaching experience in Florida. According to the demographics report published by MDCPS
(2008), well over half the staff is Black (including Haitian), with the remainder of the staff split evenly between Whites and Hispanics. Also, just under half of the instructional staff members have advanced degrees at the Master’s or Specialist levels.

Academically, Dawkins Grove Elementary has not been as successful with their students. The Florida School Accountability Report (FLDOE, 2008) shows that in recent years, Dawkins Grove has maintained grades of C or D according to the Florida School Grading System. Results on the 2007 Sunshine State Standards portion of the FCAT exemplify these mixed results and caused Dawkins Grove to be designated a “Zone School” by MDCPS, which slates the school to receive additional resources and participate in an extended school day and school year.

**Research Participants**

At both Patricia Smith and Dawkins Grove, the researcher went through the appropriate administrative channels to recruit the participation of teachers. After securing the approvals of the University of Florida’s Institutional Review Board and the Miami-Dade County Public Schools’ Research Office, the school principals were contacted to begin recruitment. At each of the two target schools, principals selected six teachers to participate for a total of 12 teacher participants. Two teachers were chosen at each grade level at each school, kindergarten through second grade, and all of the teachers agreed to participate. Focusing on these grade levels provided insight into the impact of the initiative on the early childhood classrooms that the program targets without undue interference in classrooms assessed by the FCAT, which begins testing in 3rd grade. The table below (Figure 3-1) summarizes pertinent information about each of the participants. In order to easily distinguish teachers from each school, all teachers from Patricia Smith were given pseudonyms beginning with the letter P. Teachers at Dawkins Grove were given pseudonyms that begin with the letter D. The table indicates the school that each teacher worked at either Patricia Smith Elementary (PSE) or Dawkins Grove Elementary (DGE).
Their level of educational attainment is listed along with their racial and ethnic background. This information is provided to give some background on each teacher. The table also indicates that a subgroup of eight teachers was selected to participate in additional data collection during the study. The process by which they were selected and the data collection in which they participated will be described in the following section.

**Data Collection**

A variety of data were collected for analysis and insight into the impact of the RSM initiative on teaching practice as well as the supports necessary and obstacles faced in establishing and maintaining inquiry-based, collaborative professional development. The collection of data from a variety of sources not only supports the triangulation of data, it also embodies the pragmatic emphasis on the use of “multiple tools of inquiry to gain different perspectives” (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 108). The four main sources of data are detailed here.

**Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Observations**

First, systematic classroom observations were conducted using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) protocol developed at the University of Virginia (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006) to assess teachers’ use of developmentally appropriate practice and investigate changes in teacher practice. The CLASS protocol provides a reliable measure of classroom interaction, as each rater must reach 80% reliability before scoring in the field. The CLASS and its precursor, the Classroom Observation System (COS), have also been validated in over 4,000 prekindergarten through third grade classrooms and shown to be predictive of academic and social development (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2003; 2005).

The CLASS focuses on interpersonal exchanges between the teacher and students as well as among the students themselves. The 11 dimensions of teaching practice on which teachers
were rated are grouped into 4 broad domains: (1) Emotional Support, or the level of personal warmth, the level of negativity, the teacher’s responsiveness to student needs, and the regard for students’ perspectives; (2) Classroom Organization, or the teacher’s ability to prevent or redirect misbehavior, the teacher’s time management, and the teacher’s ability to engage students; (3) Instructional Support, or the teachers’ ability to facilitate students’ concept development and promote higher order thinking, the degree to which teacher feedback fosters student understanding, and the degree to which the teacher models language appropriately; and (4) Student Engagement, or the extent to which students are actively participating in the learning activity presented or facilitated by the teacher.

Each of the 11 dimensions was scored on a 1 to 7 scale, as low (1,2), middle (3,4,5), or high (6, 7). Each observation consisted of a minimum of four, 20-30 minute cycles, each of which involves 15-20 minutes of observation and note-taking followed by 5-10 minutes of coding. The total length of the observations ranged from 1 hour, 20 minutes to 2 hours, 25 minutes. The teachers were rated on each of the 11 dimensions at the completion of each of the four observation cycles based on notes taken during the observation cycle. At the end of four cycles, mean scores were tabulated for each dimension and domain on a scoring summary sheet. In addition, the researcher prepared an observation report that summarized the qualitative notes taken throughout the observation. The scoring summary sheets and the observation reports were made available to teachers when they scheduled a CLASS feedback session with the researcher. Nine of the 12 participating teachers elected to receive the feedback.

The CLASS observations were conducted close to the beginning of the implementation of school-site professional learning communities (PLCs) between the dates of December 5 and December 20, 2007, and again close to the end of the school year between the dates of March 20
and April 23, 2008. The researcher personally conducted 19 of the 24 total observations. Another external facilitator within the RSM initiative, who also achieved reliability using the CLASS protocol, conducted the remaining five observations. There was an effort to maintain consistency in having that external facilitator conduct both the first and second round of observations for the same three teachers. This was successful for two of the teachers. However, scheduling conflicts arose for the external facilitator and the third teacher. Thus, the researcher decided to conduct the second round observation for that teacher lest the April observation would not have been conducted until the end of May.

**Individual Interviews**

Second, a subgroup of eight teachers were selected to participate in additional data collection in the form of individual, open-ended interviews (Berg, 2004) to examine their participation in the RSM initiative and its perceived impact on their teaching. These teachers were selected to represent a diversity of abilities and perspectives. The group was chosen based on the consideration of: (1) their scores on the first CLASS observation conducted in December, (2) their personal and professional background, and (3) their participation in the RSM initiative. In keeping with the pragmatic concern for multiple perspectives and promoting educational equity, the resulting subgroup reflected a broad range of scores on the CLASS, years of experience, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, ages, and levels of participation in the RSM initiative. Refer back to Figure 3-1, which denotes the teachers that were interviewed.

The researcher conducted all interviews. Two rounds of interview were conducted after a preceding round of CLASS observations. The first round of interviews was conducted between the dates of February 18 and March 6, 2008. The second round of interviews was completed between the dates May 15 and May 29, 2008. The length of the interviews ranged from 33 minutes to 1 hour, 8 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The
interview questions focused on teachers’ participation in professional development, the nature of those professional development activities, and the perceived impact of professional development activities on teaching. Keeping with a pragmatic inquiry approach and the use of abductive reasoning, the interviews allowed the researcher to test inferences made from the data collected from other sources, such as the CLASS observations, by following up on observations and asking the participants about the results directly. The open-ended format of the interviews also allowed for asking participants to elaborate on their answers. The first round of interviews focused generally on any professional development available to teachers at each school. The second round, while largely similar, focused more directly on the professional development available to teachers through the RSM initiative. The protocols for first and second round interviews are available as Appendices B and C, respectively. Together, the CLASS observations and individual interviews served as the primary sources of data for the study.

**Participant Observations**

Third, participant observations (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Spradley, 1980) of professional learning community sessions were conducted at each of the target schools to examine the site-based professional development in action. Participant observation provided opportunities to see the collaborative groups in action and the interactions among participants, which were also followed up on in individual interviews. Further, these observations allowed for richer descriptions of the features of these professional development activities. These data give a sense of the nature of the professional development work that went on at the target schools. In addition, they also provide a window to what professional development activities prompt the reflective conversations among teachers that led to changes in teacher practice.

One PLC session was observed at each school. A session was observed at Patricia Smith Elementary on January 18, 2008, from 8:15-10:00am for a total of 1 hour, 45 minutes. A session
was observed at Dawkins Grove Elementary on February 13, 2008, from 3:28pm to 4:13pm for a total of 45 minutes. Field notes taken from the PLC observations conducted were expanded to provide a better picture of the activities observed during each session. Many attempts were made to schedule additional observations of PLC sessions at each school. However, scheduling conflicts and other complications led to multiple cancellations of the PLC sessions at each of the schools during the months of March, April, and May. These scheduling complications will be discussed further in the results chapters.

**Document Review**

Fourth, any significant artifacts produced as a result of teachers’ participation in professional learning communities or other aspects of the RSM initiative were also collected for a document review. These documents included the materials produced at the training institutes for PLC coaches and administrators, agendas and other materials from school-based PLC sessions, and materials produced by the external facilitators.

All four data sources (CLASS observations, individual interviews, participant observations, and the document review) come together to help ascertain the impact of collaborative professional development activities on teaching, what supports are necessary, and what obstacles are encountered. The diversity present in the research context and among the research participants reflects a pragmatic, value-oriented approach to research toward achieving educational equity. The sequential nature of data collection (CLASS observation, interview, CLASS observation, interview) allows for the testing of inferences made from the data through further inquiry, which is the hallmark of abductive reasoning. Considering the participant observation of PLC sessions and the ongoing collection of artifacts, the methods selected allow for the triangulation of data. Moreover, the methods provide multiple tools of inquiry to gain differing perspectives, which prove useful in providing a robust answer to the research questions.
Together with the data analysis procedures that follow, the data collection procedures reflect a pragmatic inquiry approach toward investigating and resolving concerns over the instructional quality of teachers working with urban, low-income children.

**Data Analysis**

Methods available for the analysis of data were restricted by the sample size of the study. While the data collection procedures included quantitative and qualitative methods, the time and resources available to the researcher limited the number of teachers that could be observed using the CLASS instrument. Thus, a meaningful statistical analysis of the CLASS observation data was impossible.

The resulting process of analysis draws on Glauser and Strauss’ concept of grounded theory, which is derived through the process of constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Glauser, 1965; Glauser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Philosophically, a grounded theory methodology is consistent with a pragmatic inquiry approach to research because grounded theory was spawned from the work of symbolic interactionists who were rooted firmly within the pragmatic tradition (Crotty, 2003), and thus “there are aspects of pragmatism involved in grounded theory” (Denscombe, 2008, p. 275). Further, grounded theory lends itself to the abductive process of moving back and forth between theory and data. As Glauser (1965, pp. 437-438) writes, “The constant comparative method is designed to aid analysts with these abilities in generating a theory which is integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data, and in a form which is clear enough to be readily…operationalized for testing.” In addition, the constant comparative analysis method suits the present study because it can be applied to any kind of qualitative data, and can thus be used to draw conclusions from this study’s interviews, PLC observation field notes, documents, and even the qualitative notes on which the CLASS observations were scored. Grounded theory is a specific form of ethnographic inquiry that
inductively develops theoretical ideas through a series of carefully planned steps from relevant qualitative data. The application of grounded theory described here draws also on the work of more recent methodologists who have adapted grounded theory to take into account the work of constructivist research from the last twenty years (Charmaz, 2006) and continued to codify the process of constant comparative analysis in an effort to make the results of such an analysis more credible (Boeije, 2002). The process used to analyze the study’s data consisted of three phases.

**First Phase of Data Analysis**

The analysis process began with the process of initial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to create consistency in describing the actions of the participating teachers. The first phase of the analysis examined the PLC observation data, the first round of CLASS observations, and the first round of interviews. The comparative process began by first comparing data to data when coding similar instances until the properties of a code became clear. At that point, a memo was written about the code, and the code became part of the codebook. As the codes were more clearly defined, new instances of each code were compared to the properties of that code to justify their inclusion in the relevant data. This comparison process helped to ensure the consistency of codes within each individual source of data, be it an interview transcript, field notes, or a document. Data were coded with gerunds to ensure that the coding scheme stayed close to the data and focused on processes (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978). Examples of common codes included: “Developing higher-order thinking,” “Managing the classroom,” “Sharing strategies,” and “Using National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) protocols.” The coding process was assisted through the use of the HyperResearch 2.0 qualitative data analysis program, which indexed each instance by code and participant and generated coding reports to allow for constant comparison.
A second stage in the first phase of coding sought to ensure consistency among the actions described by each code and integrate similar codes into categories. A report of all instances of all codes was generated and reviewed to ensure that each instance of each code described similar actions and processes in the data. Code instances were revised where necessary to ensure consistency within each code. In addition, similar codes were integrated into categories. For example, the codes “Seeking resources,” “Prompting reflection,” and “Offering opportunities” were all subsumed into the category “Getting external support.” Memos were written to define the coding categories and raise them to a conceptual level for analytical treatment (Charmaz, 2006). Further, conceptual mapping strategies were used to diagram the interrelation of categories to one another.

**Second Phase of Data Analysis: Theoretical Sampling**

Following the abductive process of reasoning, inferences developed during the first phase of analysis were subjected to further inquiry in the collection of the second round of individual interviews and CLASS observations. The individual interviews allowed the researcher to empirically test the emergent categories. This process allowed for theoretical sampling to obtain further data to help define categories more completely. Charmaz (2006) explains,

> When categories are full, they reflect qualities of your respondents’ experiences and provide a useful analytic handle for understanding them. In short, theoretical sampling pertains only to conceptual and theoretical development; it is *not* about representing a population or increasing the statistical generalizability of your results. (pp. 100-101, original emphasis)

Theoretical sampling prompts grounded theorists to test initial hypotheses developed in data analysis by collecting specific empirical data. Thus, in the second round of interviews, the interview protocol was modified slightly to focus more specifically on questions around the RSM initiative rather than professional development in general. For example, there were no specific questions regarding external supports in the first interview protocol. However, after the
category “Getting external support” emerged, the second interview protocol included the question, “What supports have been helpful in trying to improve your teaching practice and school culture this year?” (See Appendices B and C.) The additional data collected in the second round of interviews helped to more fully define the category.

Further, the CLASS observations, conducted four months apart, allowed the researcher to confirm and substantiate the teachers’ reported claims of changes in practice. Teacher’s self-reported changes in teaching practice were compared to the observed changes in teaching practice. Only those changes in practice that could be confirmed through direct observation during the CLASS observations were considered in the research findings. For example, Ms. Pierre reported that she began to ask more higher-order thinking questions with her students after the first CLASS observation. Because that report was substantiated by direct observation during her second CLASS observation, it was reported in the results of the study. This analysis procedure reflects the pragmatic emphasis on the connection of knowledge to action because in order for a teacher to be said to have ‘learned’ something from participation in the initiative, it must have been demonstrated in practice. Further, the triangulation of data sources allowed for additional rigor that is not been present in previous studies of collaborative professional development and professional learning communities that rely on teacher reports of changes in classroom practice.

Third Phase of Data Analysis

As did the first, the third phase of data analysis began with the constant comparative method of coding instances of data, but only focused coding categories were used to treat the second round of data. Additional memos were written to further refine the properties of each category. The strategy of theoretical sorting (Charmaz, 2006) was used integrate and relate memos to one another. All memos were printed out and sorted. Memos were sorted to represent
the flow of empirical experience to render the process that participants underwent, and each memo was sorted into the category to which it related. For example, memos related to the changes teachers made in their teaching were sorted together, and memos related to the impacts teachers saw as a result of those changes were sorted together. The relation between the two categories was represented by placing the groups of printed memos next to one another, and a figure was created to document the interrelation of categories. Thus, memos not only helped to create the substance of the results chapters that follow, they also served in the development of the grounded theory of school and teacher change.

The third phase of analysis continued into writing the draft of the results chapters. Charmaz (2006) asserts that writing and rewriting are part of the discovery process of grounded theory because writing allows grounded theorists to develop insights about the connection between categories and see implications from them. Writing the draft involved creating an outline to represent a logical flow from one category to the next and select instances of data to illuminate the properties of each category and ground the conceptual in the empirical. Revising the draft to fit the flow of empirical experience required some revisions in the figure developed during theoretical sorting. When the first draft of the theory of school and teacher change was completed, the final stage of analysis involved reading the entire draft and highlighting the main idea of each section. Integrating the main arguments of each section of the draft furthered the analysis by raising the grounded theory to a conceptual level. The final theory and accompanying figure are presented in Chapters 5 and 6 (Figure 5-1).

**Transferability and Subjectivity**

These analytical steps were taken to promote the generation of theory that moves beyond a “substantive theory” of the experience of the teachers at an RSM school site to a more “formal theory” of the experiences of teachers within school reform initiatives (Glauser, 1965). In other
words, this process promotes the transferability of research findings. Additional steps were taken to promote the transferability and trustworthiness of the research findings. First, data were collected over an extended period of time. Data collection began in December 2007 and did not conclude until May 2008. This extended period of data collection allowed the researcher to follow up on hunches by testing inferences in further data collection. Second, data were triangulated so that conclusions drawn from one data source could be confirmed by another data source. For example, teachers’ reported changes in classroom instruction were confirmed by the classroom observations, and the classroom observations were conducted using the CLASS instrument that has been tested for reliability and validity (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006). Third, all interviews and fieldnotes were transcribed verbatim and in their entirety. This helped to ensure that the analysis considered participants’ own words and actions. Also, having the entire transcript allowed the researcher to return to the interviews multiple times during constant comparative analysis. Finally, a peer review process was used to check the inferences drawn during coding. The dissertation advisor coded one interview in each round separately from the researcher to ensure consistency in the inferences drawn from the data and in the categories that emerged from analysis. This rich description of the analysis process is provided to promote the transferability of the findings. However, the reader is always the ultimate judge of the trustworthiness of the research findings, and the ultimate test of their transferability will always be future inquiry regarding their application in novel situations.

The researcher’s subjectivity must also be addressed to aid the reader in judging the trustworthiness of the findings. The researcher began working in education as an English middle school teacher in the South Bronx, New York City. In addition, he worked in schools in Oakland, California; Los Angeles, California; and West Palm Beach, Florida. So, he was familiar with
some of the issues of working within large, urban school districts in schools with student populations from low-income neighborhoods. In addition, these experiences led him to continually work on behalf of these populations to enhance the educational opportunities available to them.

Thus, as is clear from the pragmatic inquiry approach described above, this dissertation approaches school reform with a particular value orientation toward improving educational equity and social justice for traditionally underserved groups. The researcher is an advocate for the sweeping social reforms that will help to end the achievement gap and education debt as well as eradicate poverty. The RSM initiative is a great step forward in achieving these goals. Having witnessed the power of ongoing, collaborative professional development in successful urban schools, the researcher supports the redefinition of teacher work to include collaborating with colleagues and the restructuring of teachers’ schedules to allow for job-embedded, inquiry-based professional development.

In addition, throughout the length of the study, the researcher worked as an external facilitator for the RSM initiative in two schools that were not the focus of this research study. The researcher helped other external facilitators to plan and deliver external training institutes and participated in a working group to plan and deliver support structures to participating schools and teachers. This led teacher participants to see the researcher less as an outside evaluator than as an integral part of the implementation of the RSM initiative overall. Principals in the target schools saw the dissertation study as a way for their teachers to get extra guidance or mentoring.

The researcher’s history of working in urban schools, belief in the advancement of social justice, and work within the RSM initiative itself could serve as potential biases in the interpretation of findings. These issues are addressed here to assist the reader in judging the
trustworthiness of the findings and in considering the transferability of the findings in similar school reform initiatives.

**Conclusion**

This chapter situated the study within a pragmatic inquiry approach to research and explained the implications of such an approach on the methodology employed in the study. Further, the chapter detailed the context of the two Miami elementary schools in which the research was conducted and introduced the twelve kindergarten through second grade teachers that participated. The variety of data sources, including CLASS observations, individual interviews, PLC observations, and the document review, and the procedures for their collection were described. The data analysis procedures were detailed, highlighting the constant comparative analysis method used to develop a grounded theory of the impact of the RSM initiative on teaching practice and school culture. Finally, the steps taken to improve the trustworthiness of the findings and the researchers’ subjectivity were addressed. The following chapter will share the results of this analysis process.
Table 3-1. Background characteristics of participating teachers. Compiled from participant information sheets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Highest degree / Teacher preparation</th>
<th>Racial / Ethnic background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pereira</td>
<td>PSE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perez</td>
<td>PSE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petit?</td>
<td>PSE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre?</td>
<td>PSE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollack?</td>
<td>PSE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>White/Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poole?</td>
<td>PSE</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davenport?</td>
<td>DGE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>DGE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devereaux *</td>
<td>DGE</td>
<td></td>
<td>Haitian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodson?</td>
<td>DGE</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donato?</td>
<td>DGE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubois?</td>
<td>DGE</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

? Participated in additional data collection (i.e., individual interviews)
* Did not return participant information sheet. Certain information unavailable.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS OF THE CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT SCORING SYSTEM OBSERVATIONS

Introduction

Chapters 5 through 7 present the results of the data collection and analysis described in the previous chapter. The findings reveal that school reform efforts based on collaborative professional development can have an impact on teaching practice. The results are organized according to the research questions that guided the study and presented in three chapters. Chapter 4 contains the results of the CLASS observations conducted in each participant’s classroom. Chapters 5 and 6 present a grounded theory that explains the changes documented in participants’ teaching practices in relation to their participation in the Ready Schools Miami (RSM) initiative and the CLASS feedback sessions offered as part of the dissertation study. Chapter 5 describes teachers’ participation in the RSM initiative as well as the reform strategies they employed as a result of their participation. Chapter 6 illustrates outcomes related to school culture and instructional practice that came of their efforts. In addition, Chapter 6 outlines the supports and obstacles that either facilitated or hindered the achievement of those outcomes. Before results are presented, a brief summary of the methodology is provided.

Methodology Summary

This study began in December 2007 with a sample of 12 teachers selected by principals at two schools to participate in the study. Two teachers were chosen at each grade level at each school from kindergarten through second grade. These teachers were observed using the CLASS observation protocol in December 2007 and again in April 2008 to assess their instructional quality according to eleven dimensions of teacher practice, organized into four major domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, Instructional Support, and Student Engagement. The numerical ratings within these observations were based on qualitative field notes gathered
during the 80 to 145 minute observation periods. In addition, a subgroup of eight teachers was chosen to represent a range of scores on the CLASS, years of experience, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and levels of participation in the RSM initiative. This subgroup participated in two rounds of individual, open-ended, qualitative interviews in February 2008 and May 2008. Additional data collection included participant observation of one PLC session at each of the schools and the collection of documents and artifacts that resulted from teachers’ participation in the initiative.

All data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis to yield a grounded theory of the impact of teachers’ participation in the RSM initiative and CLASS feedback sessions on their teaching practice and school culture. Analysis proceeded in three stages. The initial coding of the first stage, completed after the first round of CLASS observations and teacher interviews, shed light on teachers’ preliminary participation in the professional learning communities and informed the second round of interviews. The second phase consisted of theoretical sampling to collect additional empirical data to support theory development. The focused coding of the final stage of analysis edified the results of the first stage and yielded a theory that explains the changes documented in teachers’ practice in relation to their participation in aspects of the RSM initiative and this dissertation study.

**Presentation of Study Results**

The theory and findings related to changes in teacher practice are substantiated by the quantitative results tabulated and field notes gathered from the CLASS observations, the individual teacher interviews, the PLC observations, and the document review. Examples from the data are given to support the conclusions drawn and illustrate the perspectives of participants. Findings related to supports and obstacles derive from the individual teacher interviews, the PLC
observations, and the document review. Examples from the data are included to describe the nature of those supports and challenges.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the results obtained from the rounds of CLASS observations conducted in teachers’ classrooms. These results relate to the first research question: What impact does teachers’ participation in collaborative professional development have on their teaching practice? The results illustrate that a school reform effort based on collaborative professional development can have an impact on teaching practice. Chapters 5 and 6 present a grounded theory that explains the observed changes in teaching practice and school culture in relation to participation in aspects of the RSM initiative and the dissertation study. Chapter 5 focuses on the nature of teachers’ participation in aspects of the RSM initiative and the reform strategies they employed to improve instruction and school culture. Chapter 6 explains the outcomes achieved in terms of instructional practice and highlights the supports and obstacles that served as the context for those achievements. The findings presented in Chapter 6 relate to the second research question: What supports facilitate and what obstacles hinder changes in teacher practice? These chapters are intended to illustrate the process by which a school reform effort changes what goes on in classrooms and schools as well as the assistance necessary and the challenges to avoid in implementing future school reform efforts.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Observations

The results of the CLASS observations are presented in three tables. Table 4-1 documents the mean scores for all twelve participants for Observations 1 and 2 in all four CLASS domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, Instructional Support, and Student Engagement. The change in scores between observations is indicated in the final column along with the direction of that change, positive or negative.
While no statistical analysis was performed because of the small sample size, descriptive statistics indicate an overall positive trend in teachers’ scores between the first and second observations. Gains in the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains of 0.10 and 0.07, respectively, are fairly insubstantial and indicate little change in teacher practice in these areas. Larger gains were documented in the Instructional Support and Student Engagement domains, especially the Instructional Support domain which showed an overall increase of 0.81. Of course, it must be noted that teachers generally started higher on the 7-points scale in the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains, and thus there was less room for improvement. Because their scores were lower in the Instructional Support domain, there was also more room for growth. Thus, the size of the change in teachers’ domain scores is related to where the teachers started. Still, the notable change in Instructional Support, which is generally the lowest domain score according to previous research using the CLASS (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2003; 2005), is worthy of investigation.

