

GOAL SETTING AND JOB-EMBEDDED LEARNING: HOW TEACHERS PURSUE
INDIVIDUAL PROFESSIONAL GOALS IN A COLLABORATIVE SETTING

by

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(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a form of job-embedded professional learning. The gap that this study hoped to address examined teachers' perspectives of their participation in goal groups as an emerging professional learning process at Edge Elementary School. The teachers at Edge Elementary School developed annual goals at the beginning of the year as part of the teacher evaluation system within the school district. The goals determined teacher placement in the topic-based learning groups called goal groups.

Through the lens of communal constructivism, case study methodology was used to discover teachers' perspectives of goal setting, collaborative professional learning, and the subsequent impacts on teachers, students, and school culture. The study was conducted at one elementary school in Georgia. Ten teachers participated: five teachers engaged in two interviews and five teachers participated in one focus group. Each teacher was a member of one of the six goal groups for the 2013-2014 school year. Findings were explicated from five different data sets: (1) interview transcripts; (2) a

focus group transcript; (3) participant observations; (4) field notes; and (5) artifacts from goal groups.

Five themes emerged revealing teachers' perceptions of their participation in goal group professional learning. Teachers valued the collaborative process of goal groups while they encountered barriers related to time, increased difficulty in planning, and frustrations with group members. The continued development of teacher relationships and networks connected to professional practice created positive shifts in school culture. The synergy between individual and collaborative work propelled learning forward at the individual and group levels. Goal group professional learning supported coherence among evaluation, goal setting, and professional learning. Teachers not only made lasting changes in their teaching practice but they also made shifts in their beliefs about teaching.

Findings had implication for further research, particularly in the areas of teacher goal setting, teacher professional learning, school culture, and teacher leadership.

INDEX WORDS: Adult Learning; Coherence in Professional Learning; Collaborative Learning; Goal Group Setting; Teacher Goal Setting and Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Leadership; Teacher Professional Learning

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The current political landscape in the United States is dominated by educational policy driven by standards movements, high-stakes testing, and value-added model (VAM) teacher evaluation systems. These policies “de-emphasize the strength of local contexts, local knowledge, and the roles of teachers as decision makers and change agents” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 6). In the field of K-12 education, there have been increasing pressures to identify evidence-based teaching practices that deliver immediate achievement gains for students. Policy makers and educators hope to identify the one model or set of strategies that will raise students’ scores quickly under the pressure of Race to the Top and other accountability measures (Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, & Jacques, 2012; Ravitch, 2011).

The intentional or unintentional messages communicated to teachers while enacting such top down policies include: 1) others know more about the experience of teaching than teachers; 2) teachers day-to-day experiences of solving real instructional dilemmas in the classroom are less valuable than the opinions of experts; and 3) teaching is a set of technical skills that can be learned and mastered in a series of workshops, meetings, or teacher manuals (Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008). These messages communicated to teachers do not reflect or value the real complexities of the

teaching profession or the time and effort required to make fundamental and lasting changes to teacher practice (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Zepeda, 2012c).

The positive impact of teacher quality on student achievement is well established in the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Goe & Stickler, 2008; Harris & Sass, 2011). The key to building and maintaining teacher quality is effective and on-going professional learning (Borko, 2004; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2012; Guskey, 2011; Kimble, Yager, & Yager, 2006). To promote teacher quality, professional development practices should support the sustained growth of individual teachers (Bayar, 2014; Bonner, 2006; Borko & Putnam, 1995; Grant, 2012; Hawley & Valli, 2000; Zepeda, 2012c). Professional development activities need to be nested in the context of schools where teachers work collaboratively to solve real problems (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Levin & Marcus, 2007; Zepeda, 2012c). A report from the National Staff Development Council (2009) stated that learning for teachers needs to be connected to teachers work with their students, linked to concrete tasks of teaching, organized around problem solving, informed by research, and sustained over time by ongoing conversations that build strong working relationships among teachers (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Teachers need coaching, technical assistance, feedback, and other follow-up support as part of their training (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Harris & Sass, 2011; Zepeda, 2012a). In fact, the support teachers need to make significant changes in practice is complex and requires time and collaboration within the professional setting (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003; Sparks, 2013).

Professional learning models are getting closer to these ideals with the widespread implementation of sustained school-based collaboration (Gallucci, 2003; Levin & Marcus, 2007; Wenger, 1998). However, one key component missing in most of these efforts is teacher choice. One of adult learning's key principles is that adult learning is self-directed (Knowles, 1975). Adults are able to determine their own needs for learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 2013; Knowles, 1975). Goal setting is a form of adult, self-directed learning required in many teacher evaluation systems (Grant, 2012; Spence, 2007; Zepeda, 2006, 2012b). Although setting goals as part of evaluation begins to acknowledge the need for self-directed learning, current models of professional learning design often neglect the needs of teachers to work toward their set goals (Shulman, Sullivan, & Glanz, 2008; Stronge & Grant, 2009; Tucker & Stronge, 2005; Zepeda 2006, 2012b). Teachers' work toward attainment of goals set as part of the teacher evaluation systems has not been reported in the literature that examines the professional learning lives of teachers at schools.

There is ongoing tension between political pressures outlined in punitive state and federal policies that demand immediate improvement in teacher quality and appropriate research-based professional development practices that create meaningful and lasting change in teacher practice. This debate, along with the missing element of teacher choice in the professional development literature, drives this study, which hopes to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a means of job-embedded professional learning. A foundational element of the present study is that the school system had recently developed and implemented a teacher

evaluation system (Zepeda, 2012b) in which teachers developed goals related to their professional development.

Multiple factors influence expectations for teachers—federal, state, and local policies, curriculum changes, evaluation, school culture, district and school improvement plans, and teachers’ own expectations. There is often little connection between teacher evaluation, the content of professional learning, and some of the factors that dictate the day-to-day life of teaching. The goal group process examined in this study was designed to provide coherence for teachers around the teacher evaluation process, professional learning, curricular and dispositional requirements, and the needs of individual teachers as professionals.

Desimone (2011) outlines three dimensions of coherence that are critical for effective teacher professional development. 1) New learning should build on what teachers already know. 2) Professional development should align “with national, state, and local standards; assessment; curriculum; and other reforms” (p. 65). 3) Professional development should “support sustained professional communication among teachers who are working to reform their teaching in similar ways” (p. 65).

Organizational structures need to be reexamined in light of this need for coherence among the experience of teachers, their professional development, and teacher evaluation. Schools must be organized to establish communities of professionals participating in coherent, self-directed, on-going learning in collaborative groups that can meet together regularly. Supporting teacher development should become a top priority in policy discussions as it ensures *professional* accountability of teachers. In the report on teacher development published by the National Staff Development Council (2009),

researchers found that “efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice and the capacity of school systems to promote teacher learning” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 7).

Background of the Study

To better understand the context of this study, the emergence of goal group professional learning at Edge Elementary School in the Nuway School District (both pseudonyms) needs to be explained. The Nuway School District has been a leader in the state of Georgia in the realm of teacher evaluation systems that promote growth and development (Zepeda, 2012b). The Nuway School District is invested in a growth model of teacher evaluation as evidenced by the implementation of a comprehensive and tiered teacher evaluation system that involves annual initial and final meetings between the supervising administrator and each teacher, teacher goal setting related to teacher performance standards, a pre-conference and a post-conference for formal observations of each teacher, and a rubric for rating overall teacher quality related to teacher performance standards (Zepeda, 2012b).

This teacher evaluation system provides a set of teacher performance standards related to instructional practices, classroom management, and teacher dispositions. Prior to the initial meeting, teachers are expected to reflect on their own practice in relationship to these standards and to be able to discuss areas of strength and areas they wish to develop. As teachers reflect on areas where their teaching practice can be developed, they also begin to identify individual professional learning goals. During the initial meeting, a teacher and the administrator discuss the teacher’s proficiencies and growth areas related to these standards using the rubric connected to each of the standards. The teacher’s

goals related to the teacher performance standards are refined and recorded during this initial meeting.

At the research site in 2010, the instructional coach took the lead to support the teachers' professional learning related to their goals. In the initial meetings with teacher and administrator, the instructional coach noticed that groups of teachers were setting similar or related goals. This led to the idea that a professional learning framework could be developed to organize teachers into collaborative groups working on related goals. The objective of goal groups is to move professional learning beyond merely delivering or covering prescribed professional development content. With support of the group, teachers would share the learning and benefits from classroom experimentation. Shifts in teachers' individual practice would occur through individual and collaborative learning experiences.

Using the goal group process, the administrative team at Edge Elementary School married the district-level teacher evaluation system and the school improvement plan. The professional development model found its foundation in adult learning and collaborative learning ideals (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Knowles, 1975; Slavin, 2014). Taking the responsibility to support teacher growth and development in a way to also ensure accountability, the school administration at Edge Elementary organized a structure for goal groups to meet consistently across the school year. The yearlong goal group process includes the following:

- Teachers set goals and were placed in learning groups based on common goals
- Teachers work within these groups to establish learning needs and objectives
- An instructional coach works with teachers to find learning materials and other opportunities to further learning

- Teachers work face-to-face and in e-learning communities with the instructional coach and teacher leaders
- Teachers experiment with new practice based on their learning
- Teachers within groups observe each other in their classrooms while implementing goal related strategies
- Teachers work in teams to consider artifacts in preparation for annual evaluations
- Teachers met with principal for final evaluation.
- Teachers share learning across goal groups in a formal whole-school setting and in smaller informal groups and pairs

This professional learning sequence was designed to support teachers' learning related to their individual goals. The sequence allowed for cycles of learning, practice, and feedback to be conjoined to the teacher evaluation process, but for the goal group program, teachers were able to focus on what was important to them. As part of an outgrowth of not only the teacher evaluation system but also added as a part of the school improvement, teachers were able to demonstrate competency and support their preparation for the end of year summative evaluation.

Statement of the Problem

There is a significant body of literature surrounding the topic of professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Zepeda, 2012c). Elements of effective professional learning are consistently identified in the teacher professional learning literature. Professional learning should focus on student learning and the teaching of specific content (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Blank, & de las Alas, 2009; Walpole & McKenna, 2012). The learning experiences should be active and engage teachers examining data, planning lessons, and reflecting on previously taught lessons or student work (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001).

The experiences teachers have in professional learning should align with school improvement priorities, school district and state policies, and be consistent with their knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning and the improvements that can be achieved as a result of purposeful connections to what's most pressing in their skill level development (Desimone, 2011; Sparks, 2004; Zepeda, 2011). Effective professional learning requires a considerable investment of time over an extended period that is well organized and purposefully directed (Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Professional learning not only includes meaningful activities that support coherence, but should also help teachers develop strong working relationships between colleagues (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2011; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Zepeda, 2011). While there is strong evidence that professional learning can impact teacher growth and development, how teachers pursue individual professional goals within a professional learning framework is not at present clearly defined in the literature.

Three key tenets of adult learning are directly related to this study. Adults learn best when the learning tasks are designed to solve real world problems in context, social in nature, and self-directed (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 2013; Knowles, 1975). Adult learning theory indicates that learning is an inherently social enterprise (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Individual learning and goal attainment around complex tasks or challenging situations can be further supported through group learning situations where needs are identified to solve real-life problems (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). For teachers, this

process is embedded in the work they do in schools and is specifically related to working with other teachers and students (Wood & Killian, 1998).

Collaboration and job-embedded learning are married in teacher professional learning networks (Neisz, 2007). Neisz (2007) described teacher networks as “groups of teachers organized for purposes related to teacher learning, inquiry, support or school improvement have been embraced by researchers and practitioners alike for their approach to teacher professional development” (pp. 605-606). Teacher professional learning networks are designed explicitly for learning and change. The teacher network is contrary to the top down, deficit model of professional learning. In learning networks, teachers work in collaborative settings to advance teacher learning and thoughtful change within the context of schools.

In this study, goal setting theory defined the self-articulation of learner needs. Goal-setting theory refers to the effects of setting goals on subsequent performance (Latham & Locke, 1991, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2002). There is a considerable body of literature on goals and goal setting (Grant, 2012; Locke & Latham 2002, 2013; Parker, Jimmieson, & Amiot, 2009; Spence, 2007). Yet, academic literature on the use of goals within teacher professional learning is sparse. Goal setting has not been explored in the research related to teacher evaluation systems or professional development.

Goals play a key role in transitioning from an existing state to a desired state or outcome (Spence, 2007). The success of an individual's goal attainment is influence by multiple factors. A crucial element necessary for goal attainment is the degree to which goal alignment is connected with an individual's interests, motivations, and needs (Grant, 2012). Self-concordance emphasizes the extent to

which the individual perceives goals as being determined by internal or external factors (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). The greater the self-concordance, the more likely goal attainment will be reached (Grant, 2012; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

The types of outcomes of set goals further influence goal attainment. Performance goals focus on the performance of an identified task. Attainment of performance goals is connected to one's personal ability and competence (Asplund & Blacksmith, 2012; Locke & Latham, 2013). Performance goals can impede performance, particularly when tasks are highly complex, such as in teaching. Conversely, learning goals are associated with task mastery and better facilitate increased task performance (Grant & Dweck, 2003; Zimmerman, 2008). Grant (2012) further articulated the positive aspects of setting learning goals:

Learning goals tend to be associated with a range of positive cognitive and emotional processes including the perception of a complex task as a positive challenge rather than a threat, greater absorption in the actual task performance, and enhanced memory and well-being. (p. 151)

Personal learning goals are the behaviors, knowledge, or understandings that learners identify as important to their own development. Goals may relate to work habits, subject content, domains of learning, or any combination of these. The act of setting personal learning goals is about learners becoming active participants in the *learning process*. Parker et al., (2009) found that autonomy with goal setting in the workplace improves self-efficacy, which improves performance toward reaching goals.

Although quite a bit of literature has been assembled about goal setting, job-embedded-learning, and collaboration, little is known about how goal setting, job-embedded-learning, and collaboration can be connected to each other and what impact

the connections might have. The gap this study addressed examined teacher's perspectives of their participation in goal groups, an emerging professional development process at Edge Elementary School. In these groups, the teachers at Edge Elementary School developed annual goals at the beginning of the year.

Goal setting is part of the teacher evaluation program within the Nuway School District. Once teachers set self-selected goals for the year, the school administration examines the goals of each teacher and then matches teachers into groups related to the goals identified in the annual goal setting form called the Individual Professional Learning Plan (see Appendix A). From there, the goal groups form so that teacher professional learning networks centering on these goals can be established to support individual and group goal attainment. Adult learning concepts of self-direction and social support for learning framed the descriptions of how teachers worked within goal groups.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a means of job-embedded professional learning. The Nuway School District was invested in a growth model of teacher evaluation as evidenced by the implementation of a comprehensive teacher evaluation program. The evaluative process included teacher goal setting related to teacher performance standards (Zepeda, 2012b). In 2013, the Nuway School District expanded the teacher evaluation system to include the Individual Professional Learning Plan, in which teacher goal setting was related to teacher performance, elevating the need to examine the relationship between goal setting and professional learning. Adult learning

theory has long documented the effectiveness of self-directed learning and collaboration for engaging adults in learning (Brookfield, 2013; Glickman et al., 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). This study sought to discover how the two principles of adult learning—collaboration and self-direction—unfold from the teachers’ perspective in the context of teacher goal setting and the subsequent professional learning process.

Research Questions

Many questions arise from pulling all of the complex concepts of teacher evaluation, goal setting, professional learning, self-directed learning, collaboration, and job-embedded learning. The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a form of job-embedded professional learning. Research questions this study sought to answer include:

1. How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals?
2. How does participating in goal groups influence teachers’ knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice?

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was situated in the elements of constructivist learning theory. This conceptual framework supported the examination of teachers’ learning as they participated in goal group professional learning that reflects the individual and social characteristics of constructivist theory.