The Instructional Support domain assesses the dimensions of Concept Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006). The marked increase in teacher performance in this domain indicates that teachers improved their use of instructional discussions and activities that promote higher order thinking skills, their ability to provide feedback that is focused on expanding learning and understanding, and their use of language stimulation and facilitation techniques during interactions with students. While less substantial, the increase of 0.46 in the Student Engagement domain is also notable. Unlike the other three domains, the Student Engagement domain is comprised of a single dimension. The
increase in this dimension/domain shows an overall increase in active student participation in the activity presented or facilitated by the teacher.

The CLASS results and RSM participation are displayed for each teacher of Patricia Smith Elementary in Table 4-2 and for Dawkins Grove Elementary in Table 4-3. The table lists each teacher’s name, the aspects of the RSM initiative in which s/he participated, and the CLASS scores for Observations 1 and 2. The column RSM Participation notes if teachers participated in PLCs as a coach or participant and if they participated in external RSM training institutes: the Summer Institute in June 2007 and/or the two PLC Coaches training sessions in October 2007 and May 2008. Also listed is teachers’ participation in other aspects of the RSM initiative, i.e., participation in the Teacher Leadership for School Improvement (TLSI) graduate school program, attendance at the Winter Meeting of the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) in Tampa, attendance at a RSM vocabulary content clinic, or a GRE study course in preparation for submitting an application to the TLSI program. Finally, it is noted if teachers participated in the CLASS feedback sessions. The remaining columns document the CLASS scores that teachers received during the first and second observations. As in Table 4-1, the scores are reported for each of the four major domains of the CLASS observation protocol and the change score indicates the score differential and the direction of change, positive or negative. The final row in each table indicates the mean scores for all the teachers within a school on each of the four domains along with their change scores.

**Patricia Smith Elementary School**

Similar to the overall mean scores, the most notable change in domain scores at Patricia Smith occurred in the Instructional Support domain, which reported an increase of 0.90 across all six teachers at the school. Score differentials between the first and second observations in the Instructional Support domain ranged from a low of −1.25 for Ms. Perez, the only teacher to
decline in all four domains, to a high of +2.25 for Ms. Petit. Also similar to the overall mean scores, the Student Engagement domain showed a small increase of 0.33. (Table 4-2.)

The Emotional Support domain remained unchanged at 5.43, while the Classroom Organization domain showed a small decrease of 0.24. Three teachers (Ms. Pereira, Ms. Perez, and Ms. Pierre) showed a decrease in the Classroom Organization domain. The Classroom Organization domain assesses the dimensions of Behavior Management, Productivity, and Instructional Learning Format (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006). While Ms. Pereira’s decrease was merely 0.08, which essentially indicates no change, Ms. Pierre declined 0.92 and Ms. Perez declined 2.25. In Ms. Pierre’s case, this shows a decrease in evidence of her use of proactive behavior management and the evidence of clear behavioral expectations; her ability to manage instructional time and routines effectively; and her facilitation of activities, centers, and materials that maximize students’ ability to learn. In Ms. Perez’s case, the scores show a considerable decrease in evidence of these abilities.

Dawkins Grove Elementary School

Table 4-3 reports the CLASS results for teachers of Dawkins Grove Elementary. Mean scores improved in each domain at Dawkins Grove, with the most substantial increases in the Instructional Support domain (0.71) and the Student Engagement domain (0.59). Mr. Davenport, Ms. Donato, and Ms. Dubois all showed remarkable improvement in the Instructional Support domain of 1.92, 1.83, and 1.67, respectively. Only Ms. Dodson and Ms. Devereaux decreased in the Instructional Support domain. Less substantial increases of 0.19 and 0.33 were recorded for the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains, respectively. Of note, however, is the fact that two teachers at Dawkins Grove, Ms. Devereaux and Ms. Dodson showed a decrease across all four domain scores between the two observations. The other four teachers either improved or maintained their domain scores between the first and second observations.
Ready Schools Miami Participation

The observation data recorded for these teachers suggest a trend that relates participation in the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback sessions with improved teaching practice as measured by the CLASS observation protocol. This trend indicates that when a teacher participated in some aspect of the RSM initiative (e.g., participation in a PLC or participation in the TLSI graduate program) and also requested the feedback from the CLASS observations, domain scores improved. Ms. Pereira, Ms. Petit, Ms. Pollack, and Ms. Poole at Patricia Smith and Mr. Davenport, Ms. Donato, and Ms. Dubois at Dawkins Grove all provide evidence of this positive relationship. Each of these teachers participated in at least one aspect of the RSM initiative and also received feedback from the CLASS observations. These teachers all showed generally positive increases across their domain scores, with slight exceptions for Ms. Pereira whose Emotional Support and Classroom Organization scores decreased less than 0.10, Ms. Pollack whose Instructional Support score decreased 0.17, and Mr. Davenport whose Emotional Support and Classroom Organization scores showed no change at all.

By illustrating the case of non-participation, Ms. Devereaux, Ms. Dodson, and Ms. Perez provide further support for the relation of participation in the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback to improved teacher practice. Ms. Dodson chose to receive the CLASS feedback, but she did not participate in any aspect of the RSM initiative at her school. Ms. Devereaux and Ms. Perez, on the other hand, participated in some aspect of the RSM initiative, but did not choose to receive the CLASS feedback. Each of these three teachers showed decreases across all four of their domain scores.

Two teachers were outliers to this general trend. Ms. Davis never received the CLASS feedback, yet she showed some improvement across all four domain scores. It is possible that these small improvements could be related to her participation in aspects of the RSM initiative.
However, because she never received the CLASS feedback, she does not support the same trend as the other ten teachers. Likewise, even though Ms. Pierre participated in PLCs and also received the feedback from the CLASS, she registered a decrease of 0.12 in Emotional Support and 0.92 in Classroom Organization. According to the general trend, her participation in a PLC and her request to receive the CLASS feedback would suggest a positive trend across her domain scores. Despite the decreases in Emotional Support and Classroom Organization, Ms. Pierre recorded remarkable increases in Instructional Support and Student Engagement of 1.58 and 1.25, respectively. Therefore, Ms. Pierre’s case still provides support to the notion that teachers’ participation in the RSM initiative and this study resulted in improved Instructional Support and Student Engagement.

Once again, this general trend is not established by statistical analysis. Moreover, it is impossible to establish a causal connection between teachers’ participation in the RSM initiative and improved teacher practice based on these limited data. Yet, the available data point to a relationship of participation in the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback to improved teacher practice, especially in the domains of Instructional Support and Student Engagement. This conclusion is derived from the data, and it supports the notion that school reform efforts based on collaborative professional development and substantive instructional feedback can improve teacher practice. This conclusion also forms the basis of a grounded theory about teacher and school change through participation in the RSM initiative presented in the next two chapters.
Table 4-1. Mean domain scores for all participating teachers. Compiled from Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS Domain</th>
<th>Observation 1</th>
<th>Observation 2</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>+ 0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>+ 0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>+ 0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>+ 0.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-2. Mean scores for participating teachers at Patricia Smith Elementary. Compiled from Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>RSM participation</th>
<th>CLASS domains</th>
<th>Observation 1</th>
<th>Observation 2</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pereira    | - Coaches Institutes  
             |                     | Emotional Support | 6.38          | 6.31       | - 0.07 |
|            |                    | Classroom          |               |               |        |
|            |                    | Organization       | 5.75          | 5.67          | - 0.08 |
|            |                    | Instructional      |               |               |        |
|            |                    | Support            | 2.92          | 4.75          | + 1.83 |
|            |                    | Student Engagement | 5.25          | 5.50          | + 0.25 |
| Perez      | - Summer Institute  
             |                     | Emotional Support | 4.44          | 1.63       | - 2.81 |
|            | - PLC Participant   | Classroom          |               |               |        |
|            |                    | Organization       | 4.75          | 2.50          | - 2.25 |
|            |                    | Instructional      |               |               |        |
|            |                    | Support            | 2.42          | 1.17          | - 1.25 |
|            |                    | Student Engagement | 4.75          | 3.00          | - 1.75 |
| Petit      | - Coaches Institutes  
             |                     | Emotional Support | 5.44          | 6.63       | + 1.19 |
|            | - PLC Coach         | Classroom          |               |               |        |
|            | - TLSI Program      | Organization       | 5.42          | 6.08          | + 0.66 |
|            |                    | Instructional      |               |               |        |
|            |                    | Support            | 4.08          | 6.33          | + 2.25 |
|            |                    | Student Engagement | 5.25          | 6.00          | + 0.75 |
| Pierre     | - PLC Participant   
             |                     | Emotional Support | 5.75          | 5.63       | - 0.12 |
|            | - CLASS Feedback    | Classroom          |               |               |        |
|            |                    | Organization       | 6.50          | 5.58          | - 0.92 |
|            |                    | Instructional      |               |               |        |
|            |                    | Support            | 3.50          | 5.08          | + 1.58 |
|            |                    | Student Engagement | 5.25          | 6.50          | + 1.25 |
Table 4-2 Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pollack</th>
<th>Summer Institute</th>
<th>PLC Participant</th>
<th>TLSI Program</th>
<th>CLASS Feedback</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>Classroom Organization</th>
<th>Instructional Support</th>
<th>Student Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>6.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poole</td>
<td>PLC Participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>CLASS Feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ 0.62  
+ 0.83  
- 0.17  
+ 0.25  
+ 1.18  
+ 0.58  
+ 1.17  
+ 1.25  
0.00  
- 0.24  
+ 0.90  
+ 0.33
Table 4-3. Mean scores for participating teachers at Dawkins Grove Elementary. Compiled from Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>RSM Participation</th>
<th>CLASS Domains</th>
<th>Observation 1</th>
<th>Observation 2</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davenport</td>
<td>- Summer Institute</td>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Coaches Institutes</td>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- PLC Coach</td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>+ 1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- NSRF Winter Meeting</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>+ 1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- CLASS Feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>- PLC Participant</td>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>+ 0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- GRE Prep</td>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>+ 0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>+ 0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>+ 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devereaux</td>
<td>• Summer Institute</td>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>- 1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• PLC Participant</td>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>- 1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>- 0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>- 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodson</td>
<td>• CLASS Feedback</td>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>- 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>- 0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>- 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.00</td>
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Table 4-3 Continued.

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CHAPTER 5
THEORY OF SCHOOL AND TEACHER CHANGE:
TEACHER PARTICIPATION AND REFORM STRATEGIES

Theory of School and Teacher Change

The purpose of the next two chapters is to present a theory of school and teacher change and to illustrate each aspect of the theory using examples from the data. The theory of school and teacher change stipulates that teachers’ participation in collaborative professional development coupled with specific feedback on instruction can lead to substantive changes in teaching practice. Participating in collaborative professional development activities may vary among teachers and could mean participating in school-site professional learning communities (PLCs) or external institutes with colleagues from other schools. Each professional development offering contributes to teacher development because they provide a forum for teachers to access suggestions for improvement. However, these activities alone are not enough to significantly improve teaching practice. Teachers also require the additional support of receiving specific feedback that targets their particular instructional strengths and weaknesses. Teachers must participate in the two strategies in combination for school reform efforts to change instructional practice. Without participating in both, teachers continue to demonstrate ineffective classroom practice and limited instructional capacity, and thus confine the overall impact of the school reform initiative on teaching and learning.

The process of changing teaching through school reform begins with school culture. Teachers who participate in collaborative professional development and receive individualized feedback on their teaching engage in reform efforts to improve school culture and teaching practice. Teachers start by setting goals and action planning for their schools. Then, teachers make arrangements for regular collaboration with their colleagues within the school day. Further, teachers engage colleagues in their efforts by getting to know them better, setting ground rules,
and swapping ideas within the group. These community-building activities create a foundation for the genuine collaboration that informs teachers’ efforts to improve classroom practice.

The work of creating a collaborative school culture continues with the opening of professional dialogue about student learning, teacher practice, and school policy to critique and improve them. Creating teacher-led PLCs within schools facilitates this ongoing dialogue. By training certain teachers to act as PLC coaches, these groups can collectively analyze professional literature, resolve specific challenges, and examine teacher and student work using protocols to structure reflective learning conversations in a timely manner. This collaboration provides support for teachers’ efforts to enhance their instruction.

With comprehensive feedback on their teaching, teachers are able to set goals for their own instruction. Teachers target an area of their teaching in need of improvement, seek out new ideas, begin to implement them, and monitor the results. The importance of specific feedback cannot be understated because it informs teachers how they can enhance their delivery of developmentally appropriate practice. In addition, collaborative professional development provides teachers with the new ideas that they implement within the classroom. When both comprehensive instructional feedback and collaborative professional development are provided, teachers enhance their ability to provide instructional support to students.

The theory is summarized in Figure 5-1. The figure illustrates the relationships between major categories developed during a constant comparative analysis of the data. It illustrates the following key points: (1) In general, improvements in teacher practice were observed only when teachers participated in some aspect of the Ready Schools Miami initiative and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation feedback sessions; (2) Non-participating teachers limited their instructional improvement and the initiative’s impact; (3) Setting goals for
school culture and teaching practice was the first strategy employed by participating teachers; (4) Change strategies were enacted at both the teacher level and the school level by participating teachers; (5) Those teachers made changes in their own practice in order to implement more developmentally appropriate practice and impact their students; (6) Teachers also implemented efforts to create a collaborative school culture and engage in genuine collaboration and, in turn, became school leaders and improved the school culture; (7) Both internal and external supports were essential in overcoming obstacles to improving teaching practice and school culture; and (8) The extent to which teachers improved practice and school culture was delimited by the obstacles they faced at the teacher and school levels.

This chapter highlights the participation of teachers in the Ready Schools Miami (RSM) initiative and the reform strategies they implemented at the teacher and school levels while participating in the initiative. The following chapter will explore the outcomes associated with the reform strategies enacted by participating teachers as well as the specific supports and obstacles that helped or hindered in achieving those outcomes at the teacher and school levels. Because participation in the RSM initiative was a crucial component of achieving positive outcomes in the study, it is examined first.

Teacher Participation

Ready Schools Miami Activities

Incentives were used to recruit teacher participation in the RSM initiative. First, teachers who participated in external RSM training institutes or school-site PLC meetings were rewarded with Master Plan Points toward renewing their teaching certificate. Ms. Dodson, a fifth-year first grade teacher who did not participate in the school-site PLCs, knew of this incentive. She described the PLCs as the “learning environment that they have going on, and it's for Master...
Plan Points as well” (02/19/08). Many teachers at both schools took advantage of the opportunity to gain credit toward recertification by participating in the school-site PLCs.

In addition, teachers were encouraged to apply for entry to the Teacher Leadership for School Improvement (TLSI) graduate program to pursue a Master’s or Specialist degree in Curriculum and Instruction on a free tuition scholarship. Ms. Dubois, who was accepted to begin the program in Summer 2008, explained, “It's nice because it's also giving us an opportunity to further our education,…through the Master's program that's being offered” (02/25/08). Four of the twelve teachers participated in the TLSI program during the study, and two more teachers were applying at the end of the study.

Despite these incentives, participation in the RSM initiative was not universal among the teachers studied. Largely, this was due to the different approaches to participation in the school-site PLCs. For most teachers at the two schools, the school-site PLC sessions were the only tangible connection they had with the RSM initiative. At Patricia Smith, the administration made clear that it supported the efforts of the RSM initiative, and teachers were expected to participate in the PLC sessions at the school. When asked if participation in the PLCs was optional at her school, Ms. Pierre, a second-year kindergarten teacher, responded, “I would say it was recommended to do” (02/27/08). This careful choice of words illustrates what some teachers called being “voluntold” to participate. Voluntold meant that even though participation was not required, it was strongly recommended, and lack of participation was frowned upon. Ms. Pollack, a third-year second grade teacher, explained,

I know that there are other schools where it's more of a voluntary basis and if you want to do it, then you can do it. And here, there were people who couldn't even sign up for the Master Plan Points who still come to the meetings because they were told, this is something that everyone is doing. (02/18/08)
Thus, even if they weren’t able to reap the additional bonus of receiving Master Plan Points for their participation, all teachers at Patricia Smith participated in the school-site PLC sessions because it was expected of them by the school’s administration.

Dawkins Grove took a different approach to teacher participation in school-site PLCs. On the advice of the RSM external facilitator that worked with their school, the administration and trained PLC coaches allowed teachers at the school to choose whether or not they wanted to participate in school-site PLCs. Mr. Davenport, a second-year first grade teacher who served as one of the school’s PLC coaches, explained the recommendation of the external facilitator: “He just let us know that you don't pressure people into those things. You just let them come on their own. And if they come, they come. If they don't, they don't” (02/25/08). Teachers at Dawkins Grove generally saw this approach as a way to respect teachers’ professionalism and ensure that teachers who did come to the meetings were motivated to participate. Ms. Donato, a second-year kindergarten teacher, reasoned,

If you make something be mandatory, it kind of like sets the tone that it's mandatory, I don't really want to be here, so why am I here? But by eliminating that and making it an option, like you can either participate or not participate, it's up to you. We think it would be a great learning experience and a great experience for us and for our school culture. But if you choose not to participate, then that's fine, and we're not going to look at you differently. (02/21/08)

Nevertheless, Ms. Donato also recognized that allowing voluntary participation in the PLC meetings often reduced the choice about participation down to whether or not a teacher needed Master Plan Points to recertify. While some ambitious teachers decided to participate even though they did not need the points, others decided against participating. Ms. Donato admitted, “I think that some of the reason why not every teacher is engaged…is just tied to the Master Plan Points. They either don't need them for certification or it's not applicable to…their type of certification” (02/21/08).
Indeed, this suspicion was confirmed in Ms. Dodson’s interview. Ms. Dodson, having finished her Master’s degree in reading within the last two years, was in no immediate need of Master Plan Points. Even though she was initially interested in joining the PLC group, she encountered difficulties while trying to register on the school district website. Since she didn’t need the points for recertification, she didn’t pursue the matter further and gave up on the idea of the PLC meetings altogether. She said,

I don't know what happened. When they signed up, I said, “Well I need you to sign me up.” The person who was signing up said, “Okay, fine. We'll sign you up.” So I'm looking [at the website]. I'm looking. I'm never signed up, and when I tried to sign up I could never get in. And, I got frustrated and I just said, “Well forget it.” (02/19/08)

When asked why she didn’t participate in later meetings of the PLC group, Ms. Dodson figured, “I'm not going to sit in on something I'm not getting any points for when someone else is getting points for it” (02/19/08). Once the registration deadline passed, teachers could not register to receive credit for the ongoing PLC meetings at the school. Thus, the Master Plan Points that were designed as an incentive for teachers to participate in the meetings later became a barrier to recruiting new teachers to the PLC group throughout the rest of the year. Therefore, teachers like Ms. Dodson chose to simply stay out of the PLC groups and not participate in the initiative.

Overall, while participation in some aspect of the RSM initiative was related to improvements in teaching, such participation was not consistent among teachers. There were pros and cons to each approach taken by the two schools. Patricia Smith’s universal approach mandated that all teachers participate. On one hand, this approach ensured that all teachers were involved to some degree; on the other hand, it prohibited teachers from making a decision about their own professional growth. Dawkins Grove’s voluntary approach allowed teachers to choose whether or not they wanted to participate. This approach respected teacher’s professionalism, yet it also made it more difficult to recruit new participants.
Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Feedback

Teachers were offered the opportunity to receive feedback from each of the CLASS observations in the form of a score summary and observation report. The score summary showed the scores teachers received during each of the four observation periods and the mean scores for each dimension and domain. The report for each teacher’s observation summarized the field notes on which the scores were based. Each teacher was invited personally and by email to participate in a feedback session. During the feedback session, each of the dimensions of the CLASS observation protocol was explained. Teachers saw their scores and mean scores from national samples of over 4,000 teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2003; 2005). They also received a handout that explained each dimension and gave general suggestions on how to improve teaching practice in that area.

Nine of the twelve teachers elected to receive the CLASS feedback after the observations. While the observations were not intended to be more than a data collection procedure, the teachers saw them as part of the RSM initiative and expressed their appreciation at receiving such comprehensive feedback. Ms. Poole, a first grade veteran of 51 years, saw the observations as an opportunity to get feedback on weak areas in her teaching. She said, “I wanted you to let me know so I could improve on those things… if I made a mistake” (03/06/08). Ms. Dubois, a PLC coach and eighth-year second grade teacher, contrasted the CLASS observation with the sort of observations that they typically receive at their school. She explained, “I get an evaluation from the administration but it's not in depth like what you [the researcher] did. It's not really telling me, it's not very constructive…it's not thorough like what you did” (02/25/08).

Getting to know the instrument that was used to assess them was no doubt a benefit to teachers who were trying to improve their teaching and their scores from one observation to the
next. However, the importance of receiving comprehensive feedback about their teaching cannot be diminished. Certainly, it played an important role in the increase in scores between observations. For this reason, Figure 5-1 depicts one process for teachers who chose to participate in both the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback sessions toward the reform strategy of Setting Goals. Teachers that only participated in one of these aspects took a different path that led to limited impact. The path of non-participation is examined here.

**Non-Participation**

Four of the twelve teachers (Davis, Devereaux, Dodson, and Perez) were ‘non-participating’ teachers in that they did not participate in both the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback sessions. Of these four teachers, only Davis showed an increase in the domain scores between her CLASS observations. The other three teachers all exhibited decreases in their scores between observations. Ms. Dodson began with very high scores on each of the four domains, but each decreased, most notably the -1.00 change in Instructional Support. Both Ms. Devereaux and Ms. Perez showed substantial decreases between the observations with changes in domain scores ranging from -0.50 to -2.81 (Tables 4-2 and 4-3).

**Limiting Instructional Capacity**

Each of the four non-participating teachers exhibited some ineffective teaching practices during the two observations. These four teachers were not the only ones who exhibited such practices, but their lower scores indicate that they either continued to exhibit these ineffective practices or exhibited more of them in the second observation. Unlike participating teachers who showed improvements in their teaching, non-participating restricted their professional growth as educators. For this reason, the overall category was labeled Limiting Instructional Capacity.

Take, for example, notes gathered from Ms. Devereaux’s CLASS observation reports. In the first observation (12/18/07), practices observed included:
• Evidence of negative peer interactions (arguing, punching);
• Places one student at computer for period to allow instruction of other students;
• Favors right side of room when reading, asking questions;
• Expectations for behavior often unclear (Rules?);
• Lack of open-ended questions;
• Lack of clear routines/transition (attendance, pencils, moving between centers).

In the second observation (4/17/08), these ineffective practices were more prevalent:

• Instances of peer negativity (namecalling, throwing bookbags, hitting each other);
• One instance of fighting (one student was thrown down);
• Reading assignment seemed unchallenging for most students in small group instruction;
• Teacher announced that one student "needs help" in front of all other students;
• [One student] allowed to play on his own throughout significant portions of the period;
• Other students distracted by [one student] getting to play on computer; say it's unfair;
• Behavior expectations are enforced inconsistently; significant time spent on behavior;
• At times, students are focused on rote instruction; concepts/objectives disconnected.

The prevalence of these ineffective practices accounted for the decrease in Ms. Devereaux’s domain scores, particularly in the areas of Emotional Support and Classroom Organization. In fact, the observation had to be momentarily interrupted when Ms. Devereaux asked the researcher to escort “one student” to the office. It was clear that the boy had a disability, a conclusion reiterated by the school’s administration. Yet, in almost four months Ms. Deveraux had shown no improvement in the way she handled his behavior. On the contrary, her strategy of placing him away from other students on the computer seemed even less effective during the second observation. While Ms. Devereaux is but one teacher, these examples are representative of the ineffective teaching practices that were observed within the classrooms of non-participating teachers. In turn, Limiting Instructional Capacity related to Confining Impact because the lack of improved instructional practice in non-participating teachers’ classrooms restricted the overall impact of the initiative. The category of Confining Impact is examined here.