Constructivism is a philosophical view of how people come to understand or know (Dewey, 1933, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). The theory of constructivist learning posits

that students learn when they construct their own knowledge (Brookfield, 2013; Merriam, & Caffarella, 2012). That is, learners do not learn by merely accumulating information from the outside world or transferring knowledge from one to another, but they learn by participating, critically thinking, and making sense of information to understand it in relationship to what they already know (Bruner, 1966; Ertmer & Newby, 1993).

The theory of constructivism can be bifurcated into knowledge construction occurring within each individual and that occurring within a community of learners (Garrison, 1997; Merriam, & Caffarella, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). Individual learners actively respond to the environment and engage themselves in developing knowledge through interaction between their schema and the environment. Knowles (1975) described self-directed learning broadly as “a process in which individuals take the initiative with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes” (p.18). The goal group process mirrors Knowles’ process of self-directed learning, where the development of learning focuses on individual construction of learning tasks, active participation in the learning, discussion with others, opportunities to apply and experiment with new learning, and attention to changes in learning.

The social elements of constructivist learning are based on Vygotsky’s developmental theory (1978). According to Vygotsky, students’ learning is contextualized and occurs first on social level; hence social constructivism and its tenets embrace the ideas that are foundational to communities of learners. Effective professional learning requires contextualized, social learning (Wood & Killian, 1998;

Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2010). Collaborative learning and working situations are requisites in schools that support high levels of engagement and deep learning by fostering interaction among the teachers who participate in them (Hord, 2008; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton 2012). Accordingly, social learning plays a major role in enhancing individual learning (Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas, 2008; Guskey, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Slavin, 2014; Sparks, 2004). A form of constructivism that emerged from the field of virtual learning, communal constructivism, further supports social learning. Communal constructivism is defined as an approach to learning in which learners not only construct their own knowledge, but are also actively engaged in the process of constructing knowledge for their learning community (Tangney, FitzGibbon, Savage, Mehan, & Holmes, 2001).

The goal group process is based on the joining of constructivist principles that individuals construct their “own” learning through a process that is driven by the individual and supported by the inherently social context of the goal group. The goal group process begins with the individual teacher’s reflection on a particular area of practice. The teacher self-identifies his or her “own” learning goals based on individual needs. Identifying sets of teachers with similar learning goals begins the formation of goal groups. The social context for learning is a key feature of the goal group process. The intended purpose of goal group meetings is to provide safe, collaborative spaces in which teachers can engage in dialogue and reflection with others about the learning related both to individual and group needs and goals. Following the tenants of communal constructivism, the group dialogue and reflection supports further generation of ideas and

learning at the group level. In this context, teachers learn from each other by co-constructing knowledge about new practices.

While one of the key tenants of constructivist learning is that learning is social, learning is simultaneously highly individual. The teacher outside of the goal group seeks new learning to support the individual's goal. This study hopes to examine the individual learning of each teacher, not the collaborative process within the goal groups. Regardless of the structure and functionality of each goal group, the researcher hopes to understand how the goal group process influences individual learning.

Significance of the Study

Two missing links to the phenomenon of self-directed learning related to collaborative professional learning that this study sought to answer are: (1) How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals? (2) How does participation in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice? Building on past research regarding collaborative professional learning and its impact on individual learning, this study provided the opportunity to look at the possible bridge between the individual teachers' experiences in collaborative settings that support growth embedded as a formative process of a teacher evaluation system.

The results of this study hope to identify strengths and potential barriers to how teachers identify and pursue their own professional learning needs through the formal process of goal setting and collaborative professional learning. The findings of this study may also inform further discussions within the state regarding teacher growth and development especially related to teacher evaluation and school improvement.

The significance of the study's location should also be addressed to clearly understand the researcher motivation. Nuway was selected for the study because of its experience with the implementation of the goal group model and its progressive approach to teacher evaluation as a model situated on teacher growth and development.

Definition of Terms

It is important to have a clear understanding of key terms and concepts discussed in this study. The following section provides a review of key terms and concepts used throughout this study to create a frame of reference with regard to the research topic. Only the essential key terms and concepts are presented in the following section to bridge a connection to the research questions.

Collaboration: Effective collaboration is a process that facilitates learning by providing practitioners of differentiated abilities opportunities to discuss, debate, observe, and share practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Wenger, 1998)

Coherence: Alignment across factors that influence the complexities of teaching, allow for greater clarity for the teacher around the expectations for teaching and learning.

Coherence occurs, “when there is a direct link among what students need to learn, what educators are expected to do, and the content and process of professional learning”

(Killion, 2012, p. 16).

Goals: According to Spence (2007), goals are defined as a way to articulate the transitioning from an existing state to a desired state or outcome.

Goal Group: A group of educators within the same professional setting working together on similar goals. The objective of goal groups is for professional learning to support self-selected learning identified by individual goals set as part of the educator's evaluation.

Goal Group Learning: A method where two or more teachers learn individually and together in an effort to attain similar goals. It is based on the general premise that groups of people can learn more from each other through sharing and social interaction than they would if they learned exclusively on their own.

Goal Group Process: A year-long professional learning process where educators learn individually and together about practices related to their goal, discuss and reflect on the learning, share the learning and benefits from experimentation in individual classrooms to create shifts in educator practice.

Job-embedded learning: Also referred to as on-the-job training, job-embedded learning specifically refers to the learning that is connected to a teacher's daily work activities. Participants actively engage in their work while learning, reflecting, and sharing with other teachers and administrators the continuous improvement of instructional practices (Zepeda, 2012c). Job-embedded learning "makes a direct connection between learning and application in daily practice" (Croft, Cogshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010, p. 2).

Self-directed learning: Self-directed learning is "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in one elementary school in a Southeastern state in which 10 teachers participated. These 10 teachers were selected from a possible pool of 30 teachers divided into 6 goal groups. There are between three and nine teachers in each goal group. Using purposeful sampling, two teachers from each group with one teacher

serving as an alternate were invited to participate in the study. The purpose of this study is not to generalize but to shed light on a practice not yet examined in the fields of supervision, evaluation, or professional development.

Overview of the Research Procedures

Constructivist epistemology is based on the premise that knowledge is socially constructed through the interactions of individuals within and among groups. The conceptual framework identified in this study is constructivism. The constructivist epistemology is connected to the selected methodology, a case study. The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a form of job-embedded professional learning. The primary feature of the case study is to identify a specific case. In this study, the “case” is goal groups at Edge Elementary School.

The intent of the study is to describe in detail the experiences of teachers within this intrinsic case (Stake, 1995). According to Stake (1995), “Case researchers seek out both what is common and what is particular about the case, but the end product of the research regularly portrays more of the uncommon” (p.125). In addition to exploring the identified “case” of goal groups, an issue must be identified. Stake identifies issues as “complex, situated, problematic relationships, which pull attention both to ordinary experience and also to the disciplines of knowledge” (p.126). In this case study, the issue is teacher learning. Is there a relationship between participation in goal group professional development and the learning of individual teachers?

The best way to fully examine the issue, teacher learning, within the case study, goal groups, is to collect multiple forms of data that will corroborate the overall

description of the case. In this case study, data were collected from interviews, a focus group, direct observations, documents, and fieldnotes. The goal of the study is to provide an in-depth understanding of goal groups and how the process impacts individual participants. The researcher collected data in February, March, April, and May of 2014. The research site was Edge Elementary School in the Nuway School District. This particular elementary school was selected because of the use of goal group professional development as part of teacher professional development and evaluation implemented at the school.

Purposeful sampling is a sampling strategy in which groups of possible participants are identified for the study based on particular criteria relevant to the research question. The purposeful sampling for this study included at least two teachers representing each of the six goal groups created during the 2013-2014 school year. This type of purposeful sampling was the only practical strategy to use since the researcher sought to include data across the different categories of goals set within and across the members of the Goals Groups. The researcher also considered teachers' years of experience in the selection of participants. It was important to include early career, mid-career, and late career teachers in the sample to elicit the possible implications of career stages on the goal group process.

Through purposeful sampling, 10 teachers were selected for this study. The participants included 10 elementary school teachers, 5 participating in interviews and 5 participating in the focus group. In interviews and the focus group meetings, teachers were asked about teacher group goals, professional development, teacher learning, and teacher networks at Edge Elementary School. The interviewed teachers participated in 2

interviews that lasted between 45 to 60 minutes in duration. These semi-structured interviews were the primary research procedure for this case study. The other five teachers participated in the focus group, which was one hour in duration. The interviews and focus group were recorded using an audio recording device and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

The interviewed teachers were also observed in goal group meetings. Participant observations took place during regularly scheduled goal group meetings. Official documents related to goal groups provided additional data. During the process of working on goals, teachers used a shared electronic filing system to maintain documentation of their learning and progress toward meeting their goals. Participants also kept a record of the goals set, work toward the goals, and any assistance they requested. These documents were already part of the goal group process and had the potential to reveal teacher thinking about goals and if shifts were made in teacher practices related to teachers' goals. Access to these documents was available to the teachers, administrators, and the researcher.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized into five distinct chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction to the study as well as the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, background of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, significance of the study, overview of the methods, and definition of key terms and concepts. Chapter Two discusses the relevant literature connected to adult learning, features of professional development, job-embedded learning, collaboration, and self-directed learning. Chapter Three discusses in depth, the research methods used in this study and the data analysis

procedures used to answer the research questions. Chapter Four provides a discussion on the findings of this study. Chapter Five offers an amplification of the findings leading to the development of five themes. Lastly, Chapter Six presents the conclusions of the researcher, provides suggestions for future research efforts, and discusses the study's implications for current practices.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teacher learning is the process by which teachers identify, test, employ, and understand new ideas about teaching (Colbert et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fogarty & Pete, 2010; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010; Zepeda, 2012c). One of the keys to improving the quality of schools is to advance the continual learning and improvement of teachers (Desimone, 2011; Goe & Stickler, 2008; Harris & Sass, 2011; Wei et al., 2010; Zepeda, 2012c). Professional development for teachers has the potential to influence teacher learning and improvement (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Glickman et al., 2012; Joyce & Showers, 2002). According to Guskey (2002), “professional development programs are systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students” (p. 381).

For teachers to learn, they need to see and to experience the connection between acquiring new knowledge and implementing it (Dewey, 1933; Knowles, 1980). Consequently, effective professional development must be based on adult learning theories that support the connections between the need for learning, the actual learning, and the experiences in an authentic environment (Borko, Mayfield, Marion, Flexer, & Cumbo, 1997; Knowles, 1980; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a means of job-embedded professional learning. This study examined teachers' perspectives of their participation in goal groups, an emerging professional development process at Edge Elementary School. The teachers at Edge Elementary School develop annual goals at the beginning of the year as part of the teacher evaluation system within the Nuway School District. The goals determine teacher placement in the topic-based learning groups called goal groups. The guiding questions were:

1. How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals?
2. How does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice?

The demand to improve teacher quality requires further examination of teacher professional development. This study was timely because, in the course of the literature review, no research examining the coherence among teacher evaluation and teacher professional development was found. Research on teacher goal setting in professional development is scarce. In fact, at this time, it appears there is no evidence of school-wide professional development connected to teacher goal setting. This literature review examines individual elements of goal group professional development through the extraction of features and findings of related research and professional literature.

This chapter presents an overview of the five areas of literature from which this study is drawn. Table 1 maps the goal group process alongside the major precepts of this literature review.

Table 2.1

Goal Group Process: Map of Alignment with Adult Learning Principles

Alignment of Adult Learning Principles that Frame Goal Groups						
GOAL GROUP PROCESS	Teachers set goals and were placed in learning groups based on common goals	KNOWLES' PROCESS DESIGN ELEMENTS	Preparing the learners and diagnosis of learning needs	PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING	Self-selected learning and goal-setting theory	
	Teachers worked within these groups to establish learning needs and objectives		Participatory planning and formulation of learning objectives		Experiential learning, collaborative learning, communities of practice, and teachers networks	
	An instructional coach worked with teachers to find learning materials and other opportunities to further learning					
	Teachers worked face-to-face and in e-learning communities with the instructional coach and teacher leaders		Implementation of the learning plan			
	Teachers experimented with new practice based on learning					
	Teachers shared experiences and learning in formal goal group meetings		Evaluation of learning through reflection		Reflective Practice	
	Teachers observed other teachers within the groups to further learning around goals					
	Teachers worked in teams to consider artifacts in preparation for annual evaluations					
	Teachers met with principal for final evaluation					

Each section, adult learning, principles of professional development, self-selected learning, collaboration, and job-embedded learning, covers several different aspects related to the overarching topic of goal group professional development.

Adult Learning

For the past 40 years, andragogy has been a dominant framework in adult education. Andragogy has been defined in multiple ways that embody the “art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1990, p. 54), “an intentional and professionally guided activity that aims at a change in an adult person” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998, p. 60), and “a way of thinking about working with adult learners” (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 135). Andragogy is claimed to be the “best-known theory of adult learning” (Merriam & Caffarella, 2012, p. 249)

Knowles (1980) first suggested that the learning acquisition of adults is influenced by the extent of their life experiences and maturation process and the way in which learning opportunities are present. Adults have a relatively rich trove of past experience that both defines them as individuals and informs their learning as adults (Knowles, 1980). Furthermore, adults encounter many situations in their day-to-day lives that present need-based opportunities for learning (Brookfield, 2013; Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1990). Thus, adults are well positioned to assert self-directed control over their own learning, basing it on past experience and focusing it on current needs.

In andragogy, the adult learner governs the learning experience. Knowles (1980) and Knowles et al., (1998) outline six assumptions about adults as learners:

1. Adults need to be generally self-directing.
2. Adult learners’ varied life experiences serve as rich resources in the learning environment.

3. Adult learners' readiness to learn is linked to coping with real-life situations related to changing social roles.
4. Adults' learning is most likely to be applied immediately.
5. Adult learner motivation comes mostly from internal motivators including promotion, job change, and quality of life.
6. Adults need to know why they need to learn.

These principles of andragogy delineate what educators must do to teach adult learners successfully, shifting the focus of learning design, delivery, and assessment from being teacher-centered to the teacher being capable of being learner-centered. As stated by Knowles et al. (1998), it is these “core principles that strengthen the theory by their applicability to all adult learning situations” (p. 2).

Based on the six core principles of andragogy, Knowles (1980) identified eight design elements that influence the adult learning experience. These design elements include:

1. preparing learners
2. creating a climate conducive to learning
3. participatory planning
4. diagnosis of learning needs
5. formulation of learning objectives
6. planning of learning activities
7. implementation of the learning plan
8. evaluation of learning through reflection

Knowles's foundations for adult learning continue to be the best general articulation of adult learning principles (Merriam & Caffarella, 2012). Consequently, Knowles's (1980) process design elements three through eight were used to map the foundational construct of goal group professional learning (see table 2.1).

Section Summary

Knowles's design elements provided a map for goal group professional learning. Teacher goal setting as part of teacher evaluation connects to Knowles's design element

four, diagnosing needs for learning. Here teachers identify their own learning needs by reflecting on their current performance related to a set of professional standards. Knowles (1980) describes the diagnostic process as “1) the development of a model of desired behaviors or required competencies; 2) the assessment of the present level of performance by the individual in each of these behaviors or competencies; and 3) the assessment of the gaps between the model and the present performance” (p. 227).

Once groups are established according to individually set goals, teachers work together around the similar goals to refine learning objectives, plan their learning, and identify learning resources. Teachers work individually and collectively to carry out the learning plan with the support of each other and the instructional coach. Teachers go on to produce a portfolio that demonstrates work and potential mastery toward the identified goal. Through the teacher evaluation process, teachers reflect on their individual performance with the principal.

Features Common to Effective Professional Development

Effective professional development allows teachers to go beyond the espoused theories of learning to a more hands-on approach of doing and collaborating with other teachers to advance their learning and best practices (Darling- Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Teachers need to be challenged to work within their field, read, and reflect on their instructional practices, while receiving the highest quality of instruction and engagement (Corcoran, 2007; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Zepeda, 2012c).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) defined effective professional development as that which:

Results in improvements in teachers' knowledge and instructional practice, as well as improved student learning outcomes. We emphasize research that links teacher development to student learning. While the impact on student achievement is a critical indicator of the effectiveness of professional development, we believe the impact of professional development on teacher knowledge and instructional practice is also relevant, as these are worthwhile outcomes in themselves that support increased learning for students. (p.155)

Corcoran (2007) stated that effective professional development is a transformative experience that adds knowledge to a teacher's repertoire and instructional practices, while motivating and inspiring teachers to continue learning within their content area to promote student learning. In a status report on professional development, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) reported "efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice and the capacity of school systems to promote teacher learning" (p. 7). When developing plans for school improvement, it is essential to include professional development as a means to increase teacher quality (Guskey, 2000; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007).

Much of the literature on professional development criticizes the traditional paradigm, which consists of "one-shot" programs that are often disconnected from teachers' daily lives. Little (1990) suggested that the "one size fits all" approach does not consider the complexities of teachers' work, nor does it foster the necessary motivation and commitment needed to learn and develop effective new practices. Some suggest that it is past time to move forward with the pervasive implementation of new models of professional development based on all that has been revealed about teacher learning through research (Croft et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, Wei et al., 2009; Zepeda, 2012c).

Professional development research is beginning to highlight common features of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2011; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Zepeda, 2012c). Professional development programs vary, but a recent major review of professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) acknowledged that in the last two decades the research on effective professional development has begun to identify a consensus surrounding key principles in the design of professional development that can impact teachers' knowledge, practice, and perspectives. Features common to effective professional development exist in the literature as synthesis of empirical research. Highlighted here are a few lists of common features, each of which is grounded in a rigorous research base.

Desimone's (2011), *A Primer on Effective Professional Development*, suggested there was a consensus on features of effective professional development:

- Content focus: Professional development activities should focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content
- Active learning: Teachers should have opportunities to get involved, such as observing and receiving feedback, analyzing student work, or making presentations, as opposed to passively sitting through lectures.
- Coherence: What teachers learn in any professional development activity should be consistent with other professional development, with their knowledge and beliefs, and with school, district, and state reforms and policies.
- Duration: Professional development activities should be spread over a semester and should include 20 hours or more of contact time.
- Collective participation: Groups of teachers from the same grade, subject, or school should participate in professional development activities together to build an interactive learning community. (p. 69)

These features "have been associated with changes in knowledge, practice, and, to a lesser extent, student achievement" (Desimone, 2011, p. 69). Desimone's summary provides an effective standard on which to base any professional development program.

The features for the design of professional development noted by Desimone will be mirrored in the following lists.

In 2009, Darling-Hammond and Richardson wrote a research review for *Educational Leadership* that outlined characteristics of effective professional development supported by research:

- Deepens teachers' knowledge of content and how to teach it to students
- Helps teachers understand how students learn specific content
- Provides opportunities for active, hands-on learning
- Enables teachers to acquire new knowledge, apply it to practice, and reflect on the results with colleagues
- Is part of a school reform effort that links curriculum, assessment, and standards to professional learning
- Is collaborative and collegial
- Is intensive and sustained over time

Research does not support professional development that:

- Relies on the one-shot workshop model
- Focuses only on training teachers in new techniques and behaviors
- Is not related to teachers' specific contexts and curriculums
- Is episodic and fragmented
- Expects teachers to make changes in isolation and without support
- Does not provide sustained teacher learning opportunities over multiple days and weeks (paras. 25-26)

Current professional development research supports the need to provide intense and collegial learning for teacher. Professional development as recommended here has shown to improve both teaching and student learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

In a 1999 meta-synthesis of relevant research available, Hawley and Valli proposed the Principles for the Design of Professional Development:

1. The content of professional development focuses on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning the material.
2. Professional development should be based on analyses of the differences between actual student performance and goals and standards for student learning.

3. Professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved.
4. Professional development should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching.
5. Professional development should be organized around collaborative problem solving.
6. Professional development should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning—including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives.
7. Professional development should incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on learning outcomes for students and the instruction and other processes that are involved in implementing the lessons learned through professional development.
8. Professional development should provide opportunities to gain an understanding of the theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned.
9. Professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning. (pp.137-143)

Each of these principles of design for professional development could be organized within Desimone's (2011) feature of effective professional development except for involving 'teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved' (Hawley & Valli, 1999, p.138). The similar features will be further articulated here. The unique feature of self-directed learning highlighted by Hawley and Valli (1999) will be explored later in the Chapter.

Table 2.2

Comparison of Common Features of Professional Development

	Desimone (2011)	Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009)	Hawley and Valli (1999)
Content Focus	Professional development activities should focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content	Deepens teachers' knowledge of content and how to teach it to students Helps teachers understand how students learn specific content	The content of professional development focuses on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning the material.
Active learning	Teachers should have opportunities to get involved, such as observing and receiving feedback, analyzing student work, or making presentations, as opposed to passively sitting through lectures.	Provides opportunities for active, hands-on learning	Professional development should be based on analyses of the differences between actual student performance and goals and standards for student learning. Professional development should incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on learning outcomes for students and the instruction and other processes that are involved in implementing the lessons learned through professional development.
Coherence	What teachers learn in any professional development activity should be consistent with other professional development, with their knowledge and beliefs, and with school, district, and state reforms and policies.	Is part of a school reform effort that links curriculum, assessment, and standards to professional learning	Professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning. Professional development should provide opportunities to gain an understanding of the theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned.

	Desimone (2011)	Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009)	Hawley and Valli (1999)
Duration	Professional development activities should be spread over a semester and should include 20 hours or more of contact time.	Is intensive and sustained over time	Professional development should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning—including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives.
Collective Participation	Groups of teachers from the same grade, subject, or school should participate in professional development activities together to build an interactive learning community.	Is collaborative and collegial Enables teachers to acquire new knowledge, apply it to practice, and reflect on the results with colleagues	Professional development should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching. Professional development should be organized around collaborative problem solving.

Features of effective professional development as identified by Desimone (2011) included content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation, which can be incorporated into any professional development design, regardless of the content or context. When designing professional development for teachers, these commonly accepted practices of professional development should be included in the design. When professional development is connected to content, teachers are able to develop their understanding of both content knowledge and pedagogy (Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, & Pittman, 2008; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Jacobs, Franke, Carpenter, Levi, & Battey, 2007). Another feature that may be incorporated into any professional learning is the engagement of teacher-learners in active learning. For more than a decade,

professional development research has demonstrated the impact of active learning (Guskey, 2002; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wilson & Berne, 1999).

A report from Learning Forward (2009) clarified the need for coherence, duration, and collective participation. Teacher learning should be connected to teachers' work with their students, linked to concrete tasks of teaching, organized around problem solving, informed by research, and sustained over time by ongoing conversations that build strong working relationships among teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). These commonly accepted, general features of effective professional development (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Borko, 2004; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007; Wei et al., 2010) are connected to additional research using Desimone's (2011) features of professional development as a structure to present supporting research.

Content

The impact of content-based professional development on teachers' understanding of both content knowledge and pedagogy is well documented (Borko, 2004; Borko et al., 1997; Desimone, 2011; Hill et al., 2005; Jacobs et al., 2007). Blank and de las Alas (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 74 studies of professional development with a focus on math or science content. The analysis indicated that professional development can improve teacher practice and student learning by combining math or science content with analysis of teaching and student learning (Blank & de las Alas, 2009). Further review of the professional development programs for the 16 studies with effect size showed that these programs "included strong emphasis on teachers learning specific subject content as well as pedagogical content for how to teach the content to students" (Blank & de las Alas, 2009, p. 27).

In an experiment with 48 teachers (32 experimental and 16 control), Roth, Garnier, Chen, Lemmens, Schwille, and Wickler (2011) examined professional development focused on the improvement of science teaching. The participating teachers analyzed video clips of science teaching, looking for science content and student thinking. Teachers' focus on science content improved science teaching and increased science content knowledge among students and teachers. Focus on content knowledge was not the only effective professional development feature identified in any of these math or science based programs. All of the programs also actively engaged teachers in the learning (Roth et al., 2001).

Active learning

Active learning, defined by Garet et al. (2001) is the opportunity for teachers to spend time planning for classroom integration of strategies and materials into their instruction. Active, engaged, interactive learning is an important characteristic of effective, applicable, and transferable professional development (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Teachers want to be involved in the learning, immersed as a member of a team, and engaged in continual and guided practice that will impact student learning. When this happens, teachers develop greater understanding and deeper implementation in their classrooms (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Teachers who participate in planning, enacting, and revising curricular units think more deeply about their teaching and develop a better understanding of effective curriculum (Desimone, 2011; Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

Coherence

Desimone (2011) outlines three dimensions of coherence that are critical for effective professional development. New learning should build on what teachers already

know. Professional development should align “with national, state, and local standards; assessment; curriculum; and other reforms” (p. 65). Penuel et al. (2007) described coherence as “teachers’ interpretations of how well aligned the professional development activities are with their own goals for learning and their goals for students” (p. 931).

In a quantitative study of 454 teachers using a hierarchical linear modeling framework, Penuel et al. (2007) found that teachers’ perceptions of professional development activities, not just the design of the activities themselves, were important in shaping the effectiveness of professional development. If teachers view the requirements of professional development as aligned with district goals and with school goals, they are also more likely to perceive the innovation as congruent with their own goals. When congruence occurs, teachers are more willing to commit to adopting or adapting the innovation (Desimone, 2011; Zepeda, 2006, 2012b).

Duration

In discussing the salient dimensions of inquiry communities, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe time as one of the most critical dimensions when teachers come together collaboratively, noting that they “need sufficient chunks of time in which to work and sufficient longevity as a group over time” (p. 294). Yoon et al. (2007) reviewed nine studies of professional development and found that sustained and intensive programs of professional development were related to student achievement. This review considered both time within the workday and time across a school year. In 3 studies of professional development programs lasting 14 or fewer hours, no effects on student learning were evident, whereas studies of programs offering more than 14 hours of sustained teacher-

learning opportunities showed significant positive effects. The largest effects were found for programs offering between 30 and 100 hours spread out over 6-12 months.

Collective Participation

The social interactions of teachers while participating in professional development activities can diminish or promote teacher learning (Johnson et al., 2007; Little, 1990; Whitfield & Wood, 2010). Effective collaboration is a process that facilitates learning by providing practitioners of differentiated abilities opportunities to discuss, debate, observe, and share practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Wenger, 1998). When professional educators embrace conflicting opinions, strategies, and value systems through thoughtful questioning and collaborative activities, they make their practice public and teacher empowerment possible (Levine & Marcus, 2007). Van Horn (2006) stated that when teachers have opportunities to solve problems collaboratively and have access to rich resources, they are more likely to take risks, sustain attempts to make change, and develop, adapt, and/or apply approaches designed to support student learning in their classrooms.

Section Summary

Many researchers (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Borko et al., 2008; Hill et al., 2005; Jacobs et al., 2007; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Roth et al., 2011; Yoon et al., 2007) have identified features of professional development that support the transfer of learning from professional development to classroom practice. Effective professional development requires a connection to content; engagement of the participant; alignment of professional development goals with teacher beliefs, school goals, and district and state policy; and

intensive and on-going opportunities to learn and practice. Borko and Putnam (1995) stated that:

Persons who wish to reform educational practice cannot simply tell teachers how to teach differently. Teacher themselves must make the desired changes. To do so, they must acquire richer knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, and subject specific pedagogy; and they must come to hold new beliefs in these domains. Successful professional development efforts are those that help teachers to acquire or develop new ways of thinking about learning, learners, and subject matter, thus construction a professional knowledge base that will enable them to teach students in more powerful and meaningful ways. (p. 60)

All of these professional development features need to be nested in the context of schools where teachers are learning in the company of others (Goddard et al., 2007; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Senge et al., 2012). In one of the first studies to link higher levels of collaboration to higher levels of student achievement, Goddard et al. (2007) declared, “the more teachers collaborate, the more they are able to converse knowledgably about theories, methods, and processes of teaching and learning, and thus improve their instruction” (p. 879).

Collective participation as articulated includes both job-embedded professional development and collaboration. Collective participation is one of the key features of goal group professional development. It is important to further outline collective participation through the examination of literature related to job-embedded professional development and collaboration.

Job-Embedded Professional Development

Experiential learning

“Learning” as defined by Kolb (1984) “is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). Kolb (1984) maintained that learning happens through the sensorial interaction of an individual with an experience

through which the experience becomes a concept. These concepts are constantly being modified by new experiences and, therefore, a continuous formation of knowledge takes place in the learner (Kolb, 1984). Kolb (1984) created the experiential learning cycle to describe the interactions of learner with environment. The cycle is divided into four stages of learning that include a concrete experience followed by reflective observation leading to the formation of abstract concepts which allow for active experimentation with knowledge in new situations.

One of the key elements of Kolb's (1984) work was his attention to the importance of the concrete or "here-and-now" experiences to test ideas and the use of feedback to change practices. Kolb was most interested in the individual learner engaged in the process of learning, rather than seeing the learning as situated in a particular context. However, Tennant (1997) pointed out, "the model provides an excellent framework for planning teaching and learning activities and it can be employed as a guide..." (p. 92) for situated learning experiences. Defined in this way, experiential learning is learning undertaken by learners who are given the opportunity to acquire and apply knowledge and skills in an immediate and relevant setting (Brookfield, 2013).

While experiential learning relies on experiences and the senses of the adult learner for learning to occur, what the adult learner does with the actual experience effectuates the learning (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984). Therefore, the adult learner must interact with the experience and connect with that experience in order for the learning to occur. The adult learners' participation goes beyond simply hearing, seeing, or discussing it (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984).

One approach to experiential learning for teachers places the learning events at the school site where teachers work (Borko et al., 1997; Putnam & Borko, 2000). In a study of the UC Assessment project by Borko et al. (1997), the professional developers who were also the researchers taught new teaching methods and ideas to teachers at the school. Teachers would then implement the new learning in their classrooms with students. As a follow up, teachers brought experiences from their classrooms to their professional development activities where they discussed implementation with each other and with the professional developers/researchers (Borko et al., 1997). Putnam and Borko (2000) wrote “The learning of the teachers is intertwined with their ongoing practice, making it likely that what they learn will indeed influence and support their teaching practice in meaningful ways” (p. 6). Zepeda (2012c) articulated the idea when outlining the practices needed to support job-embedded learning, and shared, “When principals embed professional development in the workday, learning becomes integral to practice. Teachers implement new techniques as they acquire them” (p. 127).

Job-Embedded Professional Development

Job-embedded professional development is defined as teacher learning grounded in teachers’ day-to-day teaching experience (Tienken & Stonaker, 2007; Whitfield & Wood, 2010). Croft et al. (2010) more fully explained that job-embedded professional development is “largely a product of formal and informal social interactions among teachers, situated in the context of their school and the classrooms in which they teach and is distributed across the entire staff” (p. 5).

Fiszer (2004) further explained

Professional development requires modeling, practice in simulated and actual settings, and structured, open-ended feedback about performance observed during

actual practice. Effective professional development should ensure follow-up to the ideas discussed where collaboration, testing of selected ideas, and reflective practice are involved. (p. 2)

According to Hawley and Valli's (1999) fourth principle of professional development design, "professional development should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching" (p. 140). They elaborated that "Motivation to learn and to engage in school change efforts increases when these efforts are linked to improving and assessing daily practice. The optimal workplace is one in which learning arises from and feeds back into work experience" (Hawley & Valli, 2000, p. 2).