**Confining Impact**

When teachers did not participate in both the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback sessions, non-participation led to increasing isolation from colleagues and diminishing
motivation. As a result, the initiative fell short of improving the instruction and collaboration of all teachers.

Interviews with Ms. Dodson provide perspective on what the RSM initiative looked like from the outside because she was the only non-participating teacher that agreed to individual interviews. Ms. Dodson was a strong, independent teacher that had a good relationship with the other teachers in her first grade team. Beyond that, her relationships with other teachers were strained. She described examples of the lack of congeniality with some colleagues in the school: “If I say ‘Hi’ to you in the morning and you pass me by as if you don't see me. It's just two of us in the hallway. Things like that” (05/27/08). Like many other teachers working in urban schools, Ms. Dodson was on the verge of burning out:

I'm really not at a good stage right now because I'm thinking about switching fields because I'm disappointed. I don't know if I need to change to another school or you know. I'm not getting what I think that I should be getting. (02/19/08)

Without a forum such as PLC meetings for Ms. Dodson to get to know her colleagues, strengthen bonds with other staff members, or share challenges with colleagues for feedback, Ms. Dodson’s difficulties continued. When asked what ongoing professional development was available to teachers at Dawkins Grove, Ms. Dodson replied simply, “I don't know what goes on with the other teachers here” (02/19/08) in her first interview. In the second interview, that lack of communication persisted: “I don't know if there is something in particular that stands out to me. I haven't noticed. I haven't noticed” (05/27/08). This lack of awareness of any ongoing professional development opportunities through the RSM initiative prompted the researcher to ask the question: “From your perspective as someone who didn't participate in the professional learning communities - What do you understand Ready Schools to be?” Ms. Dodson’s response was succinct and blunt: “Actually, it's not talked about” (05/27/08).
Ms. Dodson’s non-participation prevented her from making any assessment of the initiative’s impact on the school. If she didn’t know what the initiative was supposed to do, it was impossible for her to evaluate whether it had succeeded. When asked if the RSM initiative had an impact on teaching at Dawkins Grove, Ms. Dodson replied, “Maybe for them [participating teachers], but I haven't really seen it, because I'm not really there, so I can't really say” (05/27/08). To the extent that Ms. Dodson’s perspective is representative of the experiences of other non-participating teachers, it was as if the RSM initiative did not exist for non-participants.

In conclusion, the experience of non-participating teachers reinforces the centrality of the active engagement of teachers in reform efforts in improving teaching practice and school culture. For some teachers, participating in the collaborative professional development offered by the RSM initiative was not enough to significantly improve their teaching practice. Beginning to collaborate with other teachers through school-site PLC sessions did little to substantively improve what goes on in their classrooms. These teachers required the additional support of receiving feedback that targeted their particular instructional weaknesses. On the other hand, receiving this feedback alone was similarly insufficient. Without structured means to communicate with other teachers, non-participating teachers became isolated from their colleagues. Even though instructional feedback may have helped these teachers to ascertain what areas of their practice needed attention, they lacked a job-embedded forum to access suggestions for improvement. Thus, both individual feedback on their teaching practice and collaborative professional development were necessary to substantively change what went on inside the classroom. The process by which those changes occurred is explored in the next section which
illustrates the reform strategies enacted by participating teachers within their classrooms and at the school level.

Reform Strategies

When new programs are introduced to school faculties, they are often met with initial reluctance and wariness. The RSM initiative was no different. Teachers described an initial hesitation when learning about the initiative, particularly those teachers that attended the initial Summer Institute in June 2007. Mr. Davenport talked about his entering expectations,

When I first came to the Ready Schools workshop for the Summer Heat, I'm not going to tell you a story. I won't lie. I thought it was going to just be another boring meeting where I sit in there taking notes and yadda yadda yadda. (2/25/08)

Nevertheless, something happened at that initial training and trainings after it that seemed to change teachers’ minds about the initiative. Teachers talked both about RSM’s message of teacher empowerment and professional growth as well as the engaging way in which the workshops were presented. When asked what changed her mind after her initial reluctance and lack of understanding, Ms. Dubois said, “What changed my mind is seeing that it's giving teachers power. It's empowering us to help each other, to make changes in the classroom and to be reflective learners” (02/25/08). What brought Mr. Davenport into the fold was the interactive way in which the workshops were facilitated. He explained,

The way that [our facilitator] brought things to us, it helped me to get more engaged. It was kind of a different feeling. … He said this work is very important. He described this work that we do as very important. And I kind of took like ownership to what he said (02/25/08).

Changed minds led teachers to buy into the RSM initiative. Once teachers were onboard, they began the critical work of reflecting on their teaching practice and school culture and set goals for themselves at the teacher and school level.
Setting Goals

The process of setting goals usually began at the school level as teachers began to consider broad reform efforts. Those efforts are considered first, followed by goals set at the teacher level.

School level

Reflecting on the current state of their teaching practice and school culture to set goals for their improvement was the first step in beginning the change process for participating teachers. Goals were set at the school level to improve school culture and at the teacher level to improve instruction. Because teachers’ first encounter with the RSM initiative was the Summer Institute in June 2007, the process of setting goals usually began at the school level when a school team worked together at the Summer Institute. Afterwards, teachers began to set more individual goals for their teaching practice, usually after receiving CLASS feedback.

At the Summer Institute, school teams were prompted to reflect on their school culture by completing an activity using the School Culture Typologies Matrix (Gruenert, Valentine, & Quinn, 2000). In addition, school teams were presented with the results of a school culture survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998) that had been administered in their schools at the end of the previous school year. After completing the activity to understand their own impressions of the school culture and seeing the survey results to see how those impressions compared to the perspectives of the rest of the staff, school teams collaboratively devised an action plan to improve a targeted aspect of their school culture.

The school plan designed by teachers at Patricia Smith listed the desired state as: “To create an effective PLC fostering a culture with trust and collaboration and focused on student learning and achievement” (06/15/07). Trust was a major focus because it resurfaced in the plan in “Step 1: Spread the word and begin to build trust.” Ms. Pollack attended the Summer Institute
and helped design the school’s action plan. In her interview, she made reference to the survey results that were given to school teams at the Summer Institute. She said,

> There were questions about communication and honesty and trust, things that were issues from the survey we did last year, I believe.

*Researcher:* The culture survey?

*Ms. Pollack:* The culture survey, yes. Thank you. Issues that we had that we wanted to figure out how to work through them, as a staff and come more together. (05/22/08)

Because developing communication, honesty, and trust were the main focus of the action plan, Ms. Pollack described the school’s overall focus as “mainly about staff working together and how that can change the school climate and help the students achieve more” (02/18/08). With this overall vision in mind, participating teachers at Patricia Smith took specific steps toward building a genuinely collaborative culture.

At Dawkins Grove, teachers had similar concerns and developed similar goals for the school culture. The Dawkins Grove action plan lists the “Current Reality” of the school as: “Cooperation within, not across grade levels. Teachers not collaborating much. Environment not inviting” (06/15/07). The action plan’s “Desired State” was listed as: “A pleasant learning environment where teachers and students are eager to come to school. Having clear expectations for our learning environment the students to meet them [sic].” Ms. Dubois, who attended the meeting and helped create the action plan, described the main focus of the goals her school set, “The main focus has just been getting everyone on board and getting them to work together…kind of like building the morale of the school” (02/25/08). Mr. Davenport also helped to create the Dawkins Grove plan at the Summer Institute. In his first interview, he explained the importance of the plan in helping teachers take steps toward improving school culture: “One of the main points that I remember that we had was having a cohesiveness among our colleagues” (02/25/08). Like the teachers at Patricia Smith, this school team also set goals for itself toward
improving collaboration and collegiality among the staff. As Mr. Davenport explained, the steps that participating teachers employed toward improving school culture derived from the goals teachers set at the school level. The specific action steps taken will be described in a later section. First, the goals teachers set for their instructional practice are examined.

**Teacher Level**

After the initial round of CLASS observations in December, the feedback that teachers received often prompted them to set individual goals for themselves in terms of improving their teaching practice. The feedback sessions seemed to reaffirm teachers’ sense of their areas of strength and their areas of concern in their teaching practice. From the feedback, participating teachers set goals that described the changes that they wanted to make and their reasons for making them.

Take the example of Ms. Donato. Ms. Donato was a Teach For America teacher in the final year of her two-year commitment to Dawkins Grove. In addition to participating in the school-site PLC meetings, Ms. Donato also benefited from professional development opportunities provided by Teach For America, including grade-level PLCs outside school and regular classroom observations by her Teach For America program director. Because of her participation in Teach For America, Ms. Donato was already used to the idea of being observed and collaborating with fellow teachers. After seeing the results of her first CLASS observation, Ms. Donato set some instructional goals for herself related to the Emotional Support and Instructional Support domains. In her first interview, Ms. Donato described how the CLASS observation illustrated a need to build a warmer climate for her students. She became more cognizant of the way she interacted with students. She explained,

> When I was observed, I was seen as being very short, as not paying attention to how my students were feeling, and by negating their feelings that clearly their behavior…,
welcoming feelings weren't going to be there as a result. So I tried to really be mindful of that. (02/21/08)

Ms. Donato wanted to pay more attention to the way in which she interacted with her students to try and create an inviting learning environment. So she devised steps to make the room a more inviting place to be by using more reinforcements to encourage positive student behavior and playing soft music during work time.

In addition, Ms. Donato’s participation in professional development led her to set another goal related to her instruction. She saw that she needed to work on differentiating her instruction. She realized, “I really need to differentiate in my classroom and really focus on how I can utilize different center activities to push my students and target their needs” (02/21/08). In addition to highlighting the goal she set for herself of implementing differentiated instruction, Ms. Donato’s comments shed light on the strategy she used to target this area of concern: centers. By creating a variety of centers, particularly literacy centers, Ms. Donato was able to differentiate instruction for her students and provide them with the instructional support they needed to improve their reading abilities.

Ms. Donato’s example is representative of the process that participating teachers went through in selecting an area of their teaching that needed improvement and setting some instructional goals. From those goals, teachers devised strategies to address those areas and began to implement them. The process by which teachers experimented with new instructional practices is detailed in a later section. However, just as in setting goals, participating teachers took collective action at the school level to improve school culture before they took individual action at the classroom level. The next section describes the actions teachers took to improve school culture.
Creating a Collaborative Culture

Participating teachers followed through on their action plans by taking specific steps to create a collaborative culture at their schools. Improving communication, building trust, and strengthening relationships among staff were at the center of the school action plans described above. Teachers took action to increase collaboration, build community, and facilitate communication. Mr. Davenport explained, “It's like everybody is actually interacting with one another, and not just grade level to grade level. It's trying to be across grade level” (02/25/08).

Finding time for collaboration

Because the school schedule provided limited time for collaboration in the past, teachers’ first step toward creating a collaborative culture was finding time within the school day and calendar to hold PLC meetings among the faculty. At both schools, the time allotted to PLC sessions consisted of regular hourly meetings at the end of the school day and portions of official teacher workdays. Because the teachers’ contract provided for two faculty meetings per month, both schools decided to replace one of these monthly meetings with a PLC meeting. This allowed teachers at least one hour per month to hold PLC sessions. These monthly sessions were usually conducted on a Wednesday, when students were released from school one hour early to provide time for regular teacher professional development.

Additional time was found by using portions of the official teacher workdays, which are used for meetings, workshops, and trainings. Both schools used a portion of the two teacher planning days prior to the opening of school in August 2007 to introduce the RSM initiative to the staff. Dawkins Grove devoted a whole teacher planning day to kicking off the initiative; however, the school did not use additional teacher workdays throughout the rest of the year. On the other hand, PLC coaches at Patricia Smith used a morning session to do the RSM introduction and took advantage of teacher workdays during the school year to hold PLC
sessions. They were able to hold a five-hour PLC session on one of these days. In addition, Patricia Smith closed the year with a two-hour PLC session on the last teacher workday after students had left. In her three years experience at the school, Ms. Pollack had not seen such a consistent use of teacher work time devoted to teacher learning. She commented, “Since Ready Schools has started, it's with the professional learning communities, that's really been the most…frequent use of teacher learning time…I think that this is really the only time I've ever seen school wide, whole faculty do teacher learning” (02/18/08).

### Getting everyone onboard

In addition to finding time, the coaches who led the PLC sessions had to motivate their colleagues to participate in the activities being offered at the meetings. When asked to describe the focus of her efforts within PLCs at Dawkins Grove, Ms. Dubois answered, “The main focus has just been getting everyone onboard and getting them to work together” (02/25/08). “Getting everyone onboard” meant more than simply getting teachers to show up at the PLC meeting; it also involved motivating teachers to actively engage in the activities at the meeting. Ms. Dubois made this clear: “Getting people to attend, and not only attend, but to take part. Like not just sit there and do nothing, but actually contribute to conversations and try to stay focused” (02/25/08).

At Patricia Smith, getting teachers to attend was less difficult because attendance was mandatory; however, getting teachers engaged was still an issue. PLC coaches came up with creative ways to motivate other teachers to participate, including renaming the sessions and offering refreshments. For example, Ms. Petit described the introductory PLC session held with the whole faculty: “We called the first…one, Pop In Ready Schools. And it was kind of friendly because we had popcorn and soda” (02/28/08). Ms. Petit went on to explain the reasoning behind the special name and refreshments. Patricia Smith PLC coaches thought that when teachers were comfortable, they were more likely to engage:
We just do it like that, give them a special title so they [teachers] can be more… comfortable being there. It's like, it's not something really they think that's, it's professional, it's an official meeting. So being there and eating, having snack, and talking to each other, they would feel more comfortable to share their experiences or knowledge on whatever we are talking about or discussing. (02/28/08)

Thus, beyond finding the time to hold PLC meetings with the faculty, PLC coaches had to find ways to encourage other teachers to actively engage in the meetings, and they took specific steps to do so. These strategies were aimed squarely at reforming a previous school culture based on passive participation in professional development.

**Breaking the ice**

Continuing in the direction of improving communication among staff members, PLC coaches used specific activities to encourage interaction among the staff. Changing the culture of an existing school is challenging in large part due to the relationships between staff members that have developed over previous years. It is often necessary to reacquaint staff members with each other. That meant PLC coaches used activities to prompt faculty members to re-examine their previously held judgments of each other and get to know one another in a new light. The PLC observation at Patricia Smith offered an example of this kind of activity. The game was called Two Truths and a Lie, and it asked each player to come up with three statements – two factual, one fictional – about themselves. The other members of the group had to uncover which statement is a “lie.” The activity was described in the following field notes:

One table of two male teachers joins another table of 4 female teachers. They begin playing the game, joking and laughing with each other as they begin…One teacher shares, "I went into the service when I was 34 years old, I went to Europe, and I've got 5 grandchildren." He laughs as other teachers try to figure out which statement is a lie. (01/18/08)

The icebreaker games were great examples of how teachers were able to get to know each other through small activities. By asking teachers to share things about themselves, the other members of the group got to know each participant better.
These icebreaker activities were especially popular with PLC participants, and that is reflected in the numerous descriptions of icebreaker activities in the interviews, the PLC observations, and the artifacts. In addition, five of eight interviewees cited the activities as beneficial to the staff. Ms. Pollack explained,

“There are people who I can say I have not worked with, I've never worked with, or I prefer not to work with, to be honest. But I can tell you things about their personal lives because of the icebreakers…Even if it's somebody that I've had a bad experience with, or I have no experience with, I just think it's, that's the time when you get to see, “Oh, maybe I…looked at this person that wrong way before. Oh, we have something in common after all.” (02/18/08)

Here, Ms. Pollack illustrates how the icebreaker activities allowed her to get to know her colleagues differently. She was able to reconsider her previous judgments about people when she realized that she shared things in common with them. In this way, she and the rest of the staff were able to get to know each other anew, and the PLC meetings contributed to improving communication and collaboration.

Another strategy to encourage interaction among faculty members was the use of mixed groups during the activities of the PLC meetings. PLC coaches often randomly divided faculty members into smaller groups. This encouraged interaction among teachers because PLC participants were pushed to work with teachers who weren’t necessarily in their grade levels, subject areas, or circle of friends. One example of this strategy was observed at Patricia Smith. It was described in the following field notes:

[The PLC coach] directs their attention to the agenda, saying that the teachers will number off 1 to 4, then read the article and write…He begins counting off teachers. Groups begin to gather as Ms. Pereira passes out chart paper to each of the groups. Teachers begin shouting out, “Who's a 1? Who's a 3?” And, ”Ms. Pollack, are you a 2?” Or, “Where's Three?” “Three's are over here.” It takes three minutes for teachers to assemble into their groups. (01/18/08)
Creating mixed groups promoted interaction among teachers that don’t normally engage each other on a daily basis. It also helped to encourage interaction across grade levels by developing connections between staff members across the school. Ms. Petit, a PLC coach at Patricia Smith explained, “When we have the mixed groups, they don't sit always with their friends, so it's helped” (02/28/08). By creating mixed groups, PLC coaches break the cliquish nature of some faculty interaction and encourage interaction among different groups of people. In turn, this helps to increase communication.

Setting group norms

Increasing the quantity of communication among faculty members does not guarantee the quality of that communication. To promote quality interaction among faculty members, PLC coaches set norms for interaction among the faculty. On the advice of the RSM external facilitators that trained them, PLC coaches brought back a list of suggested norms that they presented to their PLC groups for revision and acceptance. These norms served as ground rules for the way in which teachers were to engage with each other and the activities presented during PLC sessions. The agenda from Dawkins Grove’s introductory PLC meeting listed the “Suggested Agreements” for the group as: “Be present. Share wisdom. Refrain from judging; seek to clarify. Try out something new, then reflect. Maintain confidentiality” (08/15/07). At Patricia Smith, norms were prominently posted on chart paper and reviewed during the PLC observation. The day’s agenda also included the item, “Revisit community norms” (01/18/08). At the meeting, Ms. Petit reviewed the norms, which included “Speak from the heart,” for the whole group. When she was finished, Ms. Pereira “interjects, saying that we need to focus on ‘speaking from the heart.’ She says that she believes many people are thinking things that they are not saying, so they should say them so we can begin to reflect on them more” (01/18/08). By setting and reviewing group norms, coaches helped prompt PLC participants be more mindful of
the way in which they interact with one another. This was an attempt to improve the quality of
the communication among members of the staff and create a collaborative school culture.

**Sharing strategies**

Beyond taking steps to ensure the quality of the communication among staff members,
PLC coaches had to consider the content of their collaborative efforts. The content of PLC
meetings determined the tone of the discussion and the level of engagement by participants.
Because the PLC groups were still new to their school staff, coaches at both schools chose
content that maintained a predominantly positive focus, rather than a critical focus on the school,
its culture, and its teaching. Coaches chose to work toward collaborative critique by celebrating
the positive things that were already in place at the school, boosting the faculty morale, and
sharing some successful strategies among teachers. Ms. Dubois, a PLC coach at Dawkins Grove,
explained that one of the main activities of the PLC was to share “ideas about what we do in the
classroom, what works with our students, success stories actually. So we were sharing successful
things that work with our students in our classrooms…with our colleagues” (02/25/08). By
sharing the success stories with colleagues, not only was Ms. Dubois giving and getting new
ideas, she also got some validation as a teacher. She said, “I like the success stories because not
only are we able to share, but… sometimes you need to give yourself a pat on the back, and it's
nice when someone else can give you a pat on the back” (02/25/08).

The sharing of successful strategies was observed during the PLC observation at Dawkins
Grove. In a meeting after school on a Wednesday, Mr. Davenport and Ms. Dubois led the group
through a Success Analysis, a protocol from the National School Reform Faculty:

Mr. Davenport begins to explain the agenda for the day, saying that the meeting will
focus on a success they've had in the classroom. He says that the whole group will
break into smaller groups to have discussions of the successes they've had in the
class. (02/13/08)
Once the groups began discussing their successful strategies, both Mr. Davenport and Ms. Dubois joined one of the small groups to discuss strategies with their colleagues. Ms. Dubois joined a small group of five female teachers. The teachers took turns sharing different successes they had recently in the classroom. One teacher explained that because the first graders’ reading scores were so low, she was persistently encouraging them to read more. That strategy resulted in some success with one of her struggling students that day:

She says she tries to encourage students to read books with more text than pictures. She tells about a success with a little girl today in which the little girl was practicing reading a sentence for 6 minutes and finally did it successfully. She hoped that it would be contagious among the class. (02/13/08)

Here, the teacher was able to share a specific story about success with a single child with her colleagues. Small successes, such as having a girl read a single sentence that she had to practice for 6 minutes, are the sorts of rewards that give teachers the energy to continue working in difficult situations at low-performing schools. They renew commitment and reinforce a teacher's sense of efficacy, so that even when the collective test scores of the first grade were not excellent, the teacher could celebrate this singular success with a little girl and know that she was having some impact.

Further, creating a forum to celebrate these small successes encouraged teachers to buy into the work of the PLC and provided other teachers with new ideas for strategies to use in their own classrooms. Six of the eight teachers interviewed talked about sharing strategies with and borrowing strategies from other teachers in the PLC meetings. This caused the teachers to see the value of collaborating with colleagues. For example, Mr. Davenport described how he borrowed and adapted an idea he heard from another teacher during a PLC meeting. He said,

One of the ladies in our group gave us an illustration that she makes her kids think, and she has herself out in the ocean, and she tells the kids not to let her drown, and it makes them think. I guess every time they get a wrong answer she gets further and further under

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water, and the kids actually get excited. So, I took that strategy, and I used Hangman. So, I said, “Don't let Mr. Pressley get hanged up here. If y'all keep giving me wrong answers, I'm just going to hang myself!” (02/25/08)

The chance to share such strategies helped to build relationships and interdependence among the staff as they came to see each other as resources. This interdependence helped to build a more collaborative school culture.

Together, participating teachers, particularly the PLC coaches, took several collective efforts at creating a collaborative culture at the school. They began by finding the time and creating the structures for collaboration embedded within the school day and calendar. Teachers began to ‘break the ice’ as they moved on to encouraging colleagues to not only attend PLC meetings but also to actively engage in the activities. To ensure the quality of communication among staff, PLC coaches helped the PLC group adopt norms for interaction to outline what group members expected of themselves. Finally, to continue building community and to establish the professional nature of the work, teachers celebrated their small successes and shared strategies. Each of these efforts contributed to the establishment of a collaborative school culture at Patricia Smith and Dawkins Grove. Building a foundation based on community and professional practice was helpful to participating teachers’ later efforts to engage in critical collaboration. Those efforts are described here.

**Engaging in Critical Collaboration**

Engaging in critical collaboration differed from creating a collaborative culture because the process focused specifically on improving the professional practice of teachers and the learning of students. Critical collaboration here should be understood as teachers’ efforts to *critique* each others’ practice toward improving their instruction, not to engage in an analysis based in the tradition of critical pedagogy or critical theory. Teachers’ work toward critiquing each others’ instructional practice began with the strengthening of relationships among
colleagues described in the previous section. Building a sense of community was essential to teachers feeling comfortable sharing their practice with one another. The work continued with the opening of professional dialogue around teacher practices and school policies to critique and improve them. Seven of the eight teachers interviewed made reference to the prevalence of this professional dialogue in PLC sessions. Ms. Donato described the PLC meetings as “a forum where we can kind of just discuss what's going on in our classroom whether it's negative or positive” (02/21/08). Mr. Davenport said the PLC was a chance for teachers to “share different teaching experiences, their strengths, weaknesses, questions that they may have, concerns that they may have” (02/25/08). Perhaps Ms. Pollack described it most plainly when she said that the dialogue that occurred in the PLC sessions were “conversations that I wouldn't have had in the lunchroom” (02/18/08).