Section Summary

Job-embedded professional development provides intentional experiences in which teachers must interact with that experience in order for the learning to occur. The teacher's participation goes beyond simply hearing, seeing, or discussing it. The teacher is learning while engaged in the work of planning and teaching (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984). Job-embedded professional development increases student achievement and empowers teachers to collaborate and reflect on the improvement of instructional practices (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Hirsh, 2009; Hord, 2008; Zepeda, 2012c). Sparks (2004) stated that, "professional learning of this type engages the intellect, involves all teachers in cycles of action and reflection, and builds relationships, all of which lead to continuous improvements in teaching and learning for all students in schools" (p. 304).

Collaborative Learning

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that not only is the situation important, but also the social environment:

In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice—as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world. (p. 35)

The context includes not only the location, but also the other people and their interactions in the setting. Research on effective professional development highlights the importance of collaborative and collegial learning environments that help develop communities of practice able to promote school change beyond individual classrooms (Colbert et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). The following studies highlight the contribution of collaborative practices that are situated in the context of schools.

The National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA, 2009) examined student performance data from 550 schools and discovered 140 K-12 schools that outperformed demographically similar schools for 3 consecutive years. The practices of the 140 average or higher than average performing schools were studied through intensive school visits, document analysis, and personnel interviews at the school and district level. One common aspect revealed in this large-scale study is the importance of a collaborative culture on school performance.

Goddard et al. (2007) wanted to test empirically the relationship between the level of teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement. Survey data were collected from a sample of 47 elementary schools with 452 teachers and 2,536 fourth-grade students. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was the primary analytic method. Results from the study indicate that fourth-grade students have higher achievement in mathematics and reading when they attend schools characterized by higher levels of teacher collaboration for school improvement. Goddard et al. (2007)

concluded that teachers need opportunities to collaborate on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and professional development in an effort to improve student achievement.

In a five-year quasi-experimental study, Gallimore et al. (2009) examined grade-level teams' use of inquiry-focused protocols to solve instructional problems. Principles and teacher leaders used explicit protocols for leading grade-level learning teams, resulting in students outperforming their peers in six matched schools on standardized achievement tests (Gallimore et al., 2009). These improved outcomes were more likely for teams led by a trained peer-facilitator, teaching similar content, and located in stable settings in which to engage in ongoing improvement. The trainers used inquiry-focused protocols, such as identifying student needs, formulating instructional plans, and using evidence to refine instruction (Gallimore et al., 2009).

Gallimore et al. (2009) hypothesize that teachers might gain several benefits by working through the cyclical process until meaningful student results are achieved. Within the work cycles, teachers develop findings and insights about addressing specific areas of student need. Slowing down and making planning and analysis visible in a collective and intentional way affects general patterns of cognition, including:

- Cause-effect analyses become a part of daily planning;
- More attention is more consistently paid, with greater clarity and care to particular areas of student need;
- Greater attention is paid to classroom interaction and artifacts as opportunities to get feedback on the effects of teachers' efforts;
- More regular and productive questions of existing instructional practices;
- Greater interest in gaining more knowledge about practice and alternative approaches; and
- Greater reliance on evidence to drive planning and decisions. (Gallimore et al., 2009, p. 549)

When teachers are given opportunities to work on learning problems long enough to solve them and to discover connections between instruction and student outcomes,

coherence is created between teacher learning and real classroom dilemmas.

The structures of collaborative groups may take many forms, but learning is stimulated when teachers engage in conversation to push one another to experiment (Balan, Manko, & Phillips, 2011). Desimone (2011) recommended that professional development should “support sustained professional communication among teachers who are working to reform their teaching in similar ways” (p. 65).

Butler and Schnellert (2012) studied 18 middle level teachers using case study methodology and found that teacher collaborative inquiry has the potential to foster meaningful shifts in practice. There are benefits to nesting practice-level inquiry with cycles of self- and co-regulated learning. Inquiry-oriented approaches to professional development can support systematic change (Butler & Schnellert, 2012).

Eraut (2004) examined “conscious learning processes” found in or near the workplace and reported four main types of work activity that regularly give rise to learning:

- a) Participation in group activities included team working towards a common outcome, and groups set up for a special purpose such as audit, development or review of policy and/or practice, and responding to external changes.
- b) Working alongside others allows people to observe and listen to others at work and to participate in activities, and hence to learn some new practices and new perspectives, to become aware of different kinds of knowledge and expertise, and to gain some sense of other people's tacit knowledge.
- c) Tackling challenging tasks requires on-the-job learning and, if well supported and successful, leads to increased motivation and confidence.
- d) Working with clients also entails learning (1) about the client, (2) from any novel aspects of each client's problem or request and, (3) from any new ideas that arose from their joint consultation. (pp. 266-267)

These four processes represented most of peoples’ work place learning experiences in the research projects conducted by Eraut (2004). This research is relevant to the educational

setting when planning collaborative learning experiences. The findings presented here raise important questions about strategies for enhancing the quality and quantity of collaborative formal and informal learning (Eraut, 2004).

Adult learning theory indicates that learning is an inherently social enterprise (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Individual learning and goal attainment around complex tasks or challenging situations can be further supported through group learning situations where needs are identified to solve real-life problems (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). For teachers, this process is embedded in the work they do in schools and is specifically related to working with other teachers and students (Fischer, 2004; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003; Whitfield & Wood, 2010; Yendol & Hoppey, 2010; Zepeda, 2012c).

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice can be defined as a process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time, sharing ideas and strategies, determining solutions, and developing innovation. Wenger (2011) clearly stated the definition as, “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (para. 3). According to Wenger (2011), a community of practice requires three distinct characteristics: the first requirement is for the group to identify either intentional or unintentionally a shared domain of interest among its members; the second requirement is to establish a community around the domain; and the third requirement is when the community is recognized by the members’ interaction and learning together. Additionally, the community must work toward the development of a particular practice around which

members of the community build a shared set of resources and expertise. The integration of these components forms the basis for the community of practice (Wenger, 2011).

In their research and work in the business sector, Wenger and Snyder (2000) identified how well functioning communities of practice can potentially influence organization performance:

1. They solve problems quickly
2. They transfer best practices
3. They develop professional skills

These factors also apply to the work of teachers in schools. Wenger (2011) identified teacher professional development as one of the first applications of communities of practice in an educational setting.

Rosenholtz (1989) found in a study examining learning communities in 78 elementary schools that effective schools were places in which the teachers were encouraged to collaborate, share ideas and solutions to problems, and learn about educational practice. She also found that as the teachers' practices improved, the students also benefited from improved instruction (Rosenholtz, 1989). Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) found that teacher learning occurs most effectively when teachers are able to be part of a community of learners who establish and follow their own rules, understand their limitations and resources, and, ultimately, realize their potential. A community of learners allows teachers to create an environment in which they are able to voice their concerns and opinions and challenge one another to grow professionally (Bransford et al., 2000).

Cooperative Learning: Accountability

Cooperative learning became a commonly used way to organized learning experiences in the 1980s, and continues to be a valuable method for learning in multiple situations (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007). Slavin (2014) defined cooperative learning as a teaching method in which learners work together in small groups to help one another learn. Johnson and Johnson (1989) suggested that cooperative learning is more than just working in groups and includes the following: 1) positive interdependence where team members are reliant on one another to achieve a common goal, and the entire group suffers the consequences if one member fails to do his or her work; 2) individual accountability where each member of the group is held accountable for doing his or her share of the work; 3) face-to-face interaction where, although some of the group work may be done on an individual basis, most of the tasks are performed through an interactive process in which each group member provides feedback, challenges the other members, and teaches and encourages his or her group mates; 4) appropriate use of collaborative skills where students are provided with the opportunity to develop and implement trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management skills; and 5) group processing in which team members establish group goals, the assessment of their performance as a team occurs periodically, and they often identify changes that need to be made for the group to function more effectively.

According to Johnson et al. (2007), group dynamics play an important role in effective collaboration, and positive interdependence or cooperation is key to a group's ability to accomplish a common goal. "*Positive interdependence* exists when individuals perceive that they can reach their goals if and only if the other individuals with whom

they are cooperatively linked also reach their goals and, therefore, promote each other's efforts to achieve the goals" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 16, emphasis in the original).

Individual accountability is key to the success of the overall group's success and ultimately the success of the individual's goal achievement.

Communal Constructivism

The social constructivist notion of knowledge construction through social interaction can be applied to the design of professional development for teachers.

Teachers as learners need to have opportunities to engage in conversation about their practice. Hord (2009) builds the bridge from constructivism to professional development in her discussion of professional learning communities in which she shared:

The professional learning community models the self-initiating learner working in concert with peers. Constructivism recognizes learning as the process of making sense of information and experiences. Learning constructively requires an environment in which learners work collegially and is situated in authentic activities and contexts. (p. 41)

The idea of socially constructed knowledge is further developed in the theory of communal constructivism.

Communal constructivism, a theory from the field of virtual learning, is an approach to learning that combines constructivism and social constructivism in the context of the environment (Leask & Younie, 2001; Tangney et al., 2001). Communal constructivism is "an approach to learning in which students not only construct their own knowledge (constructivism) as a result of interacting with their environment (social constructivism), but are also actively engaged in the process of constructing knowledge for their learning community" (Tangney et al., 2001, p. 2).

Communal constructivists concluded that collaborative learning communities actively create new knowledge (Leask & Younie, 2001; Tangney et al., 2001). Learners, identified as students and teachers, conduct investigations by working together, pooling resources, sharing, and teaching others (Leask & Younie, 2001). This learning model couples principles from Vygotsky's work (1978) related to constructivism where roles of learner and teacher may blur. The andragogical style requires instructors to "build on the knowledge, skills and energy" of learners (Tangney et al., 2001, p.3).

In communal constructivism, students and teachers work together to develop their own understandings meant for their personal benefit, and the benefit of other students and teachers (Holmes & Gardner, 2006). Communal constructivism is the synergy that is created in the interaction of learners and their environment and the interaction of learners with each other while constructing knowledge and understanding.

Section Summary

Research on effective professional development emphasizes the importance of collaborative and collegial learning environments that help develop communities of practice able to promote school wide change (Colbert et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Teachers need ample collaborative opportunities to figure out and solve problems related to classroom issues. This allows teachers to work together to discover connections between instruction and student outcomes (Gallimore et al., 2009). Not only are teachers solving their own classroom issues but they are also creating and sharing lasting change in instructional practices.

Individual Learning

Teachers need to have opportunities to learn (Loucks & Horsley, 1995).

Professional learning experiences should respect and acknowledge that teachers are adult learners who learn in different ways, come from different backgrounds, work in a variety of settings, and address the needs of diverse students (Webster-Wright, 2009). Zeichner (2003) highlighted respect for the “voices of teachers and the knowledge they bring” (p. 318) as an important factor in promoting teacher learning. Effective professional development recognizes that teachers have individual needs, different motivations for learning, and prior knowledge and experience that will influence the type of learning in which they choose to engage (Bonner, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2002, 2013; Zeichner, 2003).

The design of professional development activities must relate to and make explicit the intended purpose of what is to be achieved. Clear outcomes ensure that teachers understand the relevance and value these activities have to their classroom practice and to student learning (Desimone, 2011; Zepeda, 2012b). The relationship between change in classroom practice and improvement in student learning demands recognition of what learning is required and how it will be learned in the most effective way to achieve intended goals (Grant, 2012; Killion, 2012; Stronge & Grant, 2009). Teachers are best situated to identify their own learning needs (Bayar, 2014; Grant, 2012; Horn & Little, 2010; Zeichner, 2003). According to Horn and Little (2010), sustained changes in classrooms can be a product of placing teachers at the center of the change efforts.

Hawley and Valli’s (1999) third principle of professional development design is specifically important to the unique characteristics of this study of goal group learning.

Principle three states, “Professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved” (p. 139). The engagement of teachers in the selection of professional development content “increases educators’ motivation and commitment to learn, encourages them to take instructional risks and assume new roles, and increases the likelihood that what is learned will be relevant to particular contexts and problems” (Hawley & Valli, 2000, p. 4).

Burke (1997) suggested that teachers should be actively involved in their own professional learning by deciding the purposes of their learning, prioritizing these into meaningful goals and determining how the professional learning experience will unfold. Guskey (2000) recommended that before teachers begin a professional development experience that they complete an in-depth needs assessment. This can be accomplished through reflection of their practice, analysis of student assessments, research, interviews, or focus groups. By creating measurable goals that are driven by actual needs, teachers will be better able to evaluate the learning experience (Guskey, 2000). Professional development that is differentiated allows teachers to self-analyze, reflect, and make informed decisions pertinent to individual needs (Guskey, 2000).

In a recent small-scale study, Bayar (2014) interviewed 16 teachers about their professional development activities over a 12-month period. These teachers reported the following components as most valuable for effective professional development:

- Match to existing teacher needs
- Match to existing school needs
- Teacher involvement in the design/planning of professional development activities
- Active participation

- Long-term engagement
- High quality instruction. (Bayar, 2014, pp. 322-333)

These findings clarify the need for teachers to be participants in the planning and development of their professional development experiences.

A study conducted by Colbert et al., (2008) examined the experiences of 37 teachers participating in Francis P. Collea Teacher Award Program (CTAAP) during the 2004-2006 funding cycle. Each year the program accepts applications from teams of teacher who want to pursue self-directed professional learning. Once granted, teachers work in learning teams for two years on self-selected professional development funded by the award. The teams in the 2004-2006 funding cycle spanned all grade levels and multiple subject areas. Colbert et al. (2008) were “interested in the lived experiences of teachers who have participated in the CTAAP” (p. 139).

A phenomenological approach was used to collect data through surveys and in-depth interviews of teachers who experienced the CTAAP. The survey included questions about how participation in CTAPP influenced their relationships at their school, their teaching practices, subject matter knowledge, and their perception of themselves as teachers in terms of empowerment, self-confidence, and professionalism.

The findings of Colbert et al. (2008) revealed:

- Teachers embraced their needs and have more quickly taken steps to address those needs.
- Teachers are pursuing authentic professional development experiences to increase academic content knowledge.
- Teachers have developed more quickly into the role of teacher-leader. Implementing their classroom and school plans has required teachers to take on leadership roles in their schools.
- When teachers are empowered to create their own professional growth plan, their passion for teaching and for improving the lives of their students is greatly enhanced.

- Teachers find benefit in the collaborative process, both within their teams and in their schools. (Colbert et al., 2008, p. 148)

According to Colbert et al. (2008) “this research clearly demonstrates how teacher empowerment in designing, implementing, and assessing professional development can be a powerful model for impacting content knowledge, pedagogy, and student learning” (p. 149)

Goal Setting

Goal setting theory stems from the study of motivation and falls within the domain of social-cognitive theory (Latham & Locke, 2006). The basic premise of this theory suggests, “conscious human behavior is purposeful [and] is regulated by the individual’s goals” (Latham & Locke, 1991, p. 212). Goal setting theory is supported by empirical studies which have found “that specific high goals are effective in significantly increasing an individual’s performance” in a variety of tasks (Latham & Locke, 2006, p. 332). The theory “focuses on the question of why some people perform better on work tasks than others” and argues that if two individuals “are equal in ability and knowledge, then the cause must be motivational” in nature (Latham & Locke, 1991, p. 213).

Setting goals is effective for a variety of reasons. Setting a goal creates an awareness of a discrepancy between a current and a desired state. Individuals are motivated by this cognitive dissonance to increase their self-regulatory efforts or change their strategies to meet their set goal (Latham & Locke, 2006; Latham & Locke, 1991). Goal setting provides individuals with a sense of purpose, increasing their concentration on goal-relevant tasks. Most importantly, setting and attaining goals gives individuals a feeling of accomplishment.