From teachers’ descriptions, an essential feature of the PLC groups was their horizontal leadership structure. The groups were comprised only of teachers, not administrators. Because the groups were led by fellow teachers, there was an absence of hierarchy. This freed teachers to express themselves more openly without feeling that they were being evaluated by superiors and without fear of reprisal. Mr. Davenport, one of the coaches at Dawkins Grove, said the PLC “gives them [teachers] an opportunity to actually talk about things that's going on within the classroom without being hounded per se by administration telling you what you're doing wrong” (05/15/08). Ms. Pollack, a PLC participant at Patricia Smith, had a similar feeling about the conversations within her PLC group. She said, “We tend to have really great discussions that consist of teachers…sharing thoughts that they probably would not be willing to go into the office and share” (05/22/08). After describing one such conversation, Ms. Pollack added, “Had the administrators been there, I don't think it would have been said at all” (05/22/08). Based on
the descriptions, it seemed necessary that both PLC coaches and participants see themselves as having equal authority in the school in order for teachers to actively engage in critical conversation about school practices.

**Focusing on student learning**

Given the work toward establishing community and the horizontal leadership, the PLCs were successful in beginning critical conversation about the professional practice of the school. Indeed, four of the interviewees explained that the specific focus of those conversations was aimed at improving student learning. Ms. Pierre said that the conversations centered on “discussing different things that we can do to better serve the school and the students” (02/27/08). And, Ms. Donato added that a major purpose of the PLC was to create “a shared vision of…student achievement and student well-being” (02/21/08).

In order to work toward that vision, the PLC coaches and participants engaged in numerous activities within their PLC groups that centered on critically reflecting on practice. PLC coaches attended an initial coaches training to teach them how to facilitate professional dialogue using protocols to structure the conversations in the style of the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF). Each PLC coach was provided with an NSRF manual of protocols and other materials to maximize the effectiveness of PLC sessions focused on examining teachers’ challenges, professional literature, teacher work samples, or student work samples. Six of the interviewees described specific protocols they engaged in during PLC sessions. The protocols guided a reflective conversation about their practice by moving from description to interpretation to implication to application. The PLC coaches spoke clearly about how the protocols helped to bring focus to professional conversations. For example, Mr. Davenport said, “It makes your life a lot easier if you go by the protocols and run them and do things the correct way” (02/25/08). By
providing structure, the protocols allowed teachers to engage in reflective conversations within a limited timeframe.

**Reading professional literature**

Using the protocols, teachers engaged in a variety of different activities within their PLC groups. An activity that teachers at both schools engaged in within their PLC groups was reading and analyzing professional literature. Generally, PLC Coaches chose text-based protocols from their manual to guide the discussion of a selected text. PLC coaches at Patricia Smith chose a piece of reading about developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) that was given to them at the RSM Summer Institute in June 2007 to share with the rest of their staff. The agenda from the January 18, 2008, meeting shows that teachers engaged in two activities around DAP: “Activating What We Know about Developmentally Appropriate Practices” and “Extending What We Know about Developmentally Appropriate Practices.” The first activity asked teachers to work within a small group to generate a chart of examples of what four different characteristics of DAP “look like” and “sound like.” The second activity asked teachers to read further about DAP and then compare their own list to a list of DAP Strategies to Increase/Decrease.

PLC coaches at Dawkins Grove used a short article they received from their external facilitator entitled “The Gray School” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2007). The article describes a fictional school with a dysfunctional school culture that inhibits reflection and communication among teachers and with the administration. It illustrates the consequences this type of environment has on teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Ms. Dubois, one of the PLC coaches, gave the article to her staff. She explained, “We did another one about the Gray School. We did like a reading assignment and compared that school to this school a little bit” (02/25/08). Reading the article as a group allowed Dawkins Grove teachers to collectively
reflect on their own school culture and create a vision of what they hoped for it to become. Mr. Davenport, the other PLC Coach, was struck by the quality of the conversation within his PLC session. He said, “After I read it, and not only after I read it, after you heard discussion from other teachers and how they viewed the Gray School, it was just like a lot of like wow…It was good discussion” (02/25/08). The success of this activity was confirmed by an email sent by the external facilitator to Mr. Davenport and Ms. Dubois to provide feedback from his observation of the session. The external facilitator wrote, “Discussion was reflective – participants were drawing connections between the content of the article and their own work context” (01/16/08).

**Sharing challenges**

In addition to reading professional literature, the PLC members shared challenges with each other to productively resolve teacher difficulties and dilemmas. At Dawkins Grove, this was done informally. Ms. Donato explained that at the beginning of the meeting participants would get the opportunity to share what’s going on in their classrooms during the Connections protocol. She said, “For ten minutes, people just kind of throw out something that's going well in their classroom or something that they know they're struggling with, that their students are struggling with” (02/21/08). Mr. Davenport talked about communicating with his grade level team members, including Ms. Dodson. Ms. Dodson taught reading, while the other first grade teacher taught math, science, and social studies to the same group of children. Mr. Davenport had a self-contained classroom where he taught all subjects to one group of students. Depending on the nature of help that he needed, he knew to go to one teacher or the other. He said, “Whenever I need any reading tips, I go to Ms. Dodson, or if I feel like I need some help with how you do this science or social studies, I go to [the other first grade teacher]” (02/25/08). This informal sharing of challenges helped teachers to overcome some of the challenges that they faced in the
classroom. However, the PLC group at Dawkins Grove never reached the point where these challenges were presented formally and analyzed collectively using protocols.

The PLC group at Patricia Smith did have teachers formally present a challenge or dilemma they faced for consideration by their colleagues. PLC coaches guided this process using the Consultancy protocol. In the Consultancy protocol, a presenting teacher shares with the group a particular challenge that he or she is having. The purpose of the protocol is to help the teacher think more expansively about that challenge so that the teacher can work to resolve it. The facilitator takes the group through a series of conversation steps to first describe and clarify the nature of the dilemma, push the presenting teachers’ thinking through probing questions from the group, and generate feedback for the presenting teacher on what other members of the group might do in a similar situation. Ms. Pollack described the presenter’s role plainly: “The presenter has a chance to go through it and say, ‘This is something that I already did and this is what worked and this is what didn't work, or I haven't done this yet. How can I change it?’” (02/18/08)

Further, Ms. Pollack described a conversation about a dilemma one teacher presented around working with an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) student. The student was a “Level 1” student, indicating that she spoke little to no English. The teacher had no experience working with ESOL students, and the other students began to think the teacher was favoring the ESOL student because she spent so much time trying to help her. Ms. Pollack explained that within the PLC group,

People suggested, “Have her work with a partner…See if you can find somebody to translate the work for her into Spanish so that she would be able to read it on her own, and maybe work with her on it later in English.”… Somebody brought up a computer program that they do, and the math program is in English and Spanish, and the little girl is only doing it in English, and they said, “Why don't you have her do classwork in English where you can assist her, and then when she's on the computer by herself, give it
to her in Spanish?” And the people gave her a lot of ideas. I mean she's not really familiar with the computer programs, but the technology facilitator was there, and knew about the program and could offer that, so it seems to help her, seems to give her ideas. (02/18/08)

The comments reflect the benefits of collaborating with other teachers to overcome teachers’ challenges. The teacher Ms. Pollack described benefited from sharing her challenge with fellow teachers, including the technology coordinator. These kinds of sessions helped teachers to think more critically about their practice and more extensively about their difficulties. In other words, these sessions were the epitome of critical collaboration among teachers.

**Looking at teacher and student work**

Examples of further critical collaboration were found at Patricia Smith as well. While the PLC groups at Dawkins Grove never moved beyond the informal sharing of challenges, teachers in the Patricia Smith PLC groups brought in artifacts from their work for the collective analysis of the group, including samples of teacher and student work. Ms. Pollack said that analyzing examples of teacher work, such as lesson plans, was a chance to “see teacher lessons and how they're used and how they could be used or made better” (02/18/08). The PLC coaches employed the Tuning protocol to guide conversation around examining such examples. Ms. Petit, one of the coaches, explained the process of examining a lesson plan in her interview. She said,

Tuning the lesson is a teacher coming with the lesson plan and the teacher will have all the materials needed for the lesson plan…and we have a group of teachers, which was a group of teachers from different areas…They will go over the lesson plan and see how is the lesson plan designed, activities, materials, everything. And the teacher will also explain the lesson plan, what he or she has done, and how the students reacted. And after, we will talk about what went wrong in the lesson plan. First, what went well. We point first to the positive things in the lesson plan. And then, what he or she could have done to make better so students can succeed or learn more from the lesson plan that she had made. (02/28/08)

This process exemplifies the nature of critical collaboration because it prompts teachers to examine an actual sample of teacher work in an effort to improve teaching practice in the school.
In addition to looking at samples of teacher work, PLC participants at Patricia Smith also examined samples of student work. Ms. Petit also explained how she facilitated these sessions. She said,

Sometimes we go over their [students’] work samples to see what is missing there. Why didn't they get it well or for some who did it, some students who did it well, how can some can get it and others cannot get in the same classroom, same teacher, and same environment? And [we look] to see what we can do so every student can achieve and succeed. (02/28/08)

Both Ms. Poole and Ms. Pierre described the experience of analyzing student work in Ms. Petit’s early elementary PLC group in their interviews. Ms. Poole spoke about a first grade teacher who brought in handwriting samples to examine. She said,

One teacher brought some materials, and we went through it and we talked about it, we discussed it…It was students' writing. First grade, it was first grade students…There was students' handwriting and the writing was on different levels. Some you could read, some you could not. (03/06/08)

Ms. Poole, a veteran teacher of over 50 years, took something from the session. She explained that the group discussion “tells me that I should come back and look at my students and the ones that are not improving, I should work a little bit harder with those students to kind of bring them up to standard” (03/06/08). Ms. Pierre, a novice teacher of only two years experience, took even more from the conversation. She did not realize the importance of developing handwriting in the early grades. She figured, “As long as it's on the line, that was fine to me” (02/27/08). However, she walked away from the PLC meeting with a new way of assessing handwriting when other teachers showed how the handwriting should fit into the handwriting sheets provided to students. Those teachers showed us that they [students] are not supposed to write the lower case letters on top of the line also, like make it too big. It has to stay on the middle line…except if it's a capital letter. And some of the other letters can be on top but not everything…I really didn't pay attention to that before and now I do. (02/27/08)
Thus, the experience was valuable for both experienced and novice teachers because they both took something from the conversation about what they are doing in their own classrooms. Examining student work samples provides a view of the quality of classroom instruction and highlights areas where instruction can be improved.

Overall, there were numerous strategies that allowed teachers to engage in critical collaboration at their schools. PLC coaches and participants employed conversation protocols to help them maintain a focus on improving student learning. Teachers at both schools engaged in reading professional literature to prompt reflection on their teaching practice and school culture. In addition, teachers at both schools shared challenges with their colleagues, either informally through dialogue or formally with the use of protocols during a PLC session. In addition, teachers at Patricia Smith collectively examined samples of teacher and student work to inform and improve their instructional practice.

Limits to success

Despite these examples of critical collaboration, the extent to which teachers at each of the schools successfully engaged in critical collaboration within the first year of the initiative’s implementation should not be overstated. It must be noted that teachers at Dawkins Grove never reached the point where they were formally sharing and analyzing dilemmas of practice, teacher work, or student work. Certain obstacles, which will be detailed in the following chapter, prevented further success at the school. Despite some success at Patricia Smith, the extent to which PLC coaches engaged other teachers in critical collaboration was also somewhat limited. Ms. Pierre explained that when teachers were examining samples of student work, the main focus was trying to assess the students’ performance level. She said,

Some of them they show you the lowest level and also the highest, and you get to compare them to see which one…By reading, we get to tell which one we think may be in the lower group and which one may be in the highest. (02/27/08)
If the main focus of teachers’ collective examination of student work was to discern which students are high-performing and which are low-performing, then the purpose of the activity was to create consistent scoring and align assessment across grade levels and classrooms. While this was a worthwhile goal, it fell short of mining the student work samples for information about a child’s background and interests or about the instructional supports he or she may need to improve the work. Rather, focusing only on assessing the work maintains teachers’ inclination to grade student work, rather than analyze it.

Further evidence of the limits of critical collaboration at Patricia Smith was noted in the planning of the final PLC session at the end of the year. Ms. Petit, one of the coaches, thought it would be best to forego a critical analysis of teachers’ successes and shortcomings and focus on bringing the staff together as a community. She said, “I think it will be mostly something fun to end the year” (05/28/08). The hesitancy to engage teachers in critical activities shows that the staff was still at the point where PLC coaches had to encourage and motivate teachers to want to participate in PLC sessions, rather than engage in genuine collaboration. The outcomes of PLC efforts will be discussed further in the following chapter. First, the efforts undertaken by individual teachers to change their teaching practice are examined.

Making Changes in Practice

In addition to taking action at the collective school level, participating teachers also took specific actions within their own classrooms in an effort to improve their teaching. As mentioned previously, teachers set goals for themselves in regards to changing their practice. Usually, making such changes involved a process where teachers first recognized that they needed to make a change in an area of their practice. Then, teachers sought out new ideas about how to make those changes from a variety of different sources. Finally, teachers employed the new
strategies they had devised and monitored the results. Here that process is illustrated using the examples of Ms. Dubois of Dawkins Grove and Ms. Pierre and Ms. Petit of Patricia Smith.

**Ms. Dubois**

This second grade teacher of math, science, and social studies had ample time to reflect on her teaching practices over the summer and in the external RSM training institutes she attended. Ms. Dubois began the school year with a goal for her instruction in mind. She wanted to learn how to facilitate, rather than direct students’ learning. She explained,

> From the beginning of the year…I was trying to get my students to work together more and kind of like have a facilitator feeling in the classroom where I presented and then you know, after that where do they go from there? Try to have them take more ownership of their learning. (02/25/08)

By letting students take ownership of their learning, Ms. Dubois felt that students would engage more in classroom activities and get more out of them. However, she explained that she had always implemented direct instruction rather than facilitation in the classroom. She said, “It's something in the past that I thought I was lacking in the classroom. I always had control, I did everything, I taught all day long” (02/25/08).

Thus, Ms. Dubois had to look elsewhere for some new ideas about how to facilitate learning rather than direct it. She had been chosen by her administration to become one of the school’s PLC coaches. She participated in a PLC at the Summer Institute and later received extensive training about facilitation at the Coaches Institutes. Ms. Dubois explained that the experience helped her to work in a more facilitative manner with her students. She said,

> In the learning communities, my role, one of my roles is to be a facilitator. So I guess it's just kind of worked itself out that way that…one of the roles that I'm playing in that group is something that I'm doing in the classroom as well. (02/25/08)

Because of the PLC Coaches Institute, Ms. Dubois seemed to feel more comfortable experimenting with new strategies. She added a problem of the day to engage students in more
problem solving activities in her math class. Then, she worked on facilitating the students’
learning with the activity rather than simply explaining the answer to them. She said,

    I try to guide them and say, “Okay, think about it like this.” I’m trying to get them to
apply what we're doing in different situations…I give them word problems that will make
them incorporate, “Okay, I know how to count money now, can I solve the problem like
this?” (02/25/08)

In her second interview, Ms. Dubois had taken this notion of facilitation to another level when
she began working on asking her students higher-order thinking questions to expand their
thinking about the lesson content. She explained, “I try to make sure that I use those higher-order
thinking…questions, making sure that they think about what they're doing.” (05/20/08).

    In realizing that she needed to make a change, Ms. Dubois began the process of making
that change. She received new ideas about how to work with her students from her participation
in the RSM initiative and later she employed that teaching style to work with her students. That
change is reflected in the CLASS observations conducted in Ms. Dubois’ class. The second
observation report noted that Ms. Dubois “actively facilitated student engagement in activities”
and “modeled student tasks on board” (04/18/08). And, her CLASS scores in instructional
support and student engagement rose +1.67 and +1.50, respectively. (Refer to Table 4-3.)

Ms. Pierre

    Like many other teachers, the only connection that Ms. Pierre had with the RSM
initiative was through her school-site PLCs. After completing her first CLASS feedback session,
Ms. Petit set goals to promote students’ higher-order thinking skills and increase student
engagement in her lessons. In her first interview, she explained, “What I plan to do now, instead
of me doing most of the talking, [is] sometimes have them sit in groups and discuss…things that
they can learn from each other” (02/27/08). In addition to the CLASS feedback, the Instructional
Practices Inventory (IPI) data for Patricia Smith prompted Ms. Pierre to rethink the way she

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engages students. Because the data showed a high degree of teacher-directed instruction, Ms. Pierre said the faculty concluded, “The children need to interact a lot more. So, I actually thought that was a good idea and kind of use it a lot lately” (02/27/08).

Ms. Pierre looked to her fellow teachers for new ideas to implement in her classroom to engage her students and promote discussion. When asked what helped to improve her practice, she responded,

Getting together with the other teachers...because you might see something, and I teach it one way, and I go to Ms. Petit’s class later on, and she's teaching that same thing. Sometimes I sit in there for a while just to see her approach and how is her kids doing it [sic]. And if mine didn't do such a great job, or I sort of reflect on it, and maybe I could try her way and see if there's anything different. (05/29/08)

Ms. Pierre’s collaboration with other teachers was essential to her improvement. From the peer observations and school-site PLC sessions, she gathered ideas and began to implement them. Like Ms. Dubois at Dawkins Grove, Ms. Pierre started asking her students more higher-order thinking questions to engage them in lessons. She explained,

I used to ask one or two of them to predict what they think the story is going to be about. And now I have more of them involved. And not only [are] they looking at the pictures, but I also bring the how, I mean the higher-order thinking questions. (05/29/08)

Ms. Pierre felt that her questioning techniques would “help them [the students] build their thinking skills” (05/29/08). She soon realized, “The kids love it” (05/29/08). She even shared an example of an engaging conversation that resulted during a read aloud story about the seasons of the year. During the lesson,

There was a book we were reading where some children are walking, and I say while they [the children in the story] were walking, they say, “Ouch, ouch, ouch,” and they have bare feet. And I asked them [my students], “Why do you think they say 'Ouch' as they were walking a lot?” And they [my students] were like, 'Because it is hot.' And then [I asked], “How do you know?” And some of them, they said, “Oh because they didn't have shoes and probably the sand was hot. It was really hot because it was summer. So because it was hot, they walk on it and they felt that. That's why they go Ouch.” (05/29/08)
Ms. Pierre’s conversation engaged students in her lesson and stimulated their higher-order thinking skills. Ms. Pierre’s CLASS domain scores confirmed these changes in practice. Between her first and second observation, Ms. Pierre showed a +1.58 gain in Instructional Support and a +1.25 gain in Student Engagement. (See Table 4-2.) Additionally, Ms. Pierre’s experience illustrates the experience of teachers who participated only in the school-site PLCs. After reviewing the CLASS feedback and IPI data, Ms. Pierre sought the guidance of her colleagues on how to engage her students. She elected to ask students more higher-order thinking questions in story discussions. As a result, students were more engaged in her lessons. Her colleague, Ms. Petit, also provided a vivid example of changes that teachers made in practice in relation to their participation in the RSM initiative.

**Ms. Petit**

This kindergarten teacher actually began her participation in the TLSI Master’s program the year prior to full scale RSM implementation at her school. Through her participation as both a graduate student and as a PLC coach, Ms. Petit was also prompted to regularly reflect on her teaching and its effectiveness with her students. Ms. Petit recognized that she had to continually adapt her own teaching in order to be maximally effective and to reach the needs of her students. In the past, she might have used the same lesson plans over and over. Now, she re-evaluated her plans to make sure they were appropriate. She said,

> Probably before I would think, “Okay I have my lesson plan…Why worry about doing it, reinventing the wheel?” No. I always think I need to go [back], “Okay, I am looking at it, but I know it can't stay the same. I need to make changes.” (02/28/08)

Knowing she needed to make continual adaptations to the way she taught her students, Ms. Petit benefited from her extensive participation in the RSM initiative through the TLSI program and the PLC coaches trainings. The TLSI program exposed her to a variety of content
area strategies to use in her classroom, particularly in reading since that was her area of specialization within the program. She talked about how the reading classes had been helpful:

“It's helped me change…my thinking about teaching reading, how students learn how to read, and effective practices teachers can use to help students read” (02/28/08). Further, participating in the PLC Coaches Institutes empowered Ms. Petit to work toward building the collective responsibility of teachers for all students in the school. She explained,

Participating in the coaches training let me think it's not for me. If I know something, if I can share it, it will be for the good of all the students. And I don't see it like, “It was all my students. I am doing for my students. I want to be good, I want to improve, so the school will see that Ms. Petit’s students is doing good, and Ms. Pierre’s students are not doing good.” I don't see it like that. I just see the common good of all the students, so probably…if I didn't participate in the coaches training, I wouldn't see the importance of that. (05/28/08)

Like Ms. Dubois, Ms. Petit’s participation in the RSM initiative served as a resource for the development of her teaching. The TLSI program gave Ms. Petit specific ideas to use in her classroom, while the coaches training seemed to develop her overall commitment to her students.

When Ms. Petit actually employed new strategies, the RSM initiative again played a role. When asked if her participation in RSM had led her to teach anything differently during this school year, Ms. Petit told the story of how her students’ trip to see the school nurse, a nurse provided by RSM partner HealthConnect, inspired students to become more engaged in their measurement lesson. She said,

We were studying measurement. It's like I can see that they were not interested in that activity. Why measure? What is the importance of measuring? And we went to the clinic. If it was not for Ready Schools, there wouldn't be a nurse there. And they went to the clinic. They measured them, and they had their height and their weight. And when we came back to the school, I used this to teach them measurement. So they can know why is it important to know about measurement. Why did they measure? Why did they measure you? And we did an activity where they measured each other, and I put on the board. I wrote their names on the board with their findings, and they can compare each other's height. And what was funny was that they did it by themselves. And then they figured out one was taller than the other one when we compared it. And I say, “Come here you two.”
And when they stand up, they realize that...they were the same height, so something is definitely wrong with your measuring. Because when you look at them both, you see that they [are] the same height. And they did it again, so they figured it out that, “Okay, we made a mistake.” It was that...[And I asked them] “Why you always have the same height? I see 40 and 50. I don't see anybody who is coming out at 60 something or 70, why?” And they come out with the answer, “Because we are all almost the same age.” [Ms. Petit laughs.]...If we didn’t have it [a nurse], I couldn't have used this incident to relate it to my teaching so they can see the importance of measuring and why is it important for their health to be measured at specific times in their life. (05/28/08)

This anecdote highlights the way in which Ms. Petit was able to adapt her teaching to meet her students’ needs and interests. The trip to the nurse provided students with the interest and motivation to learn why measurement is important and how to measure, record, and compare their own heights and weights. Ms. Petit’s participation in various aspects of the RSM initiative led her to realize that she needed to constantly adapt and provided her with a resource for fresh ideas. Finally, the additional program supports even provided her with a way to engage her students and actually meet their needs while tapping into their interests. Ms. Petit’s story was a perfect example of the synergy that is created within a comprehensive school reform program.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to detail teachers’ participation in the RSM initiative. Data analysis suggested that participation in both the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback sessions were essential to achieving positive outcomes on the CLASS instrument. Teachers who did not participate in both generally showed diminished results on the CLASS and displayed limited instructional capacity. In turn, this ineffective instruction confined the impact of the RSM initiative on the overall school. Nevertheless, participating teachers implemented specific reform strategies at both the school and teacher levels. Participating teachers enacted community-building efforts to improve teacher communication and create a collaborative school culture. Further, teachers took some steps toward engaging in critical collaboration by using protocols to examine professional literature, share classroom challenges, and collectively analyze.
samples of teacher and student work. Finally, in addition to the collective efforts of PLC coaches and participants, individual teachers made changes in their own classroom teaching. These teachers recognized that change was needed, accessed new ideas, and implemented new strategies. The success of teacher efforts to change their classroom practice and improve school culture will be the focus of the following chapter. In addition, the supports that helped teachers improve and the obstacles that impeded them will also be discussed.
Figure 5.1. Theory of School and Teacher Change.
CHAPTER 6
THEORY OF SCHOOL AND TEACHER CHANGE:
REFORM OUTCOMES, SUPPORTS, AND OBSTACLES

Reform Outcomes

This chapter completes the description of the grounded theory of school and teacher change. It highlights the outcomes of the reform strategies implemented by participating teachers as well as the supports that helped and the obstacles that hampered their ability to achieve those outcomes. The previous chapter detailed the role that participation in the Ready Schools Miami (RSM) initiative and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) feedback sessions played in the results collected from the two rounds of CLASS observations. In addition, it described the reform strategies that participating teachers employed at the school and teacher levels in order to improve school culture and classroom instruction. This chapter illustrates the outcomes of those efforts and the context in which they were achieved. The chapter begins by examining the outcomes of efforts to improve school culture, looking first at the new leadership abilities developed in professional learning community (PLC) coaches and then at aspects of the school culture that improved at each school. Then, the outcomes of individual efforts to improve teaching practice are described. First, the extent to which participating teachers implemented developmentally appropriate teaching practice is explored and then the impact of that teaching practice on students. Finally, the chapter closes with an investigation of the internal and external supports that assisted in achieving those outcomes and the obstacles that hindered teacher efforts.

Developing into Teacher Leaders

One of the most significant outcomes of RSM efforts at each school was the development of teacher leaders through the Teacher Leadership for School Improvement (TLSI) graduate program and the PLC Coaches Institutes. PLC coaches played a special role within the RSM initiative because they led the PLC sessions at their schools and often served as liaisons to the
school’s RSM external facilitator. Some of the teachers who were trained as PLC coaches had no prior experience as teacher leaders. Nevertheless, taking on the new position thrust them into a leadership role and quickly developed their leadership potential. The role of PLC coach broadened their thinking beyond the confines of their classroom to consider the professional development needs of the school staff.

**Collaborating among coaches**

The leadership of PLC coaches was illustrated by their collaborative planning. Working from their action plans, PLC coaches worked with other coaches at their school in order to plan PLC sessions with the staff. Ms. Dubois began her written reflection about coaching at Dawkins Grove with the statement: “As a facilitator, I met with other PLC facilitators to plan agendas and prepare for meetings” (2/28/08). In an interview, Ms. Petit explained the planning involved in coaching at Patricia Smith,

> We have three coaches. I am one of them. And I met with them all before each, each meeting to plan, and to search for good articles, educative articles that we can discuss, protocols we can use. And also, how each one of us [is] going to participate in the meeting. (02/28/08)

Planning sessions for their colleagues promoted their development as teacher leaders. Actually leading those sessions further developed their leadership potential.

**Leading professional learning community (PLC) sessions**

PLC coaches’ leadership was further demonstrated as they conducted PLC sessions with their colleagues. Facilitation began with introducing the agenda to the PLC group. The field notes from the PLC observations provide examples. At Dawkins Grove, the PLC session started as follows:

> Mr. Davenport begins to explain the agenda for the day, saying that the meeting will focus on a success they've had in the classroom. He says that the whole group will break into smaller groups to have discussions of the successes they've had in the class. (02/13/08)
Introducing PLC participants to the agenda for the day let teachers know what to expect from the session, much as teachers let students know a lesson’s objective.

After introducing the agenda, the facilitators led teachers through it. Leading teachers through a session involved numerous facilitation events, such as providing directions for the activity to be accomplished, monitoring and encouraging teachers’ engagement in the activity, and often joining into the small groups of teachers to facilitate conversation. For example, the main activity observed at Patricia Smith asked teachers to investigate developmentally appropriate practice. Once teachers broke into four mixed groups to consider the four characteristics of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) described in the reading, the facilitators took different approaches to facilitating other teachers’ learning. Ms. Pereira opted to move around the room checking in with each group as it worked. The field notes reflect this constant movement. First, at “9:15am, Pereira moves over to assist [the third PLC coach] in talking with the 1’s group” (01/18/08). Then, at “9:25am, Periera moves over to sit down at group 4's table” (01/18/08). Still later, “Pereira sits with Group 3” (01/18/08). At each table, Ms. Pereira would push teachers by asking questions to encourage engagement. When checking in on Group 1, Ms. Pereira “asks them, ‘Based on Classroom Climate, what do you see when you walk into a DAP class? Looks like? Sounds like’” (01/18/08)? Ms. Petit employed a different style of facilitation. Rather than move from group to group, she simply joined a single group and worked within the group for the length of the activity. Ms. Petit described how she facilitates conversation,

I am the one facilitating the discussion allowing everybody to have their turn, to say what they want to say, to help them get used to the idea to develop a learning community, like to build, to try to build trust between them and make them feel comfortable to participate in everything we're doing. (02/28/08)
Where Ms. Pereira moved around the room quite a bit to see where she could be of help, Ms. Petit sat and listened to one group. While Ms. Pereira and Ms. Petit displayed different leadership styles, both coaches seemed effective in encouraging teacher engagement in the activity.

After teachers completed an activity within a PLC session, coaches usually debriefed the activity by asking teachers to share important insights from their conversations with the larger group. Continuing with the example of the DAP activity at Patricia Smith, each small group was asked to choose one or two teachers to report the highlights of their conversation to the larger group. The field notes from the observation showed that toward the end of activity, the third PLC coach that worked with Ms. Pereira and Ms. Petit “begins to circle around the table, reminding, ‘I want you guys to share what you came up with.’” The fieldnotes indicate that a few minutes later, “A teacher from Group 1 moves to the front of the room, bringing the group's poster. He begins, ‘Good morning.’ He reads the statements to the group” (01/18/08). PLC coaches used this debriefing step to ensure that PLC participants were privy to the conversations held within each small group during the activity. This further helped to support teacher learning. However, supporting teacher learning by planning and facilitating PLC sessions was not the only leadership role that new PLC coaches had.

**Working with administration**

In addition to working with their colleagues as teacher leaders, PLC coaches also worked with administration as a new branch of school leadership. PLC coaches met with administrators in order to strengthen their efforts to improve school culture and teaching practice. At Dawkins Grove, these meetings took place with the help of the school’s external facilitator. Ms. Dubois explained that the external facilitator was extremely supportive in the coaches’ efforts to secure administrative support for the PLC sessions. She said, “We had a meeting with the principal…"
So he's [the external facilitator’s] trying to get the administration to really back us up and support us any way we need” (02/25/08).

At Patricia Smith, the administration worked closely with the PLC coaches in planning and supporting the PLC sessions. Ms. Petit seemed grateful for the help in finding the time for PLC sessions and planning the agendas. She explained,

If it is a professional development day, they [the administrators] give us time for our meeting. Sometimes they can even ask us, ‘Do you want to do it before or can we do our meeting before yours or after yours?’ So they let us choose, and also they, they talk to the teachers, they encourage them to be there. So I think it's a good thing from them. And we also sit with them, talk about what we're going to do, our plan. They give us suggestions about changes, changes we can make in the agenda,...what will work and what will not work. (02/28/08)

At both schools, PLC coaches began to work with administration in order to secure support for their efforts with the PLC groups. The responsibility to meet with administration further developed the PLC coaches into teacher leaders.

**Becoming leaders**

During their second interview, PLC coaches reflected on their journey into their new leadership roles and commented on the impact that it had on them during the school year. Both of the coaches at Dawkins Grove provided vivid examples of the personal impact that taking on such a role can have on a teacher. Mr. Davenport’s case was particularly interesting. As a second year teacher, he had no previous leadership role at the school and had limited relationships with the rest of the staff the previous year. Acting as a PLC coach allowed him to open up a little and communicate better. He explained,

I feel like I'll talk to anybody now. It's [the RSM initiative’s] taught me to be very verbal. It doesn't hurt you to be very verbal because...even when myself, Ms. Dubois, and [the external facilitator] did the presentation to the school, she [another teacher] said, 'Mr. Davenport, I didn't know you spoke in front of people. I thought you just stayed to yourself.' And I didn't know either until I went to this workshop and I guess they forced it out of me. (05/15/08)
That he had come so far as a teacher and as a leader within his second year seemed to be a surprise even to Mr. Davenport. He reflected on having been chosen to lead the PLC sessions by the administration, saying:

“Who would have ever thought that I'd be going to someone else's classroom to figure out an agenda of what we're going to be doing? I never thought about that. I look at those opportunities as, ‘Wow.’ I just say wow to myself to even be considered to be one of the facilitators.” (05/15/08)

Interviews with Ms. Dubois and Ms. Petit who were also PLC coaches displayed similar personal impacts. Ms. Petit felt that her role as a PLC coach at Patricia Smith allowed her to open up also. She said, “I was not used to speak[ing] before, now they [other teachers] talk to me and we share some ideas about good practices, good teaching practices, and I think it's good” (05/28/08). In addition, Ms. Dubois felt that her role as a PLC coach at Dawkins Grove “gave [her] more confidence” (05/20/08). Thus, each of the teachers that were chosen to serve as PLC coaches developed their leadership capacities as they worked with other coaches and the administration to guide the PLC groups through learning activities and improve the school culture. The impacts that their efforts had on school culture are examined below.

**Improving School Culture**

Improvements in school culture were evidenced by the interview comments of participating teachers. While the success was sometimes qualified, participating teachers remarked on changes in teachers’ willingness to participate in the PLC sessions and in the nature of interactions among staff members.

**Growing interest in teacher learning**

At Dawkins Grove, where participation in PLC sessions was voluntary, teachers commented on a ‘buzz’ that spread about the RSM initiative. The PLC coaches, Ms. Dubois and Mr. Davenport, both commented on the growing attendance at their PLC meetings. Ms. Dubois
explained that at the first meeting, “We probably had like twelve, and then the last one, we had like twenty” (02/25/08). She attributed this growth to curiosity: “Maybe people are curious. They want to know what is this? Why is it going on?...Let's see what it's about” (02/25/08). Teachers’ continued awareness of RSM efforts at the school led to growing interest in other aspects of the initiative, especially the TLSI graduate program. Noting the number of questions that teachers began to ask him about the TLSI graduate program, Mr. Davenport remarked, “There is a buzz in the air about the graduate program of Ready Schools Miami” (05/15/08). This interest in the initiative’s efforts pointed to renewed attention to reform efforts. Nevertheless, while growing interest in the initiative’s efforts is a promising indicator, it is not sufficient to have any significant impact on teaching practice. Teachers must also open their practice to colleagues to share and critique.

**Opening up to interaction**

The results of this study indicate that participating teachers began to feel more comfortable working with one another. Two of the four interviewees at Dawkins Grove and three of the four interviewees at Patricia Smith indicated that there was limited improvement in teachers’ relationships. After explaining the personal impact that the RSM initiative has had on her, Ms. Dubois was asked if the initiative has had any impact on the school. Her initial response was, “Mmm. Not as much, no. Not really as much. Maybe some,” before she commented, “It's [the RSM initiative’s] brought people together…that never get a chance to work together” (05/20/08). She also added, “It broke some of the barriers of only first grade working together, second grade working together. Now everyone is working together, we share data” (05/20/08). Mr. Davenport agreed with this latter response. He stated, “I think everybody in the school plays a vital part in helping one another” (05/15/08). These teachers’ comments seem to indicate that
the RSM initiative did have an impact on the school culture in terms of improving relationships among the staff.

At Patricia Smith, the impact on staff relationships was similar. Ms. Pierre commented that before the PLC sessions, relationships among the staff were tense. She said, “There's a big improvement because at first people did not notice you and now by talking to you all the time during Ready Schools, we get to say, ‘Hi’ [and] at the same time work. We're more friendly” (05/29/08). Ms. Petit, one of the PLC coaches, agreed, “It [the RSM initiative] has also an impact on, on the way we see each other. It opens the communication, and we talk more between the staff” (05/28/08). Ms. Pollack qualified the success by saying, “You have your cliques. You have your groups, whether it's your grade levels, or who you eat lunch with, whatever. There's still those groups, but it's, I think developing slowly, but more of a level of camaraderie in the school” (02/18/08). Thus, efforts at improving communication among staff members were successful in improving interaction and relationships among staff at both schools.

Increasing collaboration

These improvements in staff relationships could be considered a precursor to enhancing collaboration at the schools. The previous chapter detailed numerous strategies employed by participating teachers, especially PLC coaches, to promote collaboration among the school’s teachers. However, mandating or coercing teacher participation in PLC activities is not necessarily the same as having them feel comfortable with those activities. When teachers feel comfortable sharing their practices with others and opening their practice to critique, it is an indication that a level of trust has developed among the staff and the culture has improved. Only one of the four interviewees at each school described this kind of comfort in deprivatizing practice. At Dawkins Grove, Ms. Dubois described her increased comfort sharing with and borrowing from other teachers. She explained that the lesson observed during the second CLASS
observation was actually one that she borrowed from another teacher. She felt that was indicative of the level of comfort that developed among teachers. She said teachers were feeling comfortable asking for help. Like when I was doing the Gallon Man [lesson], for example, I knew it because I saw it...on another teacher's bulletin board. And I forgot how she did it, and I thought, “Oh that's so cute. So when we get to measurement, I'm going to do that with my students.” And I forgot how she did it, and I went to her. And I didn't feel uncomfortable at all and neither did she feel like, "Oh, ha ha. You had to ask me for help.” (05/20/08)

The enhanced atmosphere of trust made it acceptable for Ms. Dubois to seek the help of a fellow teacher, and Ms. Dubois’ increased confidence led her to implement the strategy within her own classroom. While the extent of this genuine collaboration at Dawkins Grove was limited, this instance exemplifies the collaboration sought after in the RSM initiative.

Ms. Pollack provided a similar example at Patricia Smith. A participant in the TLSI graduate program as well as the PLCs, Ms. Pollack demonstrated the kind of synergy that can occur among various aspects of the program toward building school culture. When she began the TLSI program the year prior, Ms. Pollack had rarely spoken with her colleague, Ms. Pereira. By the time the first year of the program had ended, the two teachers collaborated so well that they lobbied the principal to allow them to teach the same grade. Ms. Pollack explained,

We started classes [for the TLSI program] in the fall, and then over the past year, we realized that we work together well...We have the same kind of school focus, drive to get things done, which is how we ended up convincing the principal to let us teach together this year. (05/22/08)

Thus, their participation in the TLSI program led the two teachers to realize that they worked together well, and the principal allowed them to build on this relationship by teaching the same grade together. When Ms. Pereira later became a PLC coach, the relationship continued, and Ms. Pollack even helped to lead a PLC session when Ms. Pereira had to be absent. Both teachers shared their practice with each other, epitomized the kind of collaboration that could be
engendered within RSM schools, and were nearly inseparable by the time this study was completed.

Overall, the data indicated that the teachers’ reform efforts at the school level had some success in improving the school cultures of Dawkins Grove and Patricia Smith. At Dawkins Grove, those indications began with an increased teacher interest in the PLC sessions and the TLSI graduate program as a “buzz” began to spread about RSM efforts. At both schools, those improvements were further indicated by teacher perceptions of improved staff relationships. Finally, on a very limited basis, some teachers who participated heavily in RSM efforts exemplified the kind of collaboration among teachers for which the RSM initiative strived. The next sections examine the impact of individual teacher efforts on classroom practice.

**Implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

Individual efforts to make changes in teaching practice were related to improved implementation of developmentally appropriate practice in the classrooms of observed teachers. Teachers that participated in the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback sessions generally improved their teaching practice in their second observation, as evidenced by the results of the CLASS observations. For this reason, the overall category was labeled Implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

Take for example the teaching of Ms. Poole, the veteran first grade teacher of 51 years. In her first observation (12/10/07), practices observed included:

- Some smiling, laughing among students
- Teacher uses some encouragement (C’mon) and a supportive tone of voice
- Mild peer negativity (laughing at each other); well handled by teacher
- Evidence of good relationships among students
- Sometimes asks students to predict what the story will be about
- Asks comprehension, compare/contrast questions
- Asks students to identify digraphs in phonics reading
- Some use of proactive behavior management (“Sit up nice and tall for the read aloud.”)
• Limited use of praise as a behavior management tool
• Use of short feedback loops (e.g., use of question mark, reading fluency)

In her second observation (04/11/08), developmentally appropriate practices were more prevalent:

• Numerous instances of smiling, laughing in the room
• Very even, positive tone of voice with students
• Clear evidence of good relationship with students (polite, uses pet names)
• Teacher reassures students when they make mistakes (asks students politely to correct)
• Teacher effectively resolves a student dispute
• Asks higher order thinking questions during guided reading
• Clear expectations for behavior; few instances of misbehavior
• Frequent use of praise as a behavior management tool (“Everybody's working good today!”)
• Teacher flexible in plans (allows extra students to read their News of the Day)
• Students have jobs (e.g., picking up/passing out supplies)
• Engages in some feedback loops (e.g., helps [one student] with question on the board)
• Provides some feedback on the quality of reading (fluency, intonation)
• Majority of students engaged for most of the observation period
• Students extremely excited about identifying high frequency words in daily message

The observations showed Ms. Poole’s increased positive interaction with students, her improved questioning techniques, and her promotion of student autonomy. The prevalence of these developmentally appropriate teaching practices accounted for the increase of Ms. Poole’s scores between the first and second observations. In fact, Ms. Poole’s scores jumped over a full point in Emotional Support, Instructional Support, and Student Engagement, while the domain scores for Classroom Organization increased +0.58. (Table 4-2.)

Ms. Poole’s improvement represents the improvement of other participating teachers who showed remarkable increases across all domains, but most notably in the area of Instructional Support, indicating their increased ability to promote concept development, stimulate language development, and provide high-quality feedback for students. In fact, if the scores of non-participating teachers are removed from the overall mean, the increases in domain scores among participating teachers are even more remarkable. Table 6-1 lists the average domain scores for
participating teachers only. The increases in scores seem attributable to the increased attention that teachers paid to the area of Instructional Support after participating in RSM activities that highlighted the importance of developmentally appropriate practice and receiving feedback from the CLASS observations that documented the extent to which Instructional Support was being provided in their classrooms.

Ms. Dubois, who showed an increase of +1.67 in her Instructional Support domain score, provided an excellent example of this renewed attention to higher-order thinking. In her first interview, she was asked about the limited evidence of the facilitation of higher-order cognitive development observed in her classroom; she responded, “I don't disagree because it's true. And from that [observation] I said, ‘Wow, this is something I want to [do] better…I need to get them to developing these higher order thinking skills” (02/25/08). The feedback from the CLASS observation helped bring Ms. Dubois to the realization that she had to focus on her questioning in the classroom. With a renewed emphasis on developing her students’ higher-order thinking and her improved facilitation skills from participation in RSM activities, her teaching practice improved. For other participating teachers, the story is the same. The specific feedback about their teaching practice combined with resources and opportunities to develop new ideas and get suggestions helped teachers to show improvements in their classroom instruction. Some teachers even commented on how that improved instruction had begun to affect their students positively.

The perceived impact that teacher efforts had on students is described in the following section.

**Impacting Students**

While this study is not intended to systematically analyze the impact of RSM activities on student learning, many teachers commented on the results they were seeing in their classrooms. Five of the interviewees commented on the improved performance of one or more students as a result of their changed teaching practice and their participation in RSM efforts and the CLASS
feedback sessions. Because their participation in the RSM initiative varied, teachers attributed their successes to the various aspects in which they participated. For some teachers, it was the PLC sessions. For others, it was the TLSI graduate program. What these teachers had in common was a belief that their teaching practice and student learning had improved as a result of the RSM initiative’s presence at their school.

Ms. Pollack was a graduate student in the TLSI program. Prompted by one of the reading courses that she took, she decided to begin working one-on-one with a struggling reader during her planning time. At the beginning of the year, the child was unmotivated to participate in any reading activities, even in the individual tutoring sessions with Ms. Pollack, but she persisted. She tried to build the student’s confidence by telling him, “You know I really need somebody to work with on this project, and I was wondering if you would help me. I know that you go to tutoring, but some days at some point in tutoring, you would be able to stay and work with me” (02/18/08). The student agreed, and after working with Ms. Pollack during portions of the fall and spring semesters, Ms. Pollack had seen some dramatic improvements in the child’s interest in reading. She explained,

Honestly at the beginning of the year, if we sat down to do anything and there was a book involved, he was head down, not participating, just so passive. And now he's actively participating, and, “Can I get a book? Can I get a book? I finished this book. Can I get another book?” (02/18/08)

The boy not only showed an increased interest in reading, he also showed some improvements in his ability. According to Ms. Pollack, she administered a phonics assessment at the beginning of her work with the boy, and he had shown improvement by the time she reassessed him at the end of the year. She explained,

I said I'm going to administer, readminister this…assessment and see how he does. And he improved or stayed the same in almost every category. There was one he went down on, and I think it was with multisyllabic words. I think that was the only one. (05/22/08)
Her participation in the RSM initiative, by way of her enrollment in the TLSI program, caused Ms. Pollack to experiment with a new teaching strategy. Further, the program prompted her to document the success of those efforts by engaging in an informal inquiry using the phonics assessment. Thus, Ms. Pollack’s participation in the RSM initiative was related to the success she achieved with this individual child.

Other teachers who commented on the impact their improved instruction had on their students told similar stories. Their willingness to try out new teaching practices and collaborate with others to get new ideas led teachers to be more effective with their students. Moreover, like this example, each of the five teachers provided evidence of their improved effectiveness in the form of anecdotes, work samples, or test scores. Thus, according to these teachers, the RSM initiative reached some success not only in enhancing student learning in their classrooms, but also in developing an inquiry stance among teachers to improving their practice. Of course, this success should not be overstated because the conclusions drawn here are based on the teacher perceptions, which are not supported by additional data on student learning. Further, not all teachers that were interviewed remarked on the improved student learning that resulted from innovations in their teaching practice.

Certainly, the successes that were achieved in improving teaching practice and, to an extent, student learning were undergirded by positive supports in the context of each school and the external assistance that was provided by the RSM initiative. In addition, that success was undoubtedly limited by some of the negative environmental factors or obstacles that limited the development of a collaborative school culture, developmentally appropriate practice, and enhanced student learning. The purpose of the next section is to detail the context and conditions
that played a role in the outcomes that were observed. Particular attention will be paid to both the supports and the obstacles.

**Context and Conditions**

Figure 5-1 of the Theory of School and Teacher Change displays the internal and external supports to the right of the reform efforts undertaken by participating teachers. The figure is intended to show the supports that helped teachers in implementing those reform efforts targeting school culture, teaching practice, and student learning. The obstacles are depicted as standing between the reform strategies and these intended outcomes. This was meant to show that teachers were successful in meeting the intended outcomes to the extent that they were successful in overcoming the obstacles they faced in creating a collaborative culture and making changes in their teaching practice.

The following sections detail the supports and obstacles to the success of teacher efforts within the RSM initiative. Supports are examined first to give a view of the internal conditions and external provisions needed to facilitate the change in teaching practice that was documented in this study. Finally, obstacles are described to illuminate pitfalls that might be avoided to improve upon that success as the RSM initiative continues to scale up or as other initiatives undertake similar work.

**Internal Supports**

As previously discussed, teachers’ participation in PLCs acted as an internal support to the improvement of their school culture, teaching practice, and student learning. In addition, there were factors at each school that contributed to what teachers were able to achieve. There were three internal supports that were particularly important: school administration, grade level teams, and school support staff.
School administration

The success of new school reform initiatives depends largely on school administration. A supportive administration can catapult a promising new effort to success, and a hesitant administration can bring that same effort to a standstill. The contrast between the participation and support of the administrations at Patricia Smith and Dawkins Grove illustrate this point well. At Patricia Smith, the principal and assistant principal were avid supporters of the RSM initiative. They welcomed the opportunity to have RSM staff work with teachers inside and outside the school, and they committed to participating to the extent that their positions afforded them the opportunity. Ms. Pollack described her administration’s commitment to RSM efforts, particularly as the coaches were beginning to hold PLC meetings. She said, “They [the principal and assistant principal] both said that we're going to be here. We're going to come to the meetings, as much as possible. When we're in the building and there's a meeting, we're going to be there” (05/22/08). Ms. Pollack’s comments are substantiated by the PLC observation conducted at Patricia Smith. During that observation, the assistant principal made an appearance at the meeting to show support. The field notes state, “She [the assistant principal] explains that she will be in and out throughout the meeting today and apologizes for her inability to be present [at the meeting]” (01/18/08). The assistant principal’s appearance at the meeting shows her support for the PLC sessions, even though she couldn’t stay for the entire meeting.