As accomplishment enhances a person's sense of personal effectiveness, it generally produces higher self-concept and the setting of even higher goals to pursue (Latham & Locke, 2006). Thus, setting and attaining goals appears to create and strengthen a positive feedback loop between goal-directed action, accomplishment, and feelings of personal effectiveness, which should lead to higher sense of efficacy.

Reflective Practice

Dewey (1933) views the purpose of education as promoting intellectual, social, and moral growth of the individual in order to create a strong democratic society. His interest is in how people think when faced with real and relevant problems. Dewey (1933) stated that reflection

emancipates us from merely impulsive and routine activity...enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to end-in-view, or purposes of which we are aware. It enables us to act in deliberate and intentional fashion...to know what we are about when we act. (p. 17)

According to Dewey (1933) true reflective practice takes place only when the individual faces a real problem that needs to be resolved and seeks to resolve the problem in a rational manner. Simply thinking about teaching does not constitute reflective teaching. The defining characteristic of reflective teaching is the teacher questions their own assumptions about the goals and values held about teaching (Corcoran, 2007; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

According to Pollard and Tann (1993), Dewey's notion of reflective action, when developed and applied to teaching, is both challenging and exciting. They identified six key characteristics of its implications for teaching (Pollard & Tann, 1993). Six key characteristics of reflective action's implications for teaching (Pollard & Tann, 1993):

1. Reflective teaching implies an active concern with aims and consequences, as well as means and technical efficiency. The reflective teacher should consider not only the immediate aims and consequences of classroom work, but also acknowledge the political process and be willing to contribute to it both as a citizen and as a professional.
2. Reflective teaching is applied in a cyclical or spiraling process, in which teachers plan but also monitor, evaluate, and revise their own practice continuously.
3. Reflective teaching requires competence in methods of classroom inquiry to support the development of teaching competence.
4. Reflective teaching requires attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness.
5. Reflective teaching is based on teacher judgment, which is informed partly by self-reflection and partly by insights from educational disciplines.
6. Reflective teaching, professional learning, and personal fulfillment are enhanced through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues. (p. 9)

With each phase of continued reflection, teachers are presented with opportunities to adopt pedagogical innovations.

According to Hillier (2005), there are two reasons to reflect on practice: 1) to change existing practices that will in the long term not actually help learners learn effectively and 2) to become more positive in the search for a new understandings of their teaching practice and find more ways to deal with the challenges that confront them daily. When teachers act reflectively, they think critically about the problems in their own teaching and consider how those problems are related to their educational or social context. Reflections make them aware of the consequences of their teaching and how their own assumption or beliefs can influence their teaching.

Section Summary

Effective professional development recognizes that teachers have individual needs, different motivations for learning, and prior knowledge and experience that will influence the type of learning in which they choose to engage (Bonner, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2002, 2013; Zeichner, 2003). Sustained changes in classrooms can be a product

of intentionally placing teachers at the center of the change efforts (Horn & Little, 2010). By setting goals, teachers develop an awareness of a discrepancy between a current and a desired state. Individuals are motivated by this cognitive dissonance to increase their self-regulatory efforts or change their strategies to meet their set goal (Latham & Locke, 2006; Latham & Locke, 1991). Teachers then reflect on their teaching, questioning their own assumptions about the goals and values they hold about teaching (Corcoran, 2007; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Chapter Summary

Parise and Spillane (2010) recommended that further research should explore relative relationships between different types of formal learning opportunities, on-the-job opportunities, and teacher change. This study explores the links between teacher learning opportunities as goal group learning and self-reported teacher change. The proposed study seeks to examine how one school in a system in Georgia has worked to implement job-embedded professional learning that aligns with professional learning recommendations made by Hawley and Valli (1999). The *Principles of Professional Development* outlined by Hawley and Valli (1999) synthesize the complexities of facilitating teacher learning. The purpose of this study fits well within the scope of what Borko (2004) recommended that “to understand teacher learning, we must study it within multiple contexts, taking into account both the individual teacher-learners and the social systems in which they are participants” (p. 4).

The importance of this research rests on its unique connections between teacher evaluation and professional development, creating coherence among teacher learning needs, professional learning, and evaluation. Typically, educators who are committed to

excellent teaching continually seek growth and improvement, as the art of teaching is never a finished product. A changing community of students requires teachers to grow professionally to be able to modify their pedagogy and educational philosophies. In relationship to the needs of teacher-learners, this study stems from the premise that schools and districts need to find vehicles for sustaining teacher growth and development that connects to teacher evaluation. The study can add to research findings concerning teacher learning and contribute to the discussion on the usefulness of creating coherence in professional development programs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a means of job-embedded professional learning. The gap that this study hoped to address examined teachers' perspectives of their participation in goal groups an emerging professional learning process at Edge Elementary School.

The research questions this study sought to answer included:

1. How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals?
2. How does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice?

Theoretical Framework

The approach of this research is grounded in a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism as a general learning theory, places emphasis on the knowledge, attitudes, and interests learners bring to the learning environment. It posits that learners construct their own meanings through an internal, interpretative process based on the interaction between the student, the student's prior knowledge, and the student's social experiences (Brunner, 1966; Lave & Wenger 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 2012; Tennant, 1997). Within the constructivist continuum, the more holistic perspective of social

constructivism pioneered by Vygotsky (1978) stresses the importance of culture and context in forming understanding and so recognizes the interdependence between cognition and context (Lave & Wenger 1991; Tennant, 1997).

A pedagogy from the field of virtual learning, communal constructivism, is an approach to learning that combines constructivism and social constructivism in the context of the environment (Leask & Younie, 2001; Tangney et al., 2001). Communal constructivism is “an approach to learning in which students not only construct their own knowledge (constructivism) as a result of interacting with their environment (social constructivism), but are also actively engaged in the process of constructing knowledge for their learning community” (Tangney et al., 2001. p. 2).

Constructivist epistemology is based on the premise that knowledge is socially constructed through the interactions of individuals within and among groups (Brunner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). The theoretical frameworks used in this study emerge within adult learning theory, goal setting theory, and teacher professional learning. The constructivist epistemology aligns with the selected qualitative methodology, case study. The researcher wanted to understand how teachers perceive professional goal setting and efforts to reach goal attainment in relationship to collaborative professional learning within the context of the goal group framework implemented at Edge Elementary School.

Research Design

In this study, qualitative research methods were used to uncover how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual goals in a collegial group setting as a means of job-embedded professional learning. Silverman (2000) expressed the need for researchers to determine the appropriateness of qualitative methods as opposed to quantitative methods

when considering the particular research questions. Qualitative methods generally aim to understand the experiences and attitudes of participants and answer questions about the what, how, or why. Patton (2002) further described qualitative research as a method designed to provide descriptions of these experiences and attitudes that offer insights into the perspective of participants. As the intent of this study was to understand teachers' perspective of their experiences in self-selected, collaborative professional learning events, it was important to use methods that support the collection of data that reveals teacher's perspectives.

Case Study

This study relied on case study methods to reveal participants perspectives of their professional learning experiences. According to Creswell (2007), case study research is a research methodology in which the study of an issue is explored within a bounded system over a period of time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources and reports a case description and case-based themes. In this study, the "case" is goal groups at Edge Elementary School, which were developed as an approach to facilitating teacher development. This research study gathered information on teachers' perspectives of their participation in goal group professional learning over a period of five months to understand and discuss teachers' individual perceptions of professional learning and growth within their group and within the greater context of the school.

The intent of the study was to describe in detail the experiences of teachers within this intrinsic case (Stake, 1995). The best way to accomplish this was to collect multiple forms of data that could corroborate the overall description of the case. In this case study, data were collected from interviews, a focus group, documents, observations, and

fieldnotes. Through analysis of this collected data, the study aimed to provide an in-depth description that leads to an understanding of goal group participants.

The case study approach is particularly useful in studying loosely coupled systems such as educational institutions (Hamilton & Whittier, 2013). This idea of the loosely coupled system indicates the paradox inherent in institutional organizations. In this study, teachers participated in goal group professional learning. Each of these groups maintains an identity or separateness each from the other. However, there is sharing within and among the groups. This is also true with the individual teachers participating in each group.

Teachers maintain individually their own goals, learning, and experimentation, but they often share these experiences within the group. The learning that happens in goal groups is not rigidly controlled or contained, and it creates a sense of separateness for each group or individual. The attachment to the group and greater learning community occurs through the process of the professional learning sequence, which can create a goal group identity and a sense of community through the learning process.

There is a clear rationale for the use of a case study approach, since the central purpose of the study is to explore, understand, and discuss, not quantify, the perceptions of teachers in a goal group in reference to their professional learning. This methodology is most appropriate because it allows the researcher to study the individuals, gather their perceptions, share their experiences, and report the data in the “lived and told stories of the individuals” involved (Creswell, 2007, p. 54).

Data Sources

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a means of job-embedded professional learning. Therefore, it was important to select a research site and participants engaged in goal group professional development.

Research Site

The research site is Edge Elementary School (pseudonym) located outside of the Metro Atlanta area, in a city with about 120,000 residents. The school district in the community is of medium size relative to other districts in the state of Georgia. The school district operates 21 schools and served about 13,500 students during the 2013-2014 school year. The research site is 1 of 14 elementary schools in the district. The enrollment for this elementary school has remained at about 400 students per academic year for the past 5 years. This elementary school was selected because of its use of goal group professional learning, and the researcher gained access to the site through her former position as an instructional coach.

The Nuway School District (pseudonym) employed a growth model teacher evaluation system in which teachers' were required to set two learning goals each year as part of the evaluation process (Zepeda, 2012b). The district provided a set of teacher performance standards related to instructional practices, classroom management, and teacher dispositions. Prior to an initial meeting at the beginning of the year with the principal, teachers were expected to reflect on their own practice in relationship to these standards and to be able to discuss areas of strength and areas for development. As teachers reflected on areas where their teaching practice could be developed, they also

began to identify individual goals. During the initial meeting, a teacher and the administrator discussed the teacher's proficiencies and growth areas related to these standards using the rubric connected to each of the standards. The teacher's goals related to the teacher performance standards were refined and recorded during this initial meeting.

At the research site in 2010, the instructional coach took the lead to support the teachers' professional learning related to their goals. The instructional coach was allowed to participate in the initial meetings between the teacher and administrator in an effort to plan for professional learning that would align to teachers' needs. It was noticed that groups of teachers were setting similar or related goals. This led to the idea that a professional learning framework could be developed to organize teachers into collaborative groups working on related goals. The objective of goal groups was to move professional learning beyond merely delivering or covering content. With support of the group, teachers could share the learning and benefits from experimentation and create shifts in practice of the individual teachers.

Goal Group Professional Learning

The teachers at Edge Elementary School develop annual goals at the beginning of the year. This goal setting is part of the teacher evaluation program within the Nuway School District. Once a teacher set self-selected goals for the year, the school administration examines the goals of each teacher and then begins to match teachers into groups related to the goals identified in the Individual Professional Learning Plan (see Appendix A). From there, goal groups form so that teacher professional learning groups centering on these goals can be established to support individual and group goal

attainment. Adult learning concepts of self-direction and social support for learning framed the description of how teachers work within goal groups.

The participants in this study engaged in collaborative professional learning at Edge Elementary. Table 3.1 outlines the yearlong goal group sequence.

Table 3.1

Goal Group Process

GOAL GROUP PROCESS	Teachers set goals and were placed their teacher learning groups based on common goals
	Teachers worked within these groups to establish learning needs and objectives
	An instructional coach worked with teachers to find learning materials and other opportunities to further learning
	Teachers worked face-to-face and in e-learning communities with the instructional coach and teacher leaders
	Teachers experimented with new practice based on learning
	Teachers shared experiences and learning in formal goal group meetings
	Teachers observed other teachers within the groups to further learning around goals
	Teachers worked in teams to consider artifacts in preparation for annual evaluations
	Teachers met with principal for final evaluation.
	Teachers share goal group learning with other teachers outside of their goal groups

The school administration at Edge Elementary School strategically organized a structure for collaborative groups that met together consistently to participate in ongoing learning driven by self-selected goals that individual teachers set as part of the district teacher evaluation system.

Adult learning theory has long documented the effectiveness of self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 2012; Knowles, 1975) and collaboration for engaging adults in learning (Johnson & Johnson 2009; Levine, 2010; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). This study hoped to promote an understanding about how these

two principles of adult learning, self-directed learning and collaboration, played out in the context of teacher goal setting and the subsequent professional learning framework that was intended to support individual learning through collaborative work. The researcher hoped the results of this study would identify strengths and potential barriers to how teachers identify and pursue their own professional learning needs through the formal process of goal setting and collaborative professional learning.

Sample Selection

An interpretive case study design was used to examine the perspectives of 10 certified elementary school teachers. The teachers were asked to complete either two face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the researcher or participate in one focus group with 5 other participants. Purposeful samples of 10 goal group participants were enlisted to participate in interviews or a focus group for this study. The sampling technique was purposeful, since the 10 participants were specifically chosen using the follow criteria: a) active member of a goal group at Edge Elementary School, b) represent different goal groups, and c) represent different levels of teaching experience.

The 10 participants were chosen out of approximately 30 teachers who were participants in a goal group at Edge Elementary School during the 2013-2014 school year. The participants were recruited through an email request, seeking participants for research about professional learning in goal groups. Selections were made from the pool to secure representation from the six goals groups and a variety of years of teaching experience. A list of alternate participants was developed in case any of the first 10 participants dropped out. None of the 10 dropped out, so none of the alternate participants were asked to participate in the study.

The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the interviewees. Each of the five interview participants were asked to choose two times that were convenient for the interview. All of the interviews took place in the research location, often in a teacher's classroom. The focus group participants were asked to attend a quick planning meeting before the focus group to plan a time. Each of the participating teachers brought their calendars and worked together to find a mutually agreeable time for the focus group. The five teachers and the researcher met in the school's professional development room, after school one afternoon for the focus group.

Ten teachers (N=10) for this research study were selected from varying goal groups, races, genders, and teaching experiences, as outlined in Table 3.2 and 3.3.

Table 3.2

Participant Profiles for Teachers Interviewed

Name	Gender	Race	Grade	Goal Group	Years Teaching	Years at Site
Rachel	F	W	SPED	Classroom Community	7	3
Beth	F	W	1	Differentiation K-2	3	3
Emily	F	W	K	Differentiation K-2	1	1
Alex	F	W	5	Classroom Community	22	0
Eric	M	B	5	Student Engagement	3	1

Table 3.3

Participant Profiles for Teachers in Focus Group

Name	Gender	Race	Grade	Goal Group	Total Years Teaching	Years at Site
Halle	F	B	K	Assessment	7	7
Nina	F	W	5	Technology	18	6
Lisa	F	W	ESOL	Student Engagement	5	5
Madge	F	W	1	Differentiation K-2	7	7
Chloe	F	B	4	Differentiation 3-5	18	18

Instrumentation

Seidman (2012) stated the foundation of the interview in qualitative research is an “interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). The interest of the researcher in the specific experiences of others is what drives qualitative research and the methods that search for understanding. Much research has been done in the field of education but less attention has been paid to the perspectives of individuals involved “whose individual and collective experiences constitute schooling” (Seidman, 2012, p. 9).

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) connected conversation, a fundamental form of human communication where people get to know one another, to the interview. In the research interview, the researcher “asks about, and listens to, what people themselves tell about their lived world” (p. 1). For Kvale and Brinkman, there is a link between human interactions and knowledge production. In an interview, “knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 2).

In this research two interviews were conducted with each of the five participating teachers during the spring of 2014. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The first interview was conducted in February while teachers were in the middle of goal group professional development. The second interview was completed in May after the completion of goal group professional development and the teacher’s end of year meeting with administration that is the culminating part of teacher evaluation system. Other sources of data included a focus group meeting, fieldnotes, participant observations, and documents related to teachers’ professional development.