The administration at Dawkins Grove showed less visible support for RSM efforts. The administration seemed wary of RSM staff that entered the building to work with teachers, and there was even some difficulty trying to make arrangements with the administration to recruit teachers to participate in this study. For this reason, PLC coaches and participating teachers faced a number of obstacles in holding regular PLC sessions. These obstacles will be detailed in
another section below. For now, it is sufficient to say that teachers at Patricia Smith had an easier time enacting their reform efforts because they were supported by their administration.

**Grade level teams**

Five of the interviewees made reference to their grade level teams as an opportunity for them to collaborate with their colleagues. Shared planning time was built into teachers’ schedules at both schools to provide an opportunity for teachers of the same grade level to get together, plan lessons, and collaborate with one another. Some teachers took a great deal from their grade level team meetings. Mr. Davenport appreciated the chance to work with his grade level team at Dawkins Grove because each member had complementary strengths. He said, “I have an awesome grade level team, first grade, because by us being departmentalized,…it was just like they basically put us where our strengths were” (05/15/08). In addition to playing the role of a PLC coach, Ms. Petit also served as a grade level leader for the kindergarten teachers at Patricia Smith. She saw the grade level teams as a chance to support the development of a new teacher in the grade level. She explained,

> We have a new teacher in kindergarten, I also try not…to like have the monopoly, like I am saying everything. I let her talk sometimes, “What do you think we can do?” Instead of me telling her everything, so I can hear her and add on…And if I come with something new, I always ask her, “Do you have any ideas? How can we do it? How can we change it to make it more possible for the kids?” (02/28/08)

The opportunities that Mr. Davenport and Ms. Petit described within their grade level team meetings were similar to what could be hoped for in the PLC sessions, teachers collaborating with one another in order to support their mutual growth. Thus, grade level team meetings were an internal support to the improvement of school culture and teaching practice because they were additional structures that increased opportunities for teacher collaboration.
School support staff

In addition to a supportive administration and the opportunity to collaborate within grade level team meetings, three teachers cited the content area coaches at their school as a valuable resource. Both Ms. Petit and Ms. Pierre found the sessions of their math content area coach helpful to improving their teaching. Ms. Petit explained, “The math person in the school, he was with us from K through second, talking to us about strategies we can use to teach math better. So this is another support we get from the school” (05/28/08). In addition to providing professional development to the teachers at their school, the content area coaches also have the responsibility of monitoring student progress on assessments and keeping teachers informed of how their students did. Ms. Dubois explained that the reading coaches at Dawkins Grove were providing useful feedback to teachers through data chats with teachers about students’ test scores. She said,

The reading leaders have been having like data chats and been going over data, how the kids have performed. Each month we have a monthly assessment for certain benchmarks that we were supposed to cover for that month…There's actual feedback. We have a discussion about it and say this is how your students did. (05/20/08)

These content area coaches provided a valuable service to teachers as they tried to improve their practice. By providing teachers with professional development, they serve as another source of new ideas that teachers might implement in the classroom. By monitoring student assessment data, they also help teachers discern what aspects of their instruction and students’ learning might need further attention.

Certainly, there were other internal supports that assisted the progress of each individual teacher in his or her attempts to improve. Yet, these three were common among many of the teachers interviewed. For that reason, they are described here. The following section details the external supports that were provided to each school and its teachers.
**External Supports**

As previously discussed, the CLASS feedback sessions were an external support essential to teachers’ improvements in teaching practice, and these sessions were cited in the interviews of all eight teachers as a useful support. Beyond these feedback sessions, however, interviewees pointed to five additional external supports that were an important part of the success they achieved within the school and their classroom.

**Teacher Leadership for School Improvement (TLSI) graduate program**

Of the twelve participating teachers in the study, three (Ms. Pereira, Ms. Petit, and Ms. Pollack) were enrolled and took classes during the course of the study. A fourth (Ms. Dubois) was accepted into the program and started her first class as data collection ended for the study. Ms. Dubois spoke about the persistent recruiting of RSM staff at her school. While she admitted that the biggest selling point of the graduate program was the free tuition scholarship, she explained that what helped her apply was the sales pitch of one of the RSM external facilitators who explained to her that the program was embedded within her everyday classroom work. She said,

> The way she presented it she made it seem like…it would not be something so much more than what we're already doing…The work that we have to turn in ties right into the work that we're doing in the classroom. So, when she said that, and she seemed very supportive, and she said, “Trust me, I have a lot of teachers who are doing it, and they're successful at it, so you can do it, too.” (02/25/08)

That sales pitch brought Ms. Dubois onboard. From Ms. Dubois’ perspective, the RSM staff genuinely wanted to help teachers improve. She said, “They [RSM staff] were persistent. They won't stop. They want teachers to further their education. They want teachers to get involved with this program, which is a good thing” (02/25/08).

Once she was enrolled, Ms. Dubois began what Ms. Pollack and Ms. Petit described as the most important part of the RSM initiative to them. Along with Ms. Pereira, these teachers
had begun the TLSI program one year before RSM had been officially implemented in their school. Through the program, teachers took courses in order to pursue a reading endorsement that would be added to their teaching certificate as well as other courses, such as Teacher Inquiry and Data-Driven Decision Making. For example, Ms. Pollack said that the data-driven decision making course changed her approach to using student assessment data. Now she was much more thorough in analyzing the data to allow her to provide differentiated instruction. She explained,

You go through the data on your own and you figure out what, what's a strength and what's a weakness, and…which benchmarks you can kind of lump together, where most of the kids get at least one of them and so that they're not struggling on both. (02/18/08)

Further, teachers mentioned how being a part of a graduate program made them aware of numerous resources on the internet and elsewhere that helped them with their teaching. Ms. Petit explained, “There are so many things I didn't know about before, like it can either be resources I can find on the web or resources from books I [have] been using, or ideas from my professors” (02/28/08). Ms. Pollack added, “I have websites saved on my computer…that I go to when I'm looking for any kind of resources, whatever I'm doing…My UF little folder, those are the first websites I hit” (02/18/08).

The TLSI program was undoubtedly a centerpiece in the array of supports that the RSM initiative has to offer teachers at its participating schools. Teachers’ comments indicate that from the recruitment process on through the course content, the program is embedded in their everyday practice and aims squarely at building their knowledge and improving their instruction.

**External training institutes**

Each of the four interviewees who also had the opportunity to attend one of the RSM external training institutes noted the sessions as a significant support to the implementation and success of the RSM initiative. The initial 5-day RSM Summer Institute in June 2007 was designed to give participants the experience of participating in a PLC and to begin planning how
the initiative could be implemented at their school. In October 2007, the 3-day PLC Coaches Institute was the first part of a 5-day session to provide a small group of teacher leaders at each school with the training and resources they need to facilitate PLCs at their school. That 5-day session was completed with two additional days in May 2008. In addition, some PLC coaches were able to attend a 3-day institute in Tampa, FL at the Winter Meeting of the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), the institution that provides many of the resources used in the PLC coaches training sessions.

Of the four teachers that attended training institutes, Ms. Pollack only attended the RSM Summer Institute in June 2007, though she still saw it as a significant support to understanding and implementing the initiative: “Those that went for the week in the summer, we get it” (02/18/08). Ms. Petit missed the summer training, but she was selected to be a PLC coach and thus attended each of the two PLC Coaches Institutes. She commented that participating in the coaches’ trainings allowed her to reflect on how she connected with other teachers. She said, “Participating in the coaches training was a support itself. I think…participating in the coaches training made me think again…about myself, the way I am dealing with people” (05/28/08). Therefore, even though they were unable to participate in all of the external training institutes, Ms. Pollack and Ms. Petit appreciated the opportunity to work with their peers as part of a PLC and develop their teacher leadership abilities.

Both Ms. Dubois and Mr. Davenport, however, participated in all the external training institutes, including the NSRF Winter Meeting in Tampa, Florida. They commented on how each of the trainings served as a follow-up to the one before. Mr. Davenport phrased it well,

One thing I like about Ready Schools is there is continuous follow-ups with our meetings [sic]. It's not just one Summer Heat meeting and then that's it...It was a meeting, there was a training, followed by a workshop out of town. Then we came back and finished it
those last two days. So it's like…you’re spoon-feeding us the information to make sure that we know what we're doing when we go back to the other schools. (05/15/08)

Ms. Dubois had a similar experience to Mr. Davenport. She remarked that she kept seeing the same faces at all the trainings that she attended. She said, “It’s the same circle,” and she appreciated the “consistency” (02/25/08). Indeed, this consistency among facilitators and participants was a major feature of the trainings that supported the success achieved by teachers.

However, the consistency was not the only salient feature of the external training institutes. Two additional features were pointed out as important aspects of the trainings. First, Ms. Dubois and Mr. Davenport also noted the engaging manner in which the trainings were facilitated. The training institutes employed the same activities, readings, and protocols based on the work of the NSRF that teacher leaders were being trained to employ at their schools. Rather than learning about engaging in a collaborative approach, teachers leaders engaged in a collaborative approach to learning. Regardless of their entering expectations, this facilitation style helped to win over the teachers who participated in the training institutes. Mr. Davenport explained,

That's one thing that's tremendously different from the Ready Schools workshops to the other workshops, there's constant movement to the point where if you were sleepy, you have no time to sleep. You're constantly moving around, engaging in discussion, and I just like that, all that movement in general. (02/25/08)

Second, each of the PLC coaches who were interviewed (Ms. Petit, Mr. Davenport, and Ms. Dubois) commented on the value of collaborating with teachers from other schools on work that was meaningful for them. Teachers were able to interact with each other in reflective conversations and share ideas for action steps. At the PLC Coaches Institutes, teacher leaders also had the opportunity to practice presenting and facilitating various protocols while reflecting on substantive issues at their school or in their classroom. For example, Ms. Dubois brought
some samples of student work to the second PLC Coaches Institute in May 2008. Within the institute, a small group of teachers worked with her to examine the work using a protocol, and Ms. Dubois walked away with some new insights and ideas for working with her students. She said,

  Everyone got to analyze it and they got to tell me maybe…some things I could do differently because it was a dilemma with a certain student that I presented…They gave me some feedback as to maybe something I could have done differently, and they also brought an awareness of other things that I didn't even realize from another student. (05/20/08)

Engaging in substantive work about their own practice while learning the protocols and facilitation techniques at the training institutes appeared to promote receptiveness to the collaborative approach.

The protocols that teachers learned at the training institutes were also a tremendous support to implementing RSM efforts at the school, particularly in planning and facilitating PLC sessions. PLC coaches and participants alike commented on numerous protocols and how they promoted community building and reflective, collaborative discussion. Mr. Davenport explained how the protocols themselves were a tremendous support to his work as a PLC coach because they provide structure to the activities of a PLC. He explained, “The protocols are just awesome because it brings excellent structure to you as teacher, as a facilitator” (02/25/08). At the training institutes, PLC coaches were introduced to numerous protocols and activities to guide their work. In addition, they were provided with a book of protocols published by the NSRF and directed to the NSRF website. Ms. Petit used these resources regularly. She said, “We go to the [NSRF] website very often” (02/28/08).

The NSRF protocols and activities that teachers learned at training institutes served as a resource to their work in their school-site PLCs to improve their school culture and teaching
practice. In addition, the opportunity to engage in substantive work with teachers from other schools along with the interactive, engaging style of facilitation and the continuous follow-up built into the training institute schedule supported the success of teachers in implementing the RSM initiative at their school. Yet, teachers were not left to their own devices in between these training institute offerings. The following section describes the nature of the RSM external facilitation in place at schools.

**External facilitation**

A small staff of RSM external facilitators worked with schools to continually support the implementation of RSM efforts at the schools. RSM external facilitators were either school district or university employees who facilitated the RSM training institutes and worked with a select group of schools. Dawkins Grove and Patricia Smith had different facilitators, and they served a variety of purposes in helping school staff, especially the PLC coaches, get the initiative underway. Throughout the interviews, teachers pointed to four services that RSM external facilitators provided. First, external facilitators mentored PLC coaches on how to run PLC sessions and what activities to try with their PLC groups. Teachers from both schools commented on how their external facilitators were always helping them. Ms. Dubois said that the Dawkins Grove external facilitator is “always here, always emailing us. And actually he keeps on giving us ideas like, ‘Okay, so what is the meeting going to be about?’” (02/25/08)?

Second, external facilitators provided additional material and resources to support PLC coaches in planning and facilitating their PLC meetings. Ms. Petit explained that she could always contact the Patricia Smith external facilitator if she needed anything. She said, “If we need an article, a good article, she will say, ‘Okay this article will work. Or, I can give you a good icebreaker. You can use this one instead. Why don't you do this instead?’” (02/28/08)

Third, the RSM external facilitators observed initial PLC sessions and provided feedback on how they were facilitated. The Dawkins Grove external facilitator observed a PLC session in January 2008. After the meeting, the external facilitator sent “a feedback email” (Davenport, 02/25/08) to the Dawkins Grove PLC coaches. The email provided observations and suggestions for next moves. The external facilitator wrote,

> I left very excited by what I experienced and very favorably impressed about the tenor of the room and the attitude of the people in the group and their willingness to engage with you in this work. I want to encourage you to build on what you have accomplished and link the work to issues of practice as soon as possible. (01/16/08)

The feedback was encouraging, substantive, and critical in that it validated the coaches’ work and provided direction for their next steps. By giving this kind of feedback, the external facilitator supported the growth of the PLC coaches as teacher leaders.

Finally, external facilitators acted as a liaison with the school’s administration. In addition to acting as an emissary for the RSM initiative, the external facilitator often acted as an advocate for the school’s own PLC coaches. The power dynamics within a school staff can sometimes make teachers uncomfortable addressing issues with their administration. So, the external facilitator met with the administration to keep administrators onboard with what was going on with the initiative as well as the concerns of PLC coaches and other teachers. Because the administration was so supportive at Patricia Smith, the external facilitator was able to maintain an amicable relationship with the school’s administration. However, the reluctance of the Dawkins Grove administration and the changing of principals in the middle of the year led to a different situation. The Dawkins Grove external facilitator set up formal meetings with the new principal to explain the RSM initiative and the importance of protecting the time allotted to PLC
meetings from other distractions. As Mr. Davenport explained, “He made it his business to come out and let the principal know what was going on and how important it is for the meetings to be scheduled and that the meetings go according to plan without any interruption” (02/25/08). Whether the administration was supportive or not, the external facilitator acted as a conduit of information from the RSM initiative and the school staff to the administration and thus acted as a support to the implementation and reform efforts being enacted at the school.

Thus, RSM external facilitators were an essential part of the ongoing implementation and development of RSM efforts at each school site. By mentoring PLC coaches, providing resources and feedback, and meeting with the administration, external facilitators supported the improvement of school culture and teaching practice at the schools. Nevertheless, because of their position with the RSM initiative, the external facilitators had more duties than acting as training institute facilitators and school-site external facilitators. They were also responsible for helping the school to collect and disseminate formative data about school culture and teaching practice to monitor the impact of their efforts.

Formative data collection

RSM external facilitators were generally responsible for coordinating data collection efforts at the schools with which they worked. To monitor the impact of RSM efforts on school culture, external facilitators administered a school culture survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998). The survey was administered in the spring of 2007 before implementation began and again in the spring of 2008. The results of the Spring 2007 administration were shared with school teams during the RSM Summer Institute in June 2007 to act as a springboard for planning action steps to target specific areas of the school culture in need of improvement. Ms. Pollack attended that summer institute and explained that the items in the Patricia Smith action plan, which aimed “to create an effective PLC fostering a culture of trust, and collaboration and focused on student
learning and achievement” (06/15/08), were designed to address “things that were issues from the survey we did last year” (05/22/08).

In addition to school culture, RSM external facilitators collected and disseminated data that focused on teaching practice. The Instructional Practice Inventory (Painter & Valentine, 1996) was collected at schools to provide a whole school picture of the nature of instructional practice during a typical day at the school. The observation protocol documents the extent of student engaged learning that occurs as a result of the teaching practice employed throughout the school day. The data were collected at both schools, yet the data were never returned to Dawkins Grove. Thus, the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI) data went unmentioned by Dawkins Grove teachers while each of the teachers at Patricia Smith cited it as a valuable support. Ms. Pierre said that seeing the data made her reflect on and make changes in her practice. She said,

After finding out about the score that we had for Patricia Smith, and it shows that the things that we get good score[s] on, and the things that we could work on…I tend to realize from that we do more of whole group than letting the students doing things by themselves. (02/27/08)

So, Ms. Pierre tried implementing more hands-on activities in which her kindergarten students could work more autonomously. She gave an example of a science lesson she planned after seeing the IPI data. She said,

We were doing seed[s], and they were to think about…would they plant on soil or sand? Which one would be growing faster? And then we observed. We take notes, and then right now the trees are outside. They all grow. So, they get to see both sides. It could also grow. It might take a little more time for one than the other, but it grows on sand and also with the soil, like dirt. So they kind of discussed that,…predict about it, and now they get to see if their prediction was correct or not. (02/27/08)

Ms. Pierre’s comments illustrate exactly how the data that were collected and disseminated at the school can lead directly to improvements in teaching to provide for active and engaging lessons for students. So, both kinds of formative data collected and disseminated at schools – provided it
was indeed disseminated – served as a support to RSM efforts to improve school culture and teaching practice.

**Additional workshops**

One teacher at each school also mentioned additional workshops provided by the RSM initiative to teachers at participating schools. RSM aims to provide teachers with content clinics and other workshops to support the efforts of the initiative at schools and in the community. One major focus of the initiative is to align transitions from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. Thus, the initiative offered a workshop and provided resources for kindergarten teachers and administrators at RSM schools to help improve transitions between early learning centers and elementary schools. Ms. Petit mentioned these efforts and said that after the workshop, the school planned events to invite pre-kindergartners, their parents, and their teachers into Patricia Smith. She said,

> I think Saturday there will be something going on in the school where we will have teachers and parents coming to see how it will be when they are in kindergarten… Schools bring their kids, teachers and kids, they come to our school to see how we doing kindergarten. And tomorrow, I will have four students from another school coming to my classroom with another teacher to see how we doing in kindergarten and how they can get ready when they come here to be better prepared for what we going to offer them. (05/28/08)

The workshop was a part of the initiative’s larger effort to improve school readiness, not only by making schools ready for students, but also making students ready for school. Nevertheless, this transition workshop was not the only additional workshop mentioned by interviewees.

Ms. Donato at Dawkins Grove also attended a vocabulary development workshop given by a Lastinger Center faculty member. The vocabulary development session was the only content clinic that was made available to teachers during the study. It was quite informative for Ms. Donato. She said,
We had one of the professors from UF come and run the professional development talking about vocabulary development in our students, reading aloud best practices…with a focus on vocabulary both in the reading block and also in content areas…, which has been helpful specifically with my lower students, my ESOL students. I’m trying to incorporate a lot more graphic organizers and visuals with them. (02/21/08)

From that workshop, Ms. Donato implemented a strategy called Text Talk throughout the rest of the school year. She described that strategy in her second interview:

I would like select a book that would be appropriate for us to read, pick out three or four vocabulary words, and as I read the story, provide a quick student friendly definition of the words, so that the students gain an understanding, but it doesn't interrupt the story too much. And then following that, following the read aloud, we go into vocabulary developing skills, so whether it's having the students describe a time that they felt the vocabulary word or kind of comparing, contrasting the vocabulary words to words we already know. (05/19/08)

That this single workshop could have a lasting impact on Ms. Donato’s vocabulary instruction throughout the year is testament to the support the content clinics offered in her efforts to improve her instruction. Despite the fact that they were not consistently administered, there is evidence that suggests that they could have profound impacts on the intended outcomes of the program.

In all, numerous internal and external supports provided the conditions and assistance necessary to achieve outcomes related to school culture and teacher practice. Within the school, a supportive administration, grade level teams, and school support staff helped create favorable conditions for the implementation of RSM efforts. In addition, the external supports of the TLSI graduate program, the RSM training institutes, the external facilitators, the formative data collection, and the additional workshops all provided needed guidance to administrators and teachers in enacting their reforms. Together, these internal and external supports helped the teachers that participated in the RSM initiative to achieve improvements in school culture and instruction. These achievements were possible, however, only to the extent that these teachers
were able to overcome the obstacles they confronted at the school and teacher level. Those obstacles are detailed in the following section.

Obstacles at the School Level

The obstacles that teachers encountered while trying to enact their reform efforts highlighted the stark distinction between the theory evident in their action plans and the reality of their everyday practice. At times, teachers discussed the distinction between what they had planned to do and what happened when they tried. As Ms. Dubois said of her school’s action plan,

When we put it together, yeah, we're going to go and we're going to do it, and it makes sense and it's great. But then actually implementing it with all those changes [in administration], it was challenging. And finding the time, it was challenging. (05/20/08)

While encountering obstacles may have been disheartening to teachers because they fell short of their intended goals, the lessons learned could prove valuable to teachers in sustaining the work in the coming years and expanding to the schools currently being introduced to the RSM initiative. Four common difficulties that were encountered as teachers enacted reform efforts at the school level are examined here.

Time

Unsurprisingly, time proved to be a serious obstacle for two main reasons. First, PLC coaches had difficulty finding time to get together and plan PLC meetings. After the myriad responsibilities most teachers already have at their schools, the role of PLC coach is another hat to wear. It was often difficult to work with other PLC coaches at the school to plan PLC sessions, particularly if the PLC coaches had no common planning time. As Ms. Dubois explained,

We have so much to do with meeting deadlines, with grades, or things like that. We have no common planning time, so only time we can meet is…the day before, so we're like putting our heads together, “Okay, what are we going to do? Okay, how is this going to make sense?” (02/25/08)
And as a result, the PLC sessions that the Dawkins Grove coaches facilitated were something less than what they had hoped to accomplish. With little time to plan, it can be difficult to assess the needs of the faculty and then plan a session that meets those needs. As Ms. Dubois said, “We find something, and it's effective. But it's not as effective because it's not as we probably would have liked. It doesn't reach their needs as much” (05/20/08). Thus, the lack of planning time for coaches to work together to assess staff needs and plan PLC meetings may diminish the quality of the sessions and lessen the impact of reform efforts.

Not only was finding time for planning PLC sessions difficult for the coaches, finding time to hold the sessions themselves also proved a challenge. As mentioned previously, the first task coaches had in creating a collaborative culture was to find time for teachers to collaborate, and PLC coaches worked with their administrators to find time during teacher workdays or early release days. Nevertheless, numerous issues came up that complicated the schedules that PLC coaches had established at the end of the year. For one, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), the state standardized test, took up a good deal of teachers’ time in March. As a reprieve, principals let their teachers leave before official time on early release Wednesdays during March in order to compensate for the rigor of the testing procedures. Ms. Petit talked about the aftermath of the FCAT almost as post-traumatic stress and figured that was the reason why there had been no meetings for a period. She said, “After the FCAT was there a kind of relaxation? Maybe. They were tired after the FCAT. Now let's get relaxed. Let's get it easy, and probably that might be part of it” (05/28/08).

The following month in April, the PLCs at Patricia Smith suffered another blow when their unofficial head PLC coach, Ms. Pereira, left for six weeks of maternity leave. Each of the teachers interviewed at the school mentioned her absence as an obstacle to the progress of RSM
efforts. During her leave, not a single PLC session was held. When asked why there had been no PLC meetings since February, Ms. Poole replied simply, “I think that we have been kept busy. We were getting ready for the test, and I think one [coach] had to drop out because she had a baby” (05/20/08).

By the time that Ms. Pereira had returned in the middle of March, teachers were already moving into end of the year mode. At the end of the year, teachers had many additional procedures to take care of, and their time was even more limited. Faculty meetings began to focus more on technical procedures rather than teacher learning. Ms. Poole said that with “school closing, we got to meet to get things straightened up for retention and promotion and everything” (05/20/08). Though, at the time of the last interview, PLC coaches were still planning on having a final PLC session to close out the school year. As Ms. Pollack explained, “It is the end of the year and people are winding down, but just like we tell the kids, school isn't over. You're not done learning; the school year is not over. It goes the same thing for the teachers” (05/22/08). Thus, despite the lapse in meetings, teachers at Patricia Smith finished the year with a final PLC session.

The PLC coaches at Dawkins Grove had a more challenging time scheduling regular PLC meetings. The school’s schedule had numerous conflicts. Despite coaches’ best efforts, the meetings that were held before February were often poorly attended because some teachers were obligated to attend other meetings at the same time. Ms. Dubois explained,

Some of the days that we planned to have these meetings, there were other meetings taking place, like…the special ed[ucation] teachers had a meeting, or the third grade teachers had like a retention meeting. There was always other meetings going on at the same time…And it's not meetings that we knew about ahead of time so…we probably wouldn't have planned it for that date. (05/20/08)
The scheduling problems only worsened. After initial success in holding regular, albeit poorly attended, meetings until February, the PLC coaches were unable to hold another meeting for the rest of the school year. The FCAT conflicted with the coaches planning in March, and afterwards the coaches had to cancel one meeting date after another because of other interference with the PLC schedule. Either “emergency faculty meetings” (Donato, 05/19/08) were called and all teachers were required to attend, or the administration allowed teachers to leave early on early release Wednesdays as compensation for requiring teacher time during lunch. Mr. Davenport said, “Every time we cancel it's due to different reasons, whether…she [the principal] decides to let us go home early, or maybe it's another meeting that needs to take precedence over the PLC at that time” (05/15/08). The continual cancellation and lack of rescheduling of PLC meetings displayed the lack of priority that PLC sessions suffered under the new administration at Dawkins Grove. That lack of administrative support is explored in the following section.

Lack of administrative support

While the administration at Patricia Smith served as a support to the implementation of PLCs, the administration at Dawkins Grove did not actively support RSM efforts at the school. At best, the administration allowed certain RSM efforts to take place. For example, a group of 3 teachers were released to attend the PLC Coaches Institutes and the NSRF Winter Meeting during the school year. At worst, the administration’s actions, such as scheduling emergency faculty meetings during PLC meeting time, limited the success of efforts at the school. This lack of active administrative support of RSM efforts at the school could at least in part be attributed to the change in administration during the middle of the school year. This new principal had not been a part of Dawkins Grove previously; many things at the school were new to her, including the RSM initiative. Ms. Donato thought this lack of understanding contributed to the lack of support the administration showed for RSM efforts. She said, “We did have administrative
changes in the middle of the school year, so that might have also contributed to it. Maybe [our new principal] wasn't made fully aware of the benefits of having the Ready Schools initiative in our school” (05/19/08). Mr. Davenport tended to agree with Ms. Donato’s conclusions. Even though she met with the RSM external facilitator, Mr. Davenport said of the new principal, “I don't believe that she really understands about the Ready Schools project” (05/15/08).

The lack of understanding translated into a lack of support for the efforts of PLC coaches and participants. In turn, that lack of support became an obstacle to RSM efforts at the school and prevented them from realizing the goals that PLC coaches and participants had set for themselves for the school year. As teachers were getting to know and getting used to their new leader, their attention turned away from building the collaborative culture they had envisioned at the start of their PLC meetings. Ms. Dubois said of the change in administration, “That was a major shift, so getting used to that style, her style, there was not that much focus…on what we [PLC coaches] were trying to get started” (05/20/08). Thus, administrative support proved either to be a major support or major hindrance in advancing the reform efforts of teachers at each school, and changing administrators in the middle of the school year only made the situation more challenging.

**Getting teacher buy-in**

In addition to securing administrative support, getting teachers engaged in efforts also proved to be a significant challenge. At Dawkins Grove, where participation in the PLC sessions was voluntary, the first challenge was to get teachers to attend the meetings. Combined with the scheduling challenges discussed above, the initial hesitancy of many teachers made this no small feat. When asked what major obstacles were faced in getting PLC sessions started at Dawkins Grove, Mr. Davenport said simply, “Getting people involved” (02/25/08). This plain speech was continued in the second interview. Talking about the difficulties in maintaining their efforts to
build PLCs at the school, Mr. Davenport said, “We just have people who don't want to do it” (05/15/08).

Even when participation was expected of teachers at Patricia Smith, teachers were still reluctant to participate in the PLC meetings. Many teachers saw it as a seizure of their planning time. Ms. Pierre explained many teachers’ initial sentiments: “When we first started, a lot of people were complaining because they wanted to work in their room and they were not able to do it because they had to go to meetings” (02/27/08). These sentiments were largely similar to the initial hesitancy and reluctance displayed by the PLC coaches and leadership team members when they were first introduced to the RSM initiative. Nevertheless, whereas many members of the leadership team overcame their reluctance at training institutes, that unwillingness proved a more significant barrier for novice PLC coaches at the schools, especially those coaches who were stepping into a leadership role for the first time.

Even after PLC coaches had succeeded in getting their colleagues to attend the PLC sessions, it was another challenge to encourage teachers to actively engage in the activities. PLC coaches expressed some frustration at the lack of buy-in among fellow staff. Mr. Davenport said, “I don't think a lot of people buy it, buy into the Ready Schools program as I think I did” (05/15/08). PLC coaches often felt that their colleagues were not participating fully in PLC activities, or as Ms. Dubois put it, “We have people who are there in body, but not in mind” (05/20/08). PLC coaches explained that they did not believe that their colleagues’ presence at PLC meetings indicated a shared commitment to the improvement of the school. Rather, the meetings offered them a way to earn professional development credit toward recertification, and were thus a way to fulfill a requirement and another burden to bear.
This attitude toward professional development was not uncommon, and it certainly wasn’t reserved for PLC sessions exclusively. It seemed that some past approaches to professional development led to an initial skepticism among teachers about many professional development offerings. As Mr. Davenport explained, “For the most part, people don't actually go to PDs [professional development sessions] to get professional development or some type of knowledge or learning. I think they just go there to get Master Plan Points” (05/15/08). This skepticism was a significant obstacle to establishing PLC sessions in schools because at the heart of any successful PLC is a group of people who share common values and understandings. Ms. Dubois explained that a major hurdle in getting things going at Dawkins Grove was “shifting the attitude about it [professional development], actually participating, being active, and seeing that it's something to improve everyone, not just to get Master Plan Points, to improve the school overall, the students' achievement, our teaching” (05/20/08). As in the case of the PLC coaches, RSM efforts to establish PLCs at Dawkins Grove were only successful to the extent that they could overcome this initial skepticism about professional development in general.

Teachers at Patricia Smith had similar reservations. Yet interviewees didn’t talk about the reluctance as an aversion to professional development, they saw it more in terms of an overriding resistance to change of any sort. As Ms. Pierre explained, “Some people don't like to…change so many things because they already adapt to what they know and they want to keep it going. And others [are] just scared of change” (02/27/08). This resistance to change certainly delimited the extent to which teachers bought into reform efforts at Patricia Smith. When teachers saw the PLCs as something different from the routine that they were used to, they resisted the efforts of PLC coaches and the administration to make the PLC sessions part of the school’s routine. This resistance to change at Patricia Smith and the issues at Dawkins Grove of securing teachers’
attendance and engagement were barriers to securing the teacher buy-in necessary to make the PLC sessions genuinely successful.

**Existing culture of the school**

Skepticism toward professional development and change was not the only obstacle teachers faced in terms of school culture. Because the staff at both schools had worked together previously for years, the existing relationships between staff members sometimes proved difficult to overcome in order to build collaboration among the staff. Teachers at Patricia Smith described a pervasive lack of trust among the staff when beginning RSM efforts at the school. This lack of trust surfaced most vividly during the first PLC meeting, in which PLC coaches tried to tackle the issue directly. Teachers were asked to have a written conversation using the Chalk Talk protocol to answer a question about the lack of trust among colleagues. But, the activity itself made some people feel uncomfortable. Ms. Pierre described the lack of trust during that activity. She said,

> They were having everybody write something on a chart, like to say how we feel. A lot of people were afraid of putting things. It was supposed to be anonymous, but when you're writing, some people were still there to see you writing. (02/27/08)

The situation did not improve later in the meeting when PLC coaches tried to engage staff members in a discussion of what was written. It was even more difficult to get people to say what was on their minds in front of their colleagues. Ms. Pollack thought that some teachers might have feared repercussions. She said, “The beginning meeting, I remember was very difficult. People didn't want to share, it was kind of as though if I say something, am I going to be held to it later” (02/18/08)? Thus, the initial difficulty in developing a sense of trust and confidentiality was a challenge in building the rapport among staff necessary to create effective PLCs.
Beyond issues of trust, building relationships among staff members was sometimes difficult because of the cliques that had already developed among members of the staff. This tendency to self-segregate into groups was most notably observed at Patricia Smith. As a PLC coach, Ms. Petit saw the cliques as a difficulty in establishing an effective community at the school. The groups tended to separate teachers, rather than bring them together. She explained,

In our school, we not really connected to each other because some teachers think that they talking behind their back. We not friendly, or there are groups. I'm your friend, and you are my friends. I'm not going to talk to you…They don't even say, “Hi, Hello, how are you?” (02/28/08)

This self-segregation was confirmed during the PLC observation at Patricia Smith. As teachers came into the media center where the meeting was being held, it was evident that they sat down next to the folks they felt most comfortable around. The field notes documented that the division between teachers often fell along lines of race and ethnicity:

As teachers come in, the three facilitators sit at the front, left table. Other teachers congregate in the back tables, with two to three teachers per table. Predominantly, these teachers are self-segregated with Black teachers, Latino teachers, and White teachers separating themselves. (01/18/08)

These cliques can prove a significant obstacle to the progress of effective PLCs, especially when they seem to reflect mistrust among teachers of different racial and ethnic groups.

In all, four significant challenges to RSM efforts were noted at the school level: (1) time, (2) administrative support, (3) teacher buy-in, and (4) the existing school culture. These obstacles delimited the success that teachers were able to achieve in enacting reform efforts at their schools and limited the impact of the initiative toward reaching its goals. Yet, obstacles were not only faced at the school level. As teachers made efforts to reform their individual teaching practice and improve their instruction, they also faced challenges at the teacher level. Those obstacles are described in the following section.
Obstacles at the Teacher Level

When trying to reform their practice, teachers encountered four common obstacles to their improvement. Those four challenges are highlighted here.

Time

Unsurprisingly, one of the most significant challenges to individual teachers’ efforts to improve their practice was also time. At the teacher level, it was not the difficulty of finding time to plan or deliver PLC sessions, rather individual teachers had trouble finding adequate time to plan or deliver high quality instruction given their other responsibilities. Three teachers pointed to time as an obstacle to improvement. Two of them discussed time as an impediment to planning. For example, Ms. Petit knew she wanted to improve the quality of the activities in her reading centers for the small group instruction she regularly implemented in her classroom. However, with her responsibilities as a PLC coach, an unofficial grade level chair, a graduate student in the TLSI program, and a mother to her own children, time was often a scarce commodity. When asked of the obstacles she faced in trying to improve her instruction, she said,

I think time is a factor also. Trying to find time to create my centers, to know exactly what they [the students are] going to do, so they know exactly what they [are] going to do, and where each group is going at a certain time. (02/28/08)

The third teacher, Ms. Pollack, felt that time was always short in delivering quality instruction to her students. With all that she wanted to provide, Ms. Pollack felt that she never had enough time in the day to provide adequate instruction. She explained, “I never feel like there's enough hours in the day. If I could have my kids here 24 hours a day with me, I could find something for them to do that would help them” (05/22/08). Just as in reforming school culture, teachers found it difficult to manage the multiple competing interests for their time, and as a result, they could not improve their instruction as they had planned.
**Overload**

A related challenge dealt with the psychological toll of facing multiple, simultaneous responsibilities. Many teachers expressed sentiments that they felt overworked and underappreciated and thus overloaded. They said that they sometimes found it difficult to muster the motivation to continue working in spite of the challenges they faced in the classroom, at the school, and with their colleagues. Three teachers talked about feeling overloaded while trying to improve their practice, and all of them were students in the TLSI program, PLC coaches, or both. Ms. Petit was a perfect example. She had taken on many new responsibilities, and she sometimes didn’t feel like she was getting the support she needed despite her best intentions. She said that she sometimes second-guessed herself,

> Sometimes I wonder, “Am I crazy or why should I do all of this?” Even my children, they ask me, “Mummy, you always talking about your kids. You always planning even if you are home.” So, I don't know, but that's why I think maybe this, Why am I doing it? This is the only negative thing in it: not having enough support from colleagues. (02/28/08)

Sometimes the psychological toll made teachers question more than their sanity. Sometimes they also questioned their commitment to their job. Ms. Dubois felt burned out because staying committed can be difficult in challenging schools, such as Dawkins Grove. She felt that sometimes it would be easier if she didn’t care so much. She said,

> I'm exhausted, like it's tiring, especially if you care. Like I care…because I, I guess it's like my passion…., this is what I went to school for, and this is what I wanted to do. So when the kids aren't getting it, or if it's something that I've tried and tried, and it's still, it doesn't seem like it's reaching them, then it bothers me. (05/20/08)

When teachers felt overloaded, it drained a significant amount of psychological energy from their work. Taking the time to question one’s sanity or one’s commitment takes time and energy away from questioning the effectiveness of one’s practice. Thus, reaching this state of overload takes a toll on teachers’ motivation to improve their instruction in the classroom.
Managing the time constraints and psychological pressure of multiple responsibilities were not the only challenges teachers faced. As they tried to improve their instructional practice they also faced challenges within their classrooms. Six of the interviewees pointed to student misbehavior as a challenge they faced in improving their teaching practice. Even though most students were generally on task, teachers often explained that “you're going to find one or two” (Poole, 03/06/08) students that are not engaged in the lesson. Ms. Pierre explained that there will always be some challenging students in every classroom and you just have to work with them, or in her words, “Some you can easily manage and others, oh my god, you just have to live with it” (02/27/08).

Moreover, managing student behavior can be a significant challenge in urban schools. As Ms. Dubois said about Dawkins Grove, “Behavior is a big issue, especially here it's a big issue” (05/20/08). Because behavior was such a formidable issue, teachers sometimes felt as though they spent so much time and effort trying to manage the behavior of their students that there was little left over to deliver the instruction that their students needed. At times, it limited the options that teachers had in terms of the instructional strategies they used. Ms. Dubois explained that even though she tried to emphasize group project work in her second grade classroom, she often had difficulty because students would begin arguing with each other. She said,

If I give them a project to like work together, they'll be fine for like maybe ten minutes, but then after that the fighting starts...I want them to work together, but the problem is a lot of them, they can't. I don't know if they lack the social skills. Instead of just speaking to one another, they're yelling. (05/20/08)

Ms. Dubois saw the importance of children learning how to work together, and she did employ partner strategies in her classroom, as observed during the CLASS observations. But, she felt that she couldn’t employ these strategies as regularly as she would like.
Ms. Pollack faced a similar dilemma. Even though she wanted to employ more project-based learning to get students out of their desks and engaged in learning, she realized that instructional mode was foreign to her second grade students. She explained,

I would love for them to do away with the desks in my classroom. I would have just the kids on the floor wherever they were comfortable, but my students can't perform in that kind of environment because they've never been in that before. (02/18/08)

Students’ behavior in the classroom cannot be understated as a barrier to overcome in terms of improving classroom instruction. Indeed, it is important that teachers spend the time and effort to provide students with the guidance essential to developing the social skills necessary to work with each other. However, working with challenging students in urban schools can sometimes lead teachers to choose expediency over quality in instruction. Thus, behavior can prove to be a challenge in improving instruction.

**Scripted curriculum**

The final challenge that teachers discussed in trying to improve their instruction was the scripted curriculum that they were mandated to follow. Four of the teachers made reference to the scripted curriculum. Teachers explained that a curriculum can sometimes offer support in terms of guidance and resources. Especially during the “Crunch Time” preparations for statewide FCAT testing, teachers were provided with lesson plans to guide test preparation. “If you teach third through sixth grade, you don't do lesson plans from January to March,” explained Ms. Pollack (05/18/08), but at the same time, these lesson plans were a “double-edged sword.”

Enforcing strict fidelity to the curriculum pacing could sometimes prove detrimental to teacher’s creativity and development, the quality of their instruction, and the learning of their students. Ms. Donato felt that at times, the curriculum was confining. Because kindergarten teachers had been provided with a new curriculum during the school year, teachers had little freedom to improvise or bring in additional resources, even if teachers felt the materials were in
the interest of the students. She explained that the curriculum “is pretty scripted, so you don't really have the flexibility of incorporating like actual books into the classroom” (05/19/08). As a result, her development as a teacher was stunted. The curriculum, she said, was “stunting my growth to expand as a teacher and really push my students and address their needs in a way…that would be beneficial to them” (05/19/08). The curriculum thus limited teachers’ ability to effectively meet the needs of their students and grow as a teacher. As such, the scripted curriculum served as an obstacle to teacher growth and the improvement of instruction.

The challenges of time, administrative support, teacher engagement, and staff relations at the school level as well as time, teacher overload, student behavior, and scripted curriculum at the teacher level were not surprising. They reflect concerns in the existing literature on the implementation of collaborative professional development efforts. Nevertheless, they are described here to highlight their importance to the future efforts of the initiative and similar school reform efforts.

**Conclusion**

The outcomes presented within this chapter were part of the theory of school and teacher change. That theory stipulates that participation in the school reform initiative coupled with specific feedback on instruction led to substantive changes in teaching practice. Participation in reform efforts led teachers to set goals and implement strategies for the improvement of their school culture and their instructional practice. Internal support from the administration, grade level teams, and school support staff as well as external support from the RSM support staff were essential to the success of their efforts to create a critically collaborative school culture and make changes in teaching practice. To the extent that teachers were able to overcome obstacles at the teacher and school levels, they developed into teacher leaders, improved school culture,
implemented developmentally appropriate practice, and impacted students. The following chapter will discuss the implications of these findings.
Table 6-1. Mean scores for all teachers who participated in RSM activities and CLASS feedback sessions. Compiled from Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASS Domains</th>
<th>Observation 1</th>
<th>Observation 2</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>+ 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Organization</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>+ 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Support</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>+ 1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>+ 0.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview of the Study

School reform initiatives are born of the troubling performance of American students on international measures of student achievement and the perennial underperformance of students of color and students from poor and working class backgrounds on national measures of student achievement. Yet, it is clear that the pursuit of equitable educational success for all students requires comprehensive reform in education as well as other social services, such as housing and health care. The reform initiative investigated within this study attempts to answer this need. As a collaboration among universities, philanthropic organizations, health service providers, and a large school district, Ready Schools Miami (RSM) is an urban school reform effort that addresses some of the issues underlying the achievement gap and education debt. Within that partnership, the University of Florida’s Lastinger Center for Learning leads efforts to improve the instruction of elementary school teachers through job-embedded, collaborative professional development opportunities.

The extant literature on school reform and collaborative professional development is limited in its ability to demonstrate an impact on teaching practice and student learning. The present study was an attempt to add to the literature on school reform efforts centered on such professional development practices. The study employed a pragmatic inquiry approach to research, which viewed inquiry as a transformative process that sought not only to understand the initiative’s impact but also to improve teaching practice at the target schools. The two target schools were urban, high-poverty schools chosen to represent the large minority populations of Miami-Dade County. Six teachers were chosen at each school; two at each grade, kindergarten through second.
The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Each of the twelve teachers was observed twice using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Observation Protocol (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006). A diverse subgroup of eight teachers was chosen to participate in individual interviews. In addition, observations of professional learning community (PLC) sessions were conducted at the schools, and documents relating to teachers’ participation in RSM efforts were collected. The use of constant comparative analysis and an abductive approach to reasoning provided for a grounded theory to best explain the data and guide future practice and research.

Results indicated that nine of the twelve teachers showed notable gains in the Instructional Support domain of the CLASS, indicating an improved ability to scaffold students’ concept development, provide feedback, and stimulate language development. In addition, a slight improvement in student engagement was also noted within these teachers’ classrooms. The grounded theory of school and teacher change explained the teachers’ instructional improvement in relation to their participation in the collaborative professional development activities of the RSM initiative and the CLASS feedback sessions that were part of this dissertation study. These teachers enacted reform strategies at both the school and teacher levels that led to an improved school culture and the observed changes in classroom instruction. These teachers’ reform efforts were assisted by internal and external supports and hindered by school- and teacher-level obstacles. Overall, the theory stipulated that teachers who participated in both RSM activities and the CLASS feedback sessions demonstrated improvement in their teaching, as evidenced by gains in their CLASS domain scores.

In addition to providing an overview of the study, the purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on conclusions drawn from the findings, relate those conclusions to extant research
literature, and highlight implications of the findings for practitioners and researchers. The chapter begins with a discussion of the major conclusions drawn from the study in relation to the conclusions of previous research literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study’s implications. Implications for future practice both within the RSM initiative and in other similar school reform efforts are described. Lastly, implications for future research on school reform and professional development are explained.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study pointed to four significant conclusions related to the impacts of collaborative professional development and school reform efforts. First, this study extends the findings of previous research that high quality professional development can improve the quality of classroom teaching. Second, this study provides further support that professional learning communities (PLCs) improve school culture. Third, this study confirms that school reform efforts based on building capacity can develop teacher leadership. Finally, this study supports and builds on research related to the conditions necessary for successful school reform. Each conclusion will be examined in further detail here.

**Impact on Teaching Practice**

The combination of professional development opportunities afforded by RSM efforts at the school with the CLASS feedback sessions was characterized by the features of high quality professional development that were outlined in the literature review. The literature review suggested that high quality professional development is: collaborative, coherent, sustained, based on content matter, focused on instructional practice, grounded in active learning opportunities, and embedded within the school with input from external expertise (Borko, 2004; Cordingley et al., 2005; Desimone, 2002; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Munby et al., 2001; Wilson & Berne, 1999; Yoon et al., 2007). Clearly, the professional development opportunities provided
to the teachers possessed these qualities. The Teacher Leadership for School Improvement (TLSI) graduate program, the RSM training institutes, the school-site PLCs, the external facilitation, the RSM workshops, and the CLASS feedback sessions together embodied these characteristics.

This study expands support for the conclusion that high quality professional development can improve teaching practice. Teachers who participated in the RSM initiative took advantage of different combinations of the professional development offerings. Some teachers were participants in the TLSI program, the RSM training institutes, and the school-site PLCs. Others simply participated in the school-site PLCs. These professional development activities provided a collaborative and coherent philosophy to instructional practice that offered ongoing learning opportunities within teachers’ work context. When these opportunities were combined with the CLASS feedback sessions, which targeted specific aspects of teachers’ instructional practice, teachers demonstrated improvements in their ability to provide instructional support and foster student engagement. The findings of this study, which are based on interview and classroom observation data, build on the findings of studies that are based on teacher reports in survey data alone (e.g., Desimone et al., 2002). The study provides a comprehensive picture of the nature of the professional development that teachers received, the reform strategies they enacted, and their perception of the impact. Teachers’ reports were confirmed or disconfirmed by observations of classroom instruction and the school-site PLCs as well as a document review.

The study provides evidence of specific changes in teacher practice by documenting the shift in teachers’ abilities to facilitate higher order thinking, provide feedback, and stimulate language development. These findings are notable because they build on the research conducted using the CLASS observation protocol by Pianta and La Paro (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; National
Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD, 2003; 2005]. This body of research has consistently demonstrated that teachers score lowest on the Instructional Support domain. Thus, it is quite a significant finding that teachers within this study who participated in collaborative professional development and CLASS feedback sessions improved so notably in this particular domain. It points to effective professional development practice in addressing teachers’ most significant needs.

Additionally, the study lends support to the claim that PLCs have the potential to improve instructional practice. Each of the teachers who demonstrated improvement on the CLASS observations was a participant or coach in school-site PLCs. Therefore, the study’s findings are in line with previous studies that document teacher reports of improvements in classroom practice (Nay, 2002; Tice, 1999) as well as studies that report observed shifts in teacher practice as a result of participation in PLCs (e.g., Englert & Tarrant, 1995). However, the results of this study provide only tentative support to the positive impact of PLCs on instruction. Not all teachers that participated in PLC sessions showed improvement in their CLASS domain scores. Both Ms. Perez and Ms. Devereaux recorded notable decreases in their scores despite their participation in school-site PLCs. Thus, it is impossible to attribute the observed improvements in instruction to PLCs alone. Because many teachers participated in multiple professional development offerings, it is impossible to discern the impact of any one offering. Further, the theory of school and teacher change indicates that participation in the CLASS feedback sessions were also an important component to improving teachers’ instruction. Thus, instructional improvement cannot be explained in relation to participation in PLCs alone.