The researcher allowed the participants to select the time and place for the interview. All of the interviews took place at the research site during the workweek when the teacher was not responsible for students or had completed teaching duties. The first and second interviews for four of the interviewees were held in their classroom after school hours. All other interviews were held in the researcher's office during the teachers' planning and lunch, which were back-to-back, during the school day.

Table 3.4 present examples of questions asked in the first interview and the relationship of these interview questions to the research questions.

Table 3.4

Questions Used in Interview #1 Aligned to Research Questions

Establish Rapport	Questions to Address Research Question #1	Questions to Address Research Question #2
Would you please tell me about your teaching experience? (Years teaching, grades taught, and level of education)	Tell me about your goal group.	What are you learning?
What do you think of when you hear the word 'goals' in relationship to your work as a teacher?	Tell me about your experience in working with goal groups.	How likely are you to implement something learned in the context of goal groups or related activities in your classroom?
Tell me about the professional goals you set for yourself this year as part of your teacher evaluation.	What do you think about working in goal groups?	Does what happens in goal groups affect what happens in your classroom?

Establish Rapport	Questions to Address Research Question #1	Questions to Address Research Question #2
	What kinds of work did you do independently on your goal, unrelated to the goal group?	As a classroom teacher in Clarke County, goal setting in some form has always been a part of teacher evaluation.
	What meaning did being involved in goal groups have for you?	How has participating in goal group professional development changed your thinking about working on professional goals?
		What do you think are the barriers for teachers in trying to achieve professional goals?
		What do you think are the support systems for teachers in trying to achieve professional goals?

Table 3.5 presents examples of questions asked in the second interview and the relationship of these interview questions to the research questions.

Table 3.5

Questions Used in Interview #2 Aligned to Research Questions

Establish Rapport	Questions to Address Research Question #1	Questions to Address Research Question #2
Remind me of the professional goals you set for yourself this year as part of your teacher evaluation.	Talk to me about the rest of your experience in working with goal groups since we last talked.	What did you learn?

Establish Rapport	Questions to Address Research Question #1	Questions to Address Research Question #2
Tell me about those goals. What did you hope to see happen in your classroom from pursuing those goals?	Did you participate in peer observations? What was that like? Observer? Observed?	How likely were you to implement something learned in the context of goal groups or related activities in your classroom?
	What do you think about working in goal groups?	What impact do you think participating in the goal group process has had?
	What was is about the goal group process that supported learning?	How did you monitor and evaluate improvement of instructional practices related to the goals?
	What was is about the goal group process that inhibited learning?	What did you learn about your teaching practice through the process of setting professional goals?
	What meaning did being involved in goal groups have for you?	What you learned this year – will that support your practices next year? How or not?

Data Collection

According to Yin (2009), data in a case study can be collected in a variety of ways. The four types of data collection in this research study were participant interviews, focus group, participant observations, and document reviews. The time allotted for data collection in the research study included approximately ten hours of recorded interviews, one hour of recorded focus group, an estimated two hours of participant observation, and an estimated fifteen hours of document review. There were 10 participant interviews, 5

interviews during the school year, and 5 interviews with the same teachers at the end of the school year. There was one focus group with five participants lasting one hour.

Data were collected over a four-month period. The brevity of the study was due to the limited time the researcher had access to the participants in this research site. The focus of the research was on the teacher's perceptions of working in goal groups and their implications for teaching in the classroom. The teachers were asked to share their personal opinions and experiences about goal setting and working in goal groups, as well as their perceptions of the impact of goal group work on teaching and learning. Teachers at Edge Elementary School met formally in goal groups seven times during the school year. Table 3.6 shows the meetings schedule and the artifacts collected during each meeting.

Table 3.6

Artifacts and Observation Data Connected to each Goal Group Meeting

Meeting	Data Collected
Pre-meeting work	Individual Professional Learning Plan (IPLP)
October 7, 2013 Develop a group goal and plan of work	Slides with agenda Group Notes Teacher action plans
November 11, 2013 Share and plan for implementation	Slides with agenda Group Notes Meeting minutes Observation
January 4, 2014 Share and plan for implementation	Slides with agenda Group Notes Meeting minutes
February 17, 2014 Reflect on progress	Slides with agenda Group Notes Meeting minutes Padlet reflections Observation

Meeting	Data Collected
March 17, 2014	Slides with agenda
Reflect on progress	Group Notes
Begin to plan for teacher evaluation portfolio	Padlet with brainstorm of artifacts for final evaluation conference
April 7, 2014	Slides with agenda
Ask questions outside of goal group – “What are you still struggling with?”	Artifacts from a cross group assignment, Connect-Explore-Challenge
May 5, 2014	Protocol for Speed Dating
Share successes related to goal work with teachers not in the same group	Observation

Participant Interviews

In a case study, the most important resource for information is interviewing participants within the case. According to Yin (2009), the interview must be “...guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p.106). The type of protocol for this case study was a focused interview in which all five participants answered open-ended questions in a conversational manner, yet followed a certain set of questions derived from the interview protocols (see Appendix B).

Interviews were an essential source of case study evidence in this research because the focus was on the perceptions of the teachers related to their professional development in a learning team. Yin (2009) stated, “Well-informed interviews can provide important insights into such affairs or events...” (p.108). The researcher obtained permission to save these interviews from the participants. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed and then destroyed to eliminate the possibility that study participants could be identified. Five text sections from interview transcripts are shown in Table 3.7. The table

shows data coded as indicative of participants experiences of accountability while working in goal groups.

Table 3.7

Spreadsheet of Codes From Interview Transcripts

Text from transcript	Code	Participant	Line #'s
Even if it's just reduced to accountability, I think that's big. Because it makes you keep your goal in the forefront of your head the entire year, which is what you're supposed to be doing.	Accountability	Alex	p. 2 112-114
I think it keeps me accountable for designing and implementing plans that reflect the goals that I'm working on. The first year, we didn't have goal groups when I was teaching. I had an idea of what I wanted to do, but I was kind of on my own and didn't really know what I was doing. And kind of let it slide for a long time until it was the end of the year and we had to present on what we did. And so I think the goal groups helped me stay accountable towards actually working towards that goal	Accountability	Beth	p. 10 445-450
Then whatever is set up for us to do in there involves around conversation about, "What have you done? What are you going to do?" So you're making those kind of plans. You're working together.	Accountability; Conversation; Reflection	Beth	p. 5 221-224
Well, goal groups helped me be more accountable. Sometimes I'm like, "Oh, I need to work on this," and I'll be, "Okay, I'll work on it later." But it definitely held me more accountable, and it helped me.	Accountability	Emily	p. 8 346-349
I really think that you have to have that monthly contact because I think otherwise, there's just so many other pressing things, that it can really keep being put on the back burner until close to time when it's due.	Accountability	Rachel	p. 16 688-690

Focus Group

A focus group was an additional source of participant interview data collected as part of this research study. Schwandt (2007) described focus group interviews as “bringing together a group of people to discuss a particular topic or range of issues and are commonly found in...organizational research” (p. 119). The protocol for the focus group was a semi-structured interview in which all five participants answered open-ended questions in a conversational manner, yet followed a certain set of questions derived from the focus group protocol (see Appendix C). The data collected from the focus group were an essential additional source of case study evidence in this research study because the focus was on the perspectives of the teachers about their professional development in a learning team. Table 3.8 provides examples of text from the focus group transcript and with corresponding codes.

Table 3.8

Spreadsheet of Codes From Focus Group Transcript

Text from Transcript	Code 1	Code 2	Participant
It gives you insight into areas that you need to keep working on or further develop. We just have to keep going.	Reflection	Evolving	Chloe
I’m going to think about this goal, and then I’m going to do these things for the goal, so I can help myself become a better teacher.	Purpose of Goal	Prioritizing	Chloe
It helped us stay more focused in this one area.	Focus	Prioritizing	Halle
It’s more than just sharing resources. You learn things from other grade levels that you normally wouldn’t get to see or talk about.	Collaboration	Cross Grade Connections	Madge
Knowing that you were going to have to speak in the group makes you do the work, versus if you’re trying to do it by yourself	Collaboration	Accountability	Lisa

Text from Transcript	Code 1	Code 2	Participant
I know I picked technology because I feel like it is the weakest part of my teaching.	Reflection	Self-selection of Goals	Nina
At each meeting we would say ‘At the next meeting, I’m going to have this achieved.’ So we would set little goals and that helped keep me focused.	Collaboration	Accountability	Nina

The focus group was recorded and transcribed by professional transcriptionists. The researcher listened to the recording three times while marking the participant’s responses and noting tone and pauses. This data is from that transcript. The two sets of codes represent the multiple ways of thinking about what teachers were saying in the focus group and how concepts were further refined as the researcher engaged in multiple reading of the transcripts. As an example, the code “collaboration” was further refined into the codes “accountability” and “cross grade connections.”

Participant Observation

Participant observations can serve as another source of evidence in case study research. Participant observations can be useful in making the “case” in case study research as it can solidify themes or answer questions that cannot be answered through other data collection methods. The direct observation samples were from three different goal group meetings, which lasted approximately one hour. Table 3.9 provides examples of notes taken during observations of goal group meetings. The reflections were written in the margins of the observation notes immediately following the goal group meetings.

Table 3.9

Observation Data with Reflection and Codes

Observation notes	Time in Meeting	Date	Reflection	Code
tt. seem exhausted; usually there is conversation before meetings. The room is quiet as tt. wait for the meeting to begin. 3tt. even have their heads on the table.	Before Meeting	Nov	Contrast to tt. in the meeting. Worried about how the meetings was going to go	Tired Teachers
Would never know this was the same group of people from before. As I look around the room, every t. is either talking or looking at the person who is talking. There is animated discussion in the room.	During Meeting – Conversation Protocol	Nov	Excitement for learning; very surprised about how teachers are so energized and talking so animatedly	Collaboration; Conversation
Tt. are reflecting on learning. The prompt is - Before I started working on my goal, I used to... but now I... Tt. had to talk about it first and then write it on the padlet. Tt. are quiet while thinking and writing.	During Meeting – Writing Protocol	Feb	Reflection on learning; Talking before writing; Impact on Teaching	Reflection
This is my favorite meeting of the year. Tt. share goal work with tt. not in their gg. In the first round of speed dating and tt. are so excited to share their learning with each other. Tt. Have out their computers or notebooks showing each other their portfolios they put together for their evaluations. I'm hearing – That is so cool. Will you share that with me? Can I get a copy? How did you do that? Why? From the listening teachers	During meeting – Conversation Protocol	May	In this setting, teachers realize or formalize how much they've learned and grown. In sharing their learning, they are the expert on what they've implemented in their classrooms.	Impact on Teaching

The observations were not used as a primary data source. The notes from observations provided corroborative evidence to the primary data sources of interview and focus group transcripts.

Document Analysis

Document analysis can be useful in identifying various types of data in case study research. Agendas, minutes of meeting, and teacher reflections can help clarify references and details of events. Document review can also provide insight into time, events and settings beyond the time frame of the researcher's engagement with data collection.

Document analysis can prove helpful in understanding the culture of a group as well as in solidifying themes in participant interviews and observations (Yin, 2009). The documents reviewed as a part of this research study included agendas, meeting notes, goal setting documents, and teacher reflections. Some examples of data selected from these documents are shown in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10

Document Data by Source, Participant, and Codes

Data Source	Text	Participant	Code
IPLP	to use my assessments to form differentiated groups and then find appropriate teaching strategies for those groups	Emily	Set goal
IPLP	I plan to use rubrics for my CGI (cognitively guided instruction) notebooks as well as math journals	Halle	Set goal
Reflection 1	I want to better meet the needs of all of my students. I hope all students will meet or exceed standards.	Madge	Goal for student learning; Goal-setting

Data Source	Text	Participant	Code
Reflection 1	I believe that any time spent sharing with colleagues is progress toward professional growth. Our group is diverse in grade levels and teaching responsibility and this will lend itself to a wide range of experiences and thoughts.	4 SE	Collaboration
Padlet	Before I started working on my goal, I did more teacher-centered instruction. Now, I engage students more through student-centered activities and frequent checks for understanding.	3 SE	Impact on teaching
Padlet	I used to feel frustrated with students trying to use technology and would limit what I would let them do. Now it is one of my first choices in instructional planning.	Nina	Impact on teaching
Connect-Explore-Challenge Worksheet	“The biggest challenge I have now...” “It is challenging to have...” “It is challenging to manage...” “How can I put more...” “What to do with students who...” “My biggest challenge is...” “I can’t seem to...” “How do I reach those students who...” “Still need ideas for...”	Multiple participants	Goals as process; Evolving
Connect-Explore-Challenge Worksheet	You could teach your new material in small groups, too. Differentiating with simpler or more complex problems, support with manipulatives, while being on the same topic.		Sharing expertise

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is the approach used to analyze qualitative data that does not rely on the specialized procedures of other means of analysis. In this approach, the researcher codes sections of text according to whether they appear to contribute to emerging themes (Schwandt, 2007). The process begins with close reading of the texts

and consideration for multiple meanings within the text. The texts are read repeatedly as data is organized into categories, which are further synthesized into themes.

In the initial review of the transcripts from the interviews and focus group meetings, data were openly coded for initial impressions and recorded in the margins. Patterns began to emerge within the interview data. These initial codes and data snippets were recorded in a spreadsheet. The codes were narrowed into a single word or phrase such as self-selected, goal, individual, or collaboration. These codes were considered loose categories associated with each of the research questions

A second review of the interview and focus group transcripts was conducted. It was during the second data review that additional data from observations and documents were used to support the coding. Color-coding was used to connect sections of data with a research question. As each section of data was reviewed, categories and sub-categories began to emerge. Peer review was conducted to determine if changes were needed to the initial coding and to recommend changes for association of each section of data to a research question. Recommended changes were then reviewed with the researcher to determine final association and coding for the suggested changes.

During the third review, additional sections of data were entered into the spreadsheet with margin notes, field notes, and category labels. Categories were sorted using filters in the spreadsheet and 25 findings emerged more clearly across the interviews. Table 3.11 aligns the research questions to the findings and themes identified during analysis.

Table 3.11

Findings and Themes Organized by Research Questions

Research Questions	Findings	Themes
How do teachers perceive goal setting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal setting as an opportunity for reflection • Determining self-selected goal is important to teachers • Setting a goal implies action • Goal setting as a means to prioritize • Setting goals prompts continual learning • Set goals evolve over time • Goals can affect all areas of teaching 	4. Goal group professional learning supports coherence among evaluation, goal setting, and professional learning.
1. How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals?	<p>Collaborative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting logistics must be addressed for productive work • Creates individual accountability • Value in working on goals with others • Conversation precedes learning • Connects teachers across grades • Peers provide nonjudgmental feedback • Affords alternative perspectives • Teachers share expertise • Develops teacher networks beyond goal groups <p>Individual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent work is essential to the collaborative process • Individuals participated in other group learning experiences <p>Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time is perceived as a barrier to continued learning • Planning becomes more difficult when implementing new learning 	<p>1. Teachers value the collaborative process of goal groups while they encountered barriers related to time, increased difficulty in planning, and frustration with group members.</p> <p>2. The continued development of teacher relationships and networks connected to professional practice creates positive shifts in school culture.</p> <p>3. The synergy between individual and collaborative work propels learning forward at the individual and group levels.</p>

Research Questions	Findings	Themes
2. How does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers experience anxiety when implementing new learning Groups members attitudes can impede collaborative work 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes classroom practice Changes teachers' expectations for students Perceived impact on student learning Changes teachers beliefs about teaching 	5. Teachers not only made lasting changes in their teaching practice but also made changes in their beliefs about teaching.

Trustworthiness

The researcher created a database from interviews, the focus group session, observations, and documents not only to ensure privacy and confidentiality, but also to organize and store information for future data analysis. Only the researcher had access to the information through password protection.

According to Yin (2009), organization and database building is important in judging the quality of the research design for validity and reliability. Construct validity, external validity, and reliability are all tests of the case study that need particular attention throughout the life of the case. In construct validity, the case study researcher must identify correct operational measures for the concepts being studied. Yin (2009) describes the importance of multiple data sources like this:

With data triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity also can be addressed because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple sources of measure...Not surprisingly, one analysis of

case study methods found that those case studies using multiple sources of evidence were rated more highly in terms of their overall quality. (p. 117)

In this case study, the researcher used multiple sources of evidence (triangulation) such as interviews, a focus group meetings, observations, and document reviews.

External validity in this case study was based on one single bounded case and the theoretical framework from which the case study design evolved. Analytic generalization was met through understanding the way in which teachers' perceptions of professional learning arose from communal constructivism. The reader can analyze this case study using these theories. This research case study can only be generalized in the context in which it was founded. Reliability in this study was met through the development of interview and focus group protocols (see Appendix B & C). This research study established a chain of evidence and it employed peer checking to solidify reliability and validity.

Creswell (2007) identifies the need for all researcher to attend to issues of ethics when he writes, "regardless of the approach to qualitative inquiry, a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during the data collection in the field of analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports" (p. 141). In this research study, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to keep confidentiality. An informed consent from all participants was signed. In the interview and focus group protocols, the researcher reviewed the nature of the research and discussed the purpose of the study in full disclosure. All reasonable precautions were made to protect the human subjects in the research study as outlined in the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board procedures.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in one elementary school in a Southeastern state in which 10 teachers participated. These 10 teachers were selected from a possible pool of 30 teachers divided into 6 goal groups. The purpose of this study was not to generalize but to shed light on a practice not yet examined in the fields of supervision, adult learning, or professional learning.

Risks and Benefits

This research involved no foreseeable risks or discomforts. None of the activities were shared with building administrators or used in teacher annual evaluations. The individual identities of the participants or of the research site are not associated with participant's responses in any published format. Although there were no foreseeable risks associated with this research, if there were any, the benefits outweigh the risks based on what we can possibly learn about goal setting, professional development, and its relationship to teacher evaluation since these areas have not been looked at together in the literature despite the calls in the literature for coherence among the components of a comprehensive teacher development program (Zepeda, 2006, 2012b). As this research study examined goal groups as an innovative approach to professional development, the findings from this research study may provide educators information about the potential value, barriers, and supports necessary to use goal groups as part of a comprehensive professional development plan to continually increase student achievement. This small attempt and its potential benefit to fill that gap can certainly outweigh any unforeseeable risk.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a form of job-embedded professional learning. This study examined teachers' perspectives of their participation in goal groups, an emerging professional development process at Edge Elementary School. The teachers at Edge Elementary School developed annual goals at the beginning of the year as part of the teacher evaluation system within the Nuway School District. The goals determined teacher placement in the topic-based learning groups called goal groups.

The guiding questions of the study were:

1. How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals?
2. How does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice?

This chapter is divided into nine sections. The chapter begins with an overview of the context of the school district, a description of the school site, and general information about the teaching staff at Edge Elementary School. The next section provides basic information about goal group professional learning. A description of each of the

participants follows, with information about the goals teachers set for themselves at the beginning of the school year that were tied to their work in goal groups.

The fourth section presents findings about the multiple ways teacher define goal setting. Findings that illustrate how goal group professional learning promotes collaboration among colleagues fifth section. The sixth section offers findings of how teachers worked individually to support goal attainment and work in goal groups. Findings that identify how goal group work impacts teaching are reported in the seventh section. The final section recognizes barriers to goal attainment and work in goal groups that teachers identified.

Context of the Study

School System

The Nuway School District is located outside of the Metro Atlanta area, in a city with about 120,000 residents. This school district is of medium size relative to other districts in the state of Georgia. Nuway operated 21 schools; 14 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 2 high schools, an alternative high school, a contractual alternative school for high school and middle school students, and a career academy.

The Nuway School District employed about 1,000 teachers. Approximately 75% of the teachers in the district hold advanced degrees. During the 2013-2014 school year, the district employed a growth model teacher evaluation system in which teachers were required to set two learning goals each year as part of the evaluation process (Zepeda, 2012b). The district provided a rubric related to the teacher performance standards (see Appendix D) related to instructional practices, classroom management, and teacher dispositions.

Prior to an initial meeting with the principal at the beginning of the year, teachers were expected to reflect on their own practice in relationship to these standards and to be able to discuss areas of strength and areas for learning. As teachers reflected on areas where their teaching practice could be developed, they also began to identify individual goals. During the initial meeting, a teacher and the principal used a rubric connected to each standard to discuss the teacher's proficiencies and growth areas related to the standards. The teacher's goals related to the teacher performance standards were refined and recorded during this initial meeting.

School

Edge Elementary School (pseudonym) was selected because of its use of goal group professional learning, and the researcher gained access to the site through her former position as an instructional coach. At the research site in 2010, the instructional coach took the lead to support the teachers' professional learning related to their goals. The instructional coach was allowed to participate in the initial meetings between the teacher and principal in an effort to plan professional learning that would align to teachers' needs. It was noticed that groups of teachers were setting similar or related goals. This observation led to the idea that a professional learning framework could be developed to organize teachers into collaborative groups working on related goals.

Staff

During the period of this study, there were 33 teachers employed at Edge Elementary School. Of these 33 teachers, 24 held advanced degrees and 100% were classified as Highly Qualified Teachers according to the No Child Left Behind requirements. The teachers averaged 12 years of experience, and the retention rate was

high, with little turn over. The principal of Edge Elementary School retired at the end of the 2013 school year. She had been instrumental in supporting the development and implementation of goal group professional learning and in creating a positive school culture. During the study, the new principal and assistant principal were both in the first year in their roles.

Goal Groups

Goal groups are a professional learning sequence based on a traditional school year. The objective of goal groups was to move professional learning beyond merely delivering or covering content. With support of the group, teachers could share their learning and the benefits from experimentation as a potential way to create shifts in practices.

The goal group meetings were held in the professional learning room of Edge Elementary School. The professional learning room was a regular classroom that had been set up for teachers. Teachers used this room at least three times per week for meetings and professional learning, and once a quarter when they had release time during the school day to plan instructional units.

In the school, 30 teachers participated in goal group professional learning. These 30 teachers were divided into 6 groups based on their selected goal. Participants focused on one the following topics: differentiation, using technology, student assessment, student engagement, and classroom community. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of teachers within groups. The study participants are named (pseudonym) in each grouping. A number followed by the initials of the group's title indicates the teachers who did not

participate in the study. For example, 2 – T represents one non-participating member in the technology group.

Table 4.1

Goal Groups

Goal Groups											
Assessment	Halle 2 - A	Classroom Community	Alex	Differentiation K-2	Emily	Differentiation 3-5	Chloe	Student Engagement	Eric	Technology	Nina
			Rachel		Beth		2 D3/5		Lisa		2 - T
			3 - CE		Madge		3 D3/5		3 - SE		3 - T
			4 - CE		4 DK2		4 D3/5		4 - SE		4- T
			5 - CE		5 DK2		5 D3/5		5 - SE		5 - T
			6 - CE		6 DK2				6 - SE		
					7 DK2						
					8 DK2						

Participant Profiles

A total of 10 teachers participated in the research, which included at least 1 teacher from each of the 6 goal groups. The participants teaching experience spanned 21 years. The least experienced teacher in the study taught 1 year while the most veteran teacher had been in the profession for 22 years. The range of grade levels currently taught by participants also represents a wide range of elementary grades from Kindergarten through 5th grade. Each of the six goal groups is represented in the pool of participants, which serves to strengthen the findings of the present study.

Interview Participants

Alex, Fifth Grade Teacher, Classroom Community. Alex began teaching in 1993 and was an elementary instructional coach in the district from 2003 to 2013. Alex returned to the classroom for the 2013-2014 school year, as many instructional coaching

positions were being cut. This was Alex's first year back in the classroom after 10 years as an instructional coach. She was generally familiar with the elementary curriculum but knew she would have to dig deeply into the fifth grade curriculum. This work was something she knew she would already do as part of instructional planning and Alex felt, "very strong in the basics of teaching and in handling curriculum."

Alex wanted to focus her goal work on the idea of classroom community. She said in her first interview, "I felt like if I could just pick one thing, one thing to do that would make the biggest difference, it would be connecting with my students and their families." She wanted her classroom "to feel like a well-functioning family." She wanted students to feel safe, to become more tolerant and forgiving, and to feel like the students in the class were supportive of each other. She also wanted a lot of parent involvement. "Not even meaning necessarily they're here in the classroom, but they're very aware and they're part of what we're doing." Alex communicated that she needed to "build great rapport and relationships in order to accomplish anything academically."

Beth, First Grade Teacher, Differentiation K-2. Beth completed her student teaching at Edge Elementary School in spring semester of 2010 and began teaching at Edge Elementary School the following school year. She entered a Masters of Early Childhood Education program in the 2012-2013 school year. During the study, she was in the middle of her master's program while also working on an English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement. Beth currently teaches first grade.

Beth was committed to helping all children learn and had been working diligently to implement differentiation in reading during her first two years. Beth wanted to focus her work in goal groups on using assessment data to plan for differentiation with a

particular focus on math, but also in reading for students who were above grade level benchmarks. Beth reflected that she and the first grade team were “doing a good job of differentiating for our lower students in reading.” In her first interview, Beth shared “I hope(d) that (in) the classroom during math time, I would have different activities for different students based on their needs.”

Emily, Kindergarten Teacher, Differentiation K-2. Emily also completed her student teaching at Edge Elementary School and was subsequently hired to teach Kindergarten. During Emily’s first year, Halle was her mentor teacher. Halle provided Emily with support and coaching in her first year. They worked closely together as part of the kindergarten team. Emily was a second year teacher during the study. Emily explained, “Last year was my first year teaching, so I didn’t feel like I quite got a handle on differentiation.”

Emily’s goal for goal group work was “to use my assessments to form differentiated groups and then find appropriate teaching strategies for those groups.” Emily wrote in her reflection from the first meeting, “I want my students to be excited about learning.... with the results of students meeting and mastering the standards. I want my instruction to reflect the needs of my students.”

Eric, Fifth Grade Teacher, Student Engagement. Eric came to teaching after several years of working in the business sector. He was unhappy in his work and wanted to do something more fulfilling. Eric revealed “I joined Nuway County as an interventionist, just to get a feel for the classroom.” Eric completed an alternative certification program, while employed as an academic interventionist. Eric moved to

Edge Elementary School while he was still an interventionist and was hired as a classroom teacher when he completed his certification program.

Eric was a second year teacher, during the study. When talking about his goals for the 2013-2014 school year, he said “My vision was to have a hopping classroom where everyone is excited to learn.” He wanted to learn how to better engage students in the classroom by creating a sense of fun and play into the day-to-day activities. Eric also wanted to create opportunities for students to see the connection between what they were learning and how that learning connects to real world experiences.

Rachel, Special Education Teacher, Classroom Community. Rachel is an elementary special education teacher at Edge Elementary School. Rachel stated, “This is my fifth year as a full time teacher. I did long term subbing for four years before that.” Rachel began substitute teaching in another school district not far from the Nuway School District. She decided to become a full-time teacher and was hired as a special education teacher in that same district while on a provisional certificate. Rachel moved to Edge Elementary School when she received certification as an elementary special education teacher.

Rachel has had many challenges at Edge Elementary School. She is extremely impulsive which causes her to interrupt meetings by talking out and has been known to speak harshly to adults and children. Rachel was aware of the behavior and has taken many steps to work on these issues. Her self-awareness and kindness often mitigates her colleague’s feelings of frustration, but not completely. Rachel wanted desperately to connect with her colleagues, students, and their families.

As a special education teacher, Rachel often worked with some of the most behaviorally challenging students in the school. Her impulsive and controlling behavior could often escalate situations with students, even where there might not have even been an issue. Her goal was to work on improving her engagement and interactions with students.

Focus Group Participants

Chloe, Fourth Grade Teacher, Differentiation 3-5. Chloe has always wanted to be an elementary school teacher. When she was a little girl she would play school with her dolls. Chloe entered college planning to become an elementary school teacher and received a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Teaching. When Chloe entered the field, she had certain expectations for teaching that did not match the demands of the work. She has considered leaving teaching several times in her career.

Chloe is in her second year as a fourth grade teacher after teaching second grade for 17 years at Edge Elementary School. Chloe's goal for goal group work was "to focus my instruction on differentiated instruction for engagement." Chloe explained, "I want to get at each child the way that they best learn. I want to have lots of different ways to learn like songs or games or projects."

Halle, Kindergarten Teachers, Assessment. Halle came to teaching after a short career in marketing and after staying home with her three sons for a couple of years. She received her initial certification while completing her Masters of Art in Teaching in Early Childhood Education. Since then, Halle also completed an Educational Specialist in curriculum and instruction. She has been teaching kindergarten at Edge Elementary School for all seven years of her teaching career.

During the 2012-2013 school year, Halle implemented the use of rubrics she created collaboratively with the students in her writing instruction. She saw great improvement in student writing through the use of these rubrics. Students were able to score their own writing in relationship to the rubric, communicate next steps for their writing, and carry out the revisions in a way they never had been before. Halle wanted to move this strategy into other areas of her instruction.

Halle set a goal to implement collaboratively created rubrics in her math instruction. In her IPLP, Halle wrote, “I plan to use rubrics for my CGI (cognitively guided instruction) notebooks as well as math journals.” Halle wanted her students to have “a better understanding of what is expected of them” and for her to “have a better understanding of exactly what my students know and what they need to know.” Halle’s work on her goals would include planning lessons in which students would “develop a rubric to use for their CGI notebooks, grade themselves on several activities, and make appropriate changes to their work.”

Lisa, English Language and Literacy Teacher, Student Engagement. Lisa is the one ESOL teachers at Edge Elementary School and has held that position for the last five years. Lisa received a Bachelor of Science and a Masters of Art in Teaching in Elementary Childhood Education and holds additional certifications in ESOL, math, and reading. Lisa has spent all five years at Edge Elementary School as the ESOL teacher.

Lisa set her goal in response to a recommendation from the previous principal. In her observations from the previous school year, she was encouraged to work on engaging students in her small group lessons. She seemed to have taken the suggestion and made it her own. Lisa wrote in her first reflection, “I plan to learn about student engagement

techniques, add to my lesson plans, try them out, and reflect on how it increased or did not increase my students' engagement.” She wanted students to be more involved in their learning, so they would remember more of the lesson and know how to apply that knowledge.

Madge, First Grade Teacher, Differentiation K-2. Madge held a BA in marketing and worked in marketing for a few years. Like Eric, she was unsatisfied with her work in marketing. She returned to school and completed a Masters of Art in Teaching in Early Childhood Education. Madge has taught for seven years, all of which have been at Edge Elementary School as a first grade teacher. Madge works closely with her grade level team, which includes Beth. The first grade team spends many hours planning together.

Madge wanted to work on differentiation during the 2013-2014 school year. She wanted to use strategies based on assessment data that would reach all kids in math, writing, and reading. Her team had worked on implementing differentiation in reading for students who were performing below grade level. Madge wanted to work with her team to begin more consistently providing differentiation in all subjects. In her first reflection, she wrote, “I want to better meet the needs of all of my students. I hope all students will meet or exceed standards.”

Nina, Fifth Grade Teacher, Technology. Nina earned a Registered Nursing Degree from Richmond Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in 1979. Even as a nurse. Nina had teaching experience. She taught a class in nursing school, delivered staff development in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, and provided classes to expectant

parents. Nina left nursing when she had her first child and home schooled her children for many years, until her oldest child was in middle school.