**Impact on School Culture**

Nevertheless, this study provides further support to the well-established conclusion that PLCs have a positive impact on school culture. Previous literature suggests that PLCs move
school toward increased collaboration, increased teacher autonomy, and/or increased teacher learning and professionalism (Vescio et al., 2008). Both Dunne and colleagues (2000) and Wood (2007) documented the efforts and impacts of school-site PLCs based on the work of the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF). Their studies reached the conclusion that teachers who participated in PLC groups shared ideas and student work samples with one another, developed increased trust, and improved their sense of efficacy. The results of this study echo these findings. Teachers at both Patricia Smith and Dawkins Grove reported increased collaboration with their colleagues, especially in terms of sharing ideas and strategies with one another. Further, as teachers got to know one another better, they reported a greater sense of community and connection with their colleagues.

One caveat must be noted, however. Teachers at neither school truly realized the characteristics of an effective PLC. Literature on PLCs suggests that genuine learning communities develop shared values and collective responsibility for the learning of all students, foster reflective professional inquiry, and deprivatize practice in order to improve teacher and student learning (DuFour, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). The results suggest that teachers made significant efforts to embody these characteristics, especially at Patricia Smith where they collectively examined samples of student and teacher work. Nevertheless, the focus of activities seemed to remain on building community and exchanging tricks of the trade. This is what DuFour (2004) and associates called “co-blaboration” (italics added) rather than collaboration. Certainly, this is to be expected of schools that are just beginning to create structures for and engage in genuine collaboration. The process of becoming a critically collaborative community is developmental. And, while teachers’ efforts may have fallen short of embodying the characteristics of a genuine PLC in the first year of
implementation, they were taking steps in the right direction. One of those steps included the development of leadership roles among certain teachers.

**Development of Teacher Leadership and School Capacity**

This study provided a vivid illustration of school reform efforts based on the transformation of selected teachers into teacher leaders to build internal school capacity and human capital. School capacity refers to the total knowledge and resources that schools can apply to promoting student learning and development (King & Newmann, 2000; Smylie, 1996). School capacity increases as human capital accrues. This study provided examples of how human capital accumulated as teachers’ knowledge base increased in relation to their participation in RSM efforts. Ms. Petit, for example, demonstrated her learning through improved instructional practice in her classroom and newly acquired facilitation skills in professional development settings with her colleagues at Patricia Smith.

In a comparative study of three theory-driven reform efforts, McLaughlin and Mitra (2001, p. 310) found that teacher leadership was an important aspect of developing school capacity because teacher leaders “are seen as collaborating equals who facilitate the learning of their peers rather than as ‘experts’ on the theory.” This conclusion is strengthened by the results of this study, which illustrated the leadership development of teachers who participated in the TLSI graduate program and the PLC Coaches Institutes. By collaborating with their colleagues and the administration, leading PLC sessions, and making changes in their classroom practice, these teachers embodied the principles of the RSM initiative and acted as models for fellow teachers.

Further, the study provided empirical support to the three stories of school reform described by Fullan (2000). Evidence of the *Outside-In Story* was evidenced in the external supports provided by the RSM initiative for teachers to enact reform strategies at their schools.
The TLSI graduate program, the RSM training institutes, the external facilitation, the formative data collection, and additional RSM workshops enhanced school capacity, accountability, and innovation. The *Inside-Out Story* was demonstrated as teachers began to reorient themselves to see the value of collaborating with professionals outside their school, including RSM staff and educators from other school settings. For example, at the PLC Coaches Institute, teachers relished the opportunity to collaborate with RSM personnel, teachers from other schools, and support personnel from the district office. Finally, the *Inside Story* was exhibited in teachers’ efforts to create a critically collaborative culture that focused on enhancing student achievement. Teachers worked with their administration and RSM external facilitators to build structures for PLCs and engage their colleagues in collaborative work. While the reform strategies enacted in relation to each of Fullan’s “Stories” could certainly be expanded, this study provides evidence of how the three efforts work in concert to build school capacity, orchestrate resources, and improve educational outcomes.

**Conditions for School Reform**

Lastly, this study confirms and expands on research available on the conditions necessary to enact school reform efforts. McLaughlin and Mitra (2001, p. 302) define theory-based change efforts in relation to three main ideas: “core principles, the external development of the reform initially, co-invention and flexible implementation in practice.” In other words, a set of first principles that defines the change is developed in an external setting (e.g., a university) and then adapted to the contextual specifics of the schools and district where it is implemented. As is evident from previous description, the RSM initiative is such a theory-based change effort. McLaughlin and Mitra further argue that in order to sustain and scale up theory-based change efforts, certain conditions must be met: (1) sufficient resources, (2) knowledge of first principles, (3) supportive community of practice, (4) supportive principal, and (5) compatible
The findings of this study echo and add to these conclusions.

First, significant physical and human resources are needed to sustain and expand reform efforts such as the RSM initiative. For example, substantial amounts of time, money, and RSM personnel were necessary to provide the resources necessary for teachers from 16 schools to attend the PLC Coaches Institutes in October 2007 and May 2008. The needed resources will multiply as new schools come onboard each school year. Second, knowledge of first principles is necessary to assist teachers in adapting the reform initiative to fit their school context while remaining true to the intentions of the reform effort. The ways that PLC sessions were implemented at each school, for example, showed how teachers worked with administrators to adapt the RSM philosophy to their school context. Third, a supportive community of practice is necessary to “provide support, deflect challenges from the broader environment, and furnish feedback and encouragement essential to going deeper” (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001, p. 309). The continual follow-up with PLC coaches through the PLC Coaches Institutes and external facilitation provided a support structure to new coaches as they tried to implement reform strategies in their schools. Fourth, a knowledgeable and supportive principal who endorses the reform effort is essential to success. Clearly, the different approaches taken by the administrations at Patricia Smith and Dawkins Grove and the variable success each school had in enacting reform efforts demonstrate this point. Finally, a compatible district context that shares norms of practice with the reform effort promotes the sustainability of the reform. This conclusion was confirmed through examples of district actions that acted as obstacles to the progress of the RSM initiative, such as the replacement of the principal mid-year and the district
mandates that resulted in emergency meetings that interrupted the scheduling of PLC sessions at Dawkins Grove.

In all, the study confirms that each of these conditions plays a role in the ability to sustain and expand a theory-based school reform effort. The results of this study also indicate that the internal structures and resources of schools play a large role in the ability to implement and sustain reform efforts. The results of this study indicated that teachers pointed to both grade level teams and school support staff as essential supports to the improvement of school culture and teaching practice. Grade level teams provided a structure in which teachers had additional time to collaborate with their colleagues, share ideas, and find support. Content area coaches provided specific professional development services and monitored assessments for teachers to assist them in targeting their instruction on the needs of their students. These grade level teams and content area coaches are examples of the internal structures and resources that are essential conditions for the success of theory-based reforms. To the extent possible, reform efforts must take advantage of these conditions and adapt the reform to employ these resources.

Implications

In addition to building on previous knowledge in the arenas of school reform and professional development, the study also offers important implications for future practice and research in these fields. Implications for the expansion of the RSM initiative and similar reform efforts will be explored first, followed by implications for researchers.

Implications for Practice

Specific feedback on practice is necessary for school reforms to improve teaching practice. Coburn (2003, p. 4) argues, “The history of public schooling is replete with evidence of reforms that barely scratched the surface of schooling, failing to reach into the classroom to influence instruction.” Thus, classroom instruction cannot be forgotten in implementing school
reform initiatives. Reform initiatives must clearly define what reform implementation looks like in terms of classroom practice and create structures for teachers to receive specific feedback on their instruction. Within this study, that feedback was provided by the CLASS feedback sessions. However, CLASS feedback was not available to all teachers within a school simply because of the substantial amount of time and resources it takes to train data collectors and conduct the lengthy observations. Some structure should be devised whereby school-based personnel could be trained in CLASS data collection in order to conduct observations and provide feedback for teachers. The Instructional Practices Inventory (Painter & Valentine, 1996) that was collected at each school might also be employed, provided the process for disseminating the data to teachers is codified to ensure that schools receive regular feedback. Otherwise, reformers might employ and/or modify the school district’s classroom observation procedures to provide regular feedback to teachers on their classroom performance.

Reformers must blend reform efforts with school and district priorities, structures, and activities. McLaughlin and Mitra (2001, p. 318) posit that the school district in which a reform effort is being implemented acts as “a mediator of the project’s chances for expansion, or even survival of a theory-based reform.” Thus, reformers must take a proactive stance to working with schools and the district to ensure the compatibility of the context in which the reform is being implemented with the fundamental principles of the reform itself. Reformers can do this by explicitly demonstrating to school and district personnel how the goals of the initiative align with school and district priorities. The priorities of Patricia Smith and Dawkins Grove, like all schools within Miami-Dade, were raising the achievement scores of students on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and meeting district, state, and federal mandates. RSM personnel must be continually vigilant about how the RSM initiative can help district personnel,
principals, and teachers to improve student achievement and meet mandates for teachers’
professional development.

Further, the increased collaboration among teachers called for by school reforms must be
adapted to fit into the structures already established within the schools. Within the RSM
initiative, this means that PLC sessions should be built into the existing grade level team
structures. Certainly, this would require a substantial investment of resources into teacher
development to ensure that the grade level coaches at each school are trained to facilitate PLCs
in the fashion of the NSRF. However, the current alternative of training two to four teachers at
each school means that teachers convene PLC sessions with large groups of teachers during
afterschool hours. These sessions take the place of contractual faculty meetings that are held at
most twice per month. If PLCs are to be truly integrated into the everyday work of schools,
training must be expanded so that each grade level team, which meets once or twice weekly, has
a trained facilitator to guide its work.

Finally, reformers must illustrate how reform efforts can assist teachers and
administrators in their everyday practice. To the extent that teachers see reform efforts as the
district’s ‘flavor of the year’ or more work added to their overloaded schedule, the reform will be
unsuccessful. Reformers must work diligently to ensure that teachers see relevance and value in
reform activities to their everyday practice. Within this study, PLC coaches expressed some
difficulty in engaging their colleagues or getting the support they needed to continue their
efforts. In order to support them in securing the support of their fellow teachers and
administrators, RSM personnel need to show how reform efforts can help teachers to improve
their everyday work. For example, designing a training module to show teachers how to employ
the school’s scripted curriculum in developmentally appropriate ways could help teachers to see
the value of the reform efforts and prevent them from seeing the reform as irrelevant to their everyday practice.

Reformers must plan for instability and the transfer of authority over reform efforts to the school district. McLaughlin and Mitra (2001, p. 313) quote one school reformer as saying, “There is no level at which the system is not changing – not in terms of kids in classes, not in terms of teachers, not in terms of the district policy, and so on.” This means that reformers must take the constant flux of a school district into consideration and plan for constant re-invention of the reform effort in order for it to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. Teachers, principals, and district personnel must be educated in the fundamental principles of the reform initiative so that as they try to enact reform strategies in different contexts, they can do so in ways that are consistent with the reform’s goals and philosophy. Thus, not only must teachers and principals be involved in reform strategies, district personnel must also be educated about the reform so that they can continually apply the reform principles to their work with schools. This helps to prevent a district context that is incompatible with reform efforts.

The effort to educate personnel at all levels is especially important within a large urban school district whose hierarchical, bureaucratic context is antithetical to the principles of a reform based on mutual collaboration toward professional growth. Wood (2007) suggests that in training future PLC coaches to work in the style of the NSRF, it is important to unpack the rationale behind PLCs in order to ensure that the protocols teachers use are tools rather than the content of PLC meetings. In the same vein, the rationale behind reform strategies must be unpacked for district personnel to ensure that the steps taken in the name of reform are means to the end of producing a critically collaborative school culture focused on improving teaching and learning, rather than ends in themselves.
Reformers must also consider how to transfer the authority of strategic planning and fundraising to school district personnel. Stokes and colleagues (1997, p. 21) assert that in order for a school reform to be successful, there must be a transition from “an externally understood and supported theory to an internally understood and supported theory-based practice.” (as cited in Coburn, 2003, p. 8). Planning for this transition requires careful consideration of which aspects of the reform can be managed by the district at each phase of implementation. Within the RSM initiative, it could soon be possible to build enough capacity for district personnel to assume the responsibilities of training school-site PLC coaches and providing external facilitation to RSM schools. Nevertheless, significant steps must be taken to ensure that at the end of grant funding, the district can assume control of all reform efforts and conduct them in ways that are consistent with the reform’s goals and principles.

**Implications for Research**

In addition to implications for school reformers and professional developers, this study provides implications for the researchers who are studying such work. Five implications for research are examined here.

**Research on school reform must involve capturing the depth of meaningful change in teaching practice.** As explained above, school reform efforts must make specific efforts to positively influence teaching practice. In turn, research efforts to document these efforts must employ measures that can adequately assess meaningful changes in classroom practice. Research must go beyond easily observed but superficial changes in practice, such as the presence of certain materials, to include observation of teacher behaviors and pedagogy. This study provides a framework for such an evaluation of changes in teacher practice. A reliable and validated instrument like the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2006) used in combination with individual teacher interviews of a subgroup of participating teachers.
allows researchers to document specific changes in classroom practice and shifts in teachers’ thinking about their teaching. Following up classroom observations with targeted questions about what was observed and what changed between observations allows researchers to examine teachers’ thinking behind the strategies they employ and the extent to which they have internalized a reform’s definition of effective classroom instruction. Using these techniques, researchers can answer the question: What strategies are useful in supporting meaningful change in instructional practice?

**Research must also involve capturing the extent to which school district activities embody reform principles.** Because it is important for reformers to make efforts to ensure that district personnel are educated in the fundamental principles of the reform, it is equally important for researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used by reformers to do so. Research on the effectiveness of school reform efforts must include specific attention to meaningful changes in school district activity. Researchers might observe activities conducted in the name of the reform, such as trainings or meetings, to ensure that they embody the principles of reforms. In addition, interviews with key district personnel are necessary to gauge the extent to which reform principles have been internalized. This research will also provide reformers with formative data about the success of their efforts in terms of reculturing the school district in preparation to assume control of the reform initiative. Research along these lines can answer the questions: What strategies are effective in reculturing a school district to norms of professional collaboration? What processes are most effective at transferring the authority of reform efforts to district personnel while maintaining fidelity to reform principles?

**Statistical analysis using multilevel models is necessary to confirm the results with a larger sample of teachers.** The results of this study were based on a sample of only 12 teachers,
which prevented meaningful statistical analysis of the quantitative data because of the lack of power to detect an effect with such a small sample size. A larger sample of teachers is required to achieve the power to detect whether or not the improvements in teaching documented with the CLASS instrument were statistically significant. McDonald and colleagues (2006) suggest that advanced statistical techniques, such as multilevel models (Raubenbush & Bryk, 2002), allow researchers to capture the individual- and school-level influences on reform outcomes by quantifying the influence of structural factors on the outcome of interest. Using these techniques, researchers can control for the influence of certain factors (e.g., teachers’ educational attainment) in order to investigate an outcome (e.g., student achievement).

Increasing the sample size also increases the resources necessary to conduct such research as numerous data collectors are necessary and the threats to the validity of the interpretation of results increases, especially when using an instrument that is based on qualitative field notes as the CLASS is. Nevertheless, the CLASS observation protocol seems to be the best instrument available in terms of assessing instructional quality. It sits firmly in a middle ground between highly reliable and valid instruments that tell us more about the materials and environment of a classroom than about the actual quality of instruction on the one hand and highly circumstantial conclusions drawn from the field notes collected by a participant observer who is assessing the quality of classroom instruction on the other. While based on such field notes, the CLASS forces observers to take note of 11 different dimensions of instructional quality and assess teachers in a reliable way. With statistical analysis based on such data, researchers could answer the following questions: What are the effects of school culture (e.g., administrative support, strength of teacher collaboration) on teaching practice? Which reform
strategies (e.g., TLSI graduate program, PLC sessions, RSM training institutes) have the largest impact on teaching practice?

Within the RSM initiative, a true randomized controlled trial is impossible to conduct because the district decides which schools participate in the RSM initiative. Thus, it is impossible to randomly assign schools to treatment or control groups. However, it is possible to design a quasi-experimental study that compares RSM schools to matched schools. Such a design will analyze the RSM initiative’s impact on teaching practice in comparison to traditional professional development at similar schools.

School and teacher change must be studied longitudinally to provide a view of reform efforts and impacts throughout the initiative. The results of this study add to literature on the effectiveness of school reform and professional development and the challenges to sustainability in the early phases of implementation (e.g., McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001). The sustainability of school reform efforts in later phases, especially after grant funding has ceased, is an area far less understood (Coburn, 2003). The current study should be continued and expanded to follow teachers and schools over the course of the next several years to monitor the initiative’s implementation and effectiveness in improving classroom teaching. In addition to expanding the data collection measures employed within the study to more teachers and schools, future research should include a measure of school culture, such as the school culture survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998), and additional participant observations of school-site PLCs and other RSM activities. This research would help to answer the questions: How do reform efforts mature over time? What challenges arise after the first years of implementation? To what extent are reform efforts sustained after funding and implementation are over?
A comparative meta-analysis of school reform efforts should be completed. Borko (2004) argues that little research has been done to compare distinct professional development efforts to one another in terms of implementation, impact, and resource requirements. Research comparing various school reform efforts would help to inform policy decisions about the allocation of resources to reform efforts that have demonstrated success in terms of consistent implementation and predictably positive results over time. Future research should be conducted to compare the RSM initiative to reform efforts with similar goals in order to compare its overall effectiveness.

**Conclusion**

This study adds to the current knowledge base on school reform and professional development. It demonstrates that a combination of collaborative professional development offerings with substantive feedback on instructional practice can lead to improvements in classroom teaching. Further, it confirms the conclusion that collaborative professional development has positive impacts on school culture and documents the development of teacher leadership and school capacity. Finally, this study expands knowledge about the conditions necessary for successful school reform. As part of a larger study that will examine the impact of the RSM initiative on student achievement, this study adds to the growing body of literature on urban school reform.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources/Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Children’s Trust Funding</td>
<td>• Develop and implement a Quality Rating System for early learning centers in Florida</td>
<td>• Curriculum map aligning standards within and across grades</td>
<td>• Improved teacher quality and retention</td>
<td>• Schools and district restructured as professional learning communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• W.K. Kellogg Foundation Funding</td>
<td>• Mobilize community support and develop strong supports related to health and wellbeing of children</td>
<td>• Reports on the quality of early learning centers in Florida</td>
<td>• Improved student achievement</td>
<td>• Sustainable and replicable model to expand state- and nation-wide</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leadership and expertise of Lastinger Center and Early Childhood Initiative Foundation</td>
<td>• Develop schools as professional learning communities with strong, integrated PD</td>
<td>• Participation reports</td>
<td>• Improved indicators of child wellbeing</td>
<td>• Politically aware public that recognizes the need for public financing of child services an education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Resources and expertise of major contributing partners</td>
<td>• Enhance strong principal leadership and supportive district leadership</td>
<td>• Deliverables (e.g. plans from institutes, evaluation plan, roll out plan for major restructuring)</td>
<td>• Schools and district restructured as professional learning communities</td>
<td>• Creation of a Ready Schools network to further expand the community of practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Resources and expertise (including PD system) of Miami Dade County Public Schools</td>
<td>• Align standards, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and PD within and across grades PK 3rd grade</td>
<td>• Develop and implement a cross-institutional, parent advocacy and engagement model</td>
<td>• Improved indicators of child wellbeing</td>
<td>• Sustainable and replicable model to expand state- and nation-wide</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Develop and implement a cross-institutional, parent advocacy and engagement model</td>
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APPENDIX B
FIRST ROUND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This protocol will be used for 2-3 rounds of interviews conducted with participating teachers observed using the CLASS protocol. After each question, I will probe for teachers’ thoughts and/or perceptions of the issues and events they describe.

(1) Describe what’s going on in your school related to teacher learning.
(2) Describe your participation in these teacher learning opportunities.
(3) Do you use what you learn within these teacher learning opportunities? If so, which teacher learning opportunities are the most helpful to you? How does it/do they help you? If not, why not?
(4) Have these teacher learning opportunities had an impact on your teaching? If so, how? If not, why not?
(5) What has been the main focus of the learning community group in which you collaborate with other teachers?
(6) Describe the kinds of activities that you participate in as part of your learning community group.
(7) What activities have been unimportant to your work as a teacher?
(8) What activities have been most beneficial to your work as a teacher?
(9) Has there been an activity that led you to teach differently? If so, how did your teaching change? If not, why not?
(10) Further questions prompted by the results of CLASS observations, reports from the external facilitators, participant observations of the teacher learning activities at the school, and the document review, for example:

1. When I observed you using the CLASS instrument, I noticed that your teaching was characterized by ____. Describe that aspect of your teaching.
2. I spoke with the external facilitator for your school, _____. S/he told me that recently your school was doing ____. Has that activity had an impact on your teaching practice?
3. As I observed one of your learning community group meetings, I noticed that the teachers were doing ____. Explain what was happening then.
4. Looking through the agendas from your learning community group meetings, I noticed that you often spend time doing ____. Is that activity beneficial to the group? In what ways? Is it beneficial to you? How?
APPENDIX C
SECOND ROUND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This protocol will be used for 2-3 rounds of interviews conducted with participating teachers observed using the CLASS protocol. After each question, I will probe for teachers’ thoughts and/or perceptions of the issues and events they describe.

1. Describe what’s going on in your school related to Ready Schools Miami.
2. Describe your participation in these opportunities.
3. What has been important about Ready Schools Miami for you?
4. Has Ready Schools Miami had an impact on you this year, either directly or indirectly? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. Has Ready Schools Miami had an impact on the school this year? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. What supports have been helpful in trying to improve your teaching practice and school climate this year?
7. What obstacles have you encountered in trying to improve your teaching practice and school climate this year?
8. What has been the main focus of the learning community group in which you collaborate with other teachers?
9. What have you learned from your participation in your learning community group or other Ready Schools Miami activities? How did you draw those conclusions?
10. Do you use what you learn from your participation in Ready Schools activities? If so, how do you use that new learning? If not, why not?
11. Has there been an activity that led you to teach differently? If so, how did your teaching change? If not, why not?
12. Further questions prompted by the results of CLASS observations, reports from the external facilitators, participant observations of the teacher learning activities at the school, and the document review, for example:

   1. When I observed you using the CLASS instrument, I noticed that your teaching was characterized by ____. Describe that aspect of your teaching.
   2. I spoke with the external facilitator for your school, ____. S/he told me that recently your school was doing ____. Has that activity had an impact on your teaching practice?
   3. As I observed one of your learning community group meetings, I noticed that the teachers were doing ____. Explain what was happening then.
   4. Looking through the agendas from your learning community group meetings, I noticed that you often spend time doing ____. Is that activity beneficial to the group? In what ways? Is it beneficial to you? How?
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Philip Poekert was born on December 31, 1979 in West Palm Beach, Florida. He is the youngest of the three children born to a Cuban mother and a German-Irish father. He grew up in West Palm Beach and Palm Beach Gardens and graduated from the International Baccalaureate Program at Suncoast Community High School in 1997. He went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy from New College of Florida in 2001, writing an undergraduate thesis in the philosophy of education.

After graduating from New College, Philip joined Teach For America as part of the 2001 New York Corps. He taught eighth grade English and social studies for two years at Intermediate School 183 (Paul Robeson Academy) in the South Bronx, New York City. While teaching, he also earned his Master of Science in Teaching degree from Pace University in New York City in 2003. He later moved to California for two years where he taught at Oakland High School in Oakland and Camino Nuevo Charter School in Los Angeles. From California, Philip returned home to Palm Beach Gardens to finish his fourth year of classroom teaching at Howell Watkins Middle School, the middle school he attended as a teenager. Philip began the pursuit of his Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Florida in 2005.

Upon completion of his Ph.D. program, Philip will take a position with the University of Florida’s Lastinger Center for Learning to coordinate school reform efforts for the Ready Schools Miami initiative. He now lives in Miami Beach with his loving wife, Claudia Dimitrio.