Nina's first teaching experience was at a local Christian school while she was working on a second undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Education. Nina moved to public school because she felt called to serve kids who had a hard time and were economically disadvantaged. Nina was a fifth grade teacher at Edge Elementary School where she had been teaching for seven years.

Nina works tirelessly as a teacher. She is one of the first to arrive and last to leave Edge Elementary School each day. When educators observe in Nina's classroom, they are in awe of her skill and expertise. Nina works consistently to improve her practice and sees herself as "self-reflective." Nina's goal was to implement the use of technology in her classroom. Nina shared, "I picked technology because it is the weakest part of my teaching."

Findings – Teachers Define Goal Setting

"Something to strive for, something to give me direction, and something to work on." (Rachel)

It is important to establish the participants' view of "goal." In the first interview, participants were asked directly "What do you think about when you hear the word goal in relationship to your work as a teacher?" Eric and Emily both gave text book definition of goals as something to be set, worked on, and accomplished. Eric referred to reaching a goal as "hitting a target, a set target." And Emily stated a goal is "something I want to get done by the end of the year." However, Alex, Beth, and Rachel talked about goal setting as part of becoming a better teacher for students, imagining where they "want to be

professionally” and taking steps to make the imagining a reality. Through their eyes, goals are steps that can be taken in the effort to reach an ideal. Throughout the data, teachers revealed multiple ways to consider goals: (a) reflecting on practice, (b) self-selecting, (c) planning to take action, (d) prioritizing, (e) continuing to learn, (f) evolving work, and (g) affecting all areas of teaching.

Reflecting on Practice

“Being self-aware and reflecting on where we need to improve our teaching.” Lisa

Goal setting requires reflection. Goals are based on prior experience, knowledge, and feedback. Beth expressed it this way “I think about what I need to work on to become a better teacher and be most effective for the students in my classroom.” Nina shared that she considers herself to be self-reflective and stated, “I know what I’m good at and what I’m not good at.” Nina’s reflection on her teaching led her to set a goal that would address her self-identified need. She needed to engage her students in the use of technology as a tool to further learning.

Eric was an early career teacher, who struggled with classroom management and student engagement. Eric shared “Coming in as a new teacher, there are so many goals I could have chosen, but the most important for me right now is just keeping students engaged every single day, its tough.” Eric’s reflection on his previous classroom experience led him to choose to work on increasing student engagement.

The need for reflection is directly connected to identifying and setting a goal. In the following section, the findings show that teachers select goals that are products of reflecting on the needs of their students, on their own performance in relationship to the teacher evaluation standards, on performance evaluations, and on their own experiences.

Self-Selecting Goals

“It is really important to me to be able to choose my own goal.” Nina

One of the objectives of goal group professional learning is to honor teachers’ ability and need to self-select areas for professional growth. Teacher evaluation at Edge Elementary School included goal setting. Teachers drew from the set of standards used in the system-wide teacher evaluation plan to determine goals for the school year that were related to their classroom practice. The data revealed that teachers decided on goals in a variety of ways.

All participants indicated that they made the decision on what their goal would be and which goal group would be the best fit for them. However, teachers expressed differently how they decided on their goal. Chloe chose her goal with her new group of students in mind. Chloe shared that her goal was “half mine and half for the kids.” Chloe talked about her own school experience, and how she was often bored in school when she shared, “I know how I learned and didn’t learn.” Chloe acknowledged the importance of engaging students in learning and meeting students where they are. Madge conveyed similar thinking “because what I learn and what I do as the teacher, makes learning easier for them (students).” One way teachers decided on goals was to consider what their students needed to be successful.

Lisa decided on a goal that was based, in part, on her end of year evaluation with the principal of Edge Elementary School. Lisa shared that in her evaluation conference she and the principal discussed several areas for improvement. In setting her goal, Lisa considered which of the areas might have the most significant impact on her teaching overall. She shared “it was a blend of what outsiders were observing as a growth area and

what I saw as a need, too. In the end, I chose it.” It seemed important to Lisa to make this point.

Halle chose her goal by reflecting on her planning, teaching, and assessment in relationship to the standards used for teacher evaluation. She explained:

So the district wants us to do this and this and this. I would look and see. What do I think I need to work on to meet what the district wants me to do? And that is how I picked my goal.

Nina shared similar thinking. Nina knew the district was moving forward with a one-to-one technology initiative for students, but at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year, Nina would not have self-identified as being technologically literate. She confided “I know I picked technology because I feel like it is the weakest part of my teaching.” Nina went on to say “I picked it (technology) because I want to stay fresh and current, like Chloe said earlier.” Both Halle and Nina measured their instructional practices against the evaluation standards to set their goals.

Alex selected her goal because in her many years of experience in education, she knew that connecting with students and their families was the most important thing she could do to establish a productive learning environment. Alex did not use the standards or get feedback from any administrator. She made plain the importance her goal to her when stating “I knew that if I could pick just one thing to do that would make the biggest difference, it would be connecting with students and families.” Alex reflected on her experience in schools as a way to determine her goal.

Regardless of how teachers come to decide on goals, it is clearly important to teachers that they are able to make the final decision about their goals. Jan shared “I’m pretty self-reflective. I know what I’m good at and what I’m not good at. It was important

to me to choose my own goal. And how to learn more to help me get better at it.” Lisa voiced an alternative perspective in stating “If you were all mandated to learn the same thing, if that’s an area of strength for you, you are going to be bored. “ Madge went on to say, “I do think we are stronger in our commitment to our goals if we pick them. Giving us the choice makes it more positive and more motivating.”

Planning to Take Action

“This is about doing something for students,” Emily

During the first weeks of school, teachers completed an IPLP (see Appendix A). This plan included two goals. Teachers wrote a goal statement, strategies for improvement, and measurements of success. In writing these statements, strategies, and measurements, teachers used language that held a strong sense of ownership and personal responsibility. The table presented below highlights the personal action required by the teacher through examining the verbs used in writing the IPLP’s.

Table 4.2

Action Oriented Language of Goal Statements

Participant	Goal Statement	Strategies
Alex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ want to create ✓ support the learning of all my students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ work with students ✓ devise a mission statement ✓ implement ✓ do the hard work
Beth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ assess student learning ✓ plan differentiated work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ do math check-ins ✓ utilize data ✓ assess students
Emily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ want to be able to successfully use results from assessments ✓ want to differentiate instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ use my assessment data ✓ drive my instruction ✓ create small groups ✓ differentiate instruction
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ consistently plan ✓ improve student achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ help students develop ✓ break down assignments

Participant	Goal Statement	Strategies
	✓ structure a learning environment	✓ engage students in learning
Rachel	✓ foster relationships ✓ maintain a calm demeanor ✓ model behavior	✓ show the progress ✓ make learning more productive ✓ video tape my instruction
Halle	✓ develop and implement ✓ cooperation and input from students ✓ provide constructive and useful feedback	✓ develop rubric collaboratively ✓ utilize rubrics ✓ provide feedback
Chloe	No record of IPLP	
Lisa	✓ make sure I use instructional strategies that keep all students engaged ✓ maximize the amount of learning time ✓ engage students in learning	✓ increase student engagement ✓ utilize different strategies ✓ reflect on the strategies ✓ examine assessment data
Nina	✓ utilize technology ✓ enable students ✓ provide avenues to extend learning ✓ use technology to track student progress	✓ creative use of technology ✓ develop web quests ✓ strengthen math fluency ✓ utilize Google Docs ✓ encourage students ✓ become more proficient
Madge	✓ use assessments to drive instruction	✓ Attend a workshop ✓ Engage in professional learning ✓ Participate in grade level meetings ✓ Discuss strategies and plans

The teachers used language in developing goals and action plans that exemplified action. Words such as develop, strengthen, engage, utilize, and structure are all indicative of intended action. Teachers' use of language suggests they will take action to work toward set goals.

Prioritizing

Setting goals can also be a way to establish priorities, a way to help teachers focus on one aspect of teaching to improve teaching practice. Chloe stated in the focus group

that goal setting helped her become a better teacher by concentrating her improvement efforts on differentiation, but she noted that it had an impact on every area of instruction. Chloe explained how she thinks about goal setting when she said “I’m going to think about this goal, and then I’m going to do these things for the goal, so I can help myself become a better teacher.” Halle, another focus group participant, immediately followed Chloe with “it helped us stay more focused in this one area.” Lisa shared that setting a goal and connecting that goal to professional learning makes one “mindful of what you’re doing with your teaching.”

In each goal group meeting, the groups of teachers were asked to share what they planned to accomplish before the next meeting. Each group recorded work that would be done either by the whole group or by the individual members. Whether or not this work was consistently completed in a timely manner in each group and for each meeting is difficult to determine. However, in 16 specific instances, work planned in one meeting was reported as “complete” in the group notes of the subsequent meeting. Beth summed it up when she said “We set our own small goals in each meeting. It helped us remember that it’s important, and it needs our attention.”

Continuing to Learn

In the focus group, Chloe mentioned the importance of staying current on teaching practices. Staying current in the field was connected to goals for teachers, because being required to set goals as part of evaluation creates potential for learning. Madge explained, “Some people get stuck in a rut and use the same things over and over. Setting a goal forces them to make changes in their teaching.” When teachers select a goal and have to work toward attaining that goal “it exposes them to new things whether

they want it or not,” commented Madge. The focus group participants talked about “other” teachers being “stuck in a rut” or needing to be exposed to “new things whether they want it or not.”

Rachel framed setting goals as a preventative for “becoming dull. It keeps you from becoming burned out and mundane.” The focus group participants shared their own perspectives of goal setting from a more positive position. Eric said it this way, “I’ve learned that –first of all, you never stop learning. I learned from myself that –I always have a certain curiosity about things. So the more I get into something, the more I want to know.” Beth stated, “It is important to continually challenge yourself and work towards making your teaching practice better because it helps the students.” When teachers experience success with their goals they feel a sense of accomplishment. Nina expressed:

I value the challenge of trying to learn something new that’s going to benefit my students. It makes me feel good when I can do something new that I haven’t done before, and then they (students) really respond, and they really like it, and they really learn from the experience.

The focus group participants all agreed with Nina when she shared this thought. Setting goals is about setting an intention for learning and implementing to improve teaching both for the teacher and for the students. The teacher and the students experience a sense of accomplishment when students learn.

Evolving

It was in the January goal group meeting where teams and teachers began to evaluate where they were in relationship to goal attainment, and they used this as an opportunity to adjust their goals. The January minutes reflect the thinking of a teacher in the technology group, who wrote “this is a work in progress, much harder than we thought it would be” in the group notes. The members of this goal group were trying to

integrate technology into their instruction that would engage students in asking questions and in solving problems related to their grade level content. Not only did teachers in the technology group have to know the content, but they also had to learn about software, select the most appropriate platform for what they wanted to accomplish, learn how to use, and finally develop the content for students. The learning curve for the members of this group was steep.

Chloe was in the differentiation goal group for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers. She was really struggling with implementation. During the focus group, Chloe stated:

When I started, I was like, “Okay, I’m going to do this.” But like I said, it was hard for me to—I still want to be able to do, like, “Okay, we’re doing this,” and everybody else is doing the same thing but different, and I really haven’t mastered that at all. (long pause) It’s hard. Next year I know I’m going to work on this again. I got A, B, and C; next year, and I’m going to do D, E, and F. So that [is] constant evolution.

It was clear that Chloe was frustrated. Her pattern of speech changed and she was struggling to put words together to talk about how she was not where she thought she should be in her goal work. During the long pause right before Chloe said, “It’s hard” everyone in the group was quiet where usually they had been quick to jump into the conversation.

In the April meeting, teachers participated in an activity called “Connect-Extend-Challenge” (Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011). In this work, teachers were asked to identify an aspect of working on their goal that was still a challenge in an effort to get ideas from teachers not in their same group. All of the teachers in goal groups were able to identify an aspect of their goal that was still a challenge. Teachers began their responses to the question “What is still challenging or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings, or puzzles do you have now?”

- “The biggest challenge I have now...”
- “It is challenging to have...”
- “It is challenging to manage...”
- “How can I put more...”
- “What to do with students who...”
- “My biggest challenge is...”
- “I can’t seem to...”
- “How do I reach those students who...”
- “Still need ideas for...”

In the focus group, Chloe brought out this idea of goals and the work on goals evolving over time. Madge agreed with her, sharing:

And I think it just teaches us, like you don’t really have a goal, and then you’re like, “Okay, I met that goal,” and you check it off. Because the goals that I worked on last year, one of them I chose again, just because I didn’t really feel like I achieved it. So I chose it again.

Halle supported that statement with “You don’t reach perfection. You’re always just making your teaching better and better and better.” Nina provided an example from her work on implementing technology, “I really did use technology a lot this year, so it makes me encouraged to want to try it again next year and do even more.” The focus group closed this part of the discussion when Chloe said, “It gives you insight into areas that you need to keep working on or further develop. We just have to keep going.”

Affecting all Areas of Instruction

The work teachers propose in their IPLP’s could potentially affect every dimension of a teacher’s work. Teachers engage in an instructional cycle where they interpret curriculum, plan instruction, deliver the instruction, administer assessments, and interpret the results to plan further instruction. If the action words identified from goal statements (see Table 4.3) are placed within the instructional cycle, the intended actions could alter teachers’ work in all areas of curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

Table 4.3

Potential Impact of Goals on Instructional Planning

Curriculum	Instruction	Assessment
devise	support	utilize
plan	implement	drive
make	assess	differentiate
create	show	engage
break down	develop	reflect
develop	differentiate	improve
differentiate	help	
engage	engage	
provide	video	
foster	model	
structure	show	
	support	

The meaning that goal setting has for the participants is multifaceted. Teachers expressed how goals help them to reflect on their practice and to set goals for improvement. For teachers, self-selecting the goal was important to their investment in the work of goal attainment. When teachers create a plan to work on goals, the written plan shows they intend to take action. Goal setting is also a way to prioritize and highlight the importance of the set goal. Teachers shared their need to continue to learn as a way to benefit both themselves and their students. The work on goals is ever evolving as new challenges emerge. Working on set goals could potentially affect all areas of instruction.

Finding – Goal Groups Promote Collaboration Among Colleagues

Collaboration is the idea that people come together to achieve some task or goal. In her first interview, Alex described collaboration by telling about a collaborative work

experience in a previous setting. Alex elaborated: “I’m learning. I’m thinking about my situation. I’m sharing my thinking with peers. We talk. And then I think how does this apply to me and what shift can I make that will make everything better?” Teachers need opportunities to discuss, debate, observe, and share practices. The more teachers talk about their practice the better teachers they become (McGreal, 1983).

How do teachers describe collaboration in goal groups? The importance of logistics in effective collaborative work is presented. Teachers considered how to divide up research or reading or appropriately participate during meetings. Teachers in the study valued the accountability of working in goal groups. Teachers discussed the importance of working on a similar topic in goal groups. Teachers identified conversation as the essential element of collaboration. All the participants shared something about the importance of conversation, seemingly surprised that they are “just talking.”

Goal group meetings provided opportunities for teacher to work with teachers in other grade levels. Working in cross grade teams afforded a richer learning experience. Only a few teachers identified a benefit of goal groups as specifically receiving feedback, rather teachers identified the conversation in goal groups as a sharing of different perspectives. A seventh element of collaboration is the sharing of expertise. Teachers felt that if someone in the group had tried something that worked, they needed to share that something with the group. Finally, through goal group work teachers increase their teacher networks within the school.

Logistics

Figuring out the logistics of collaboration is very important to create an effectively working group. Teachers identified multiple ways group logistics were

identified and sorted out. The goal groups met once each month between October 2013 and May 2014. Alex expressed her opinion about the number of goal group meetings by saying, “if we were meeting much more often or had much higher requirements, I think it would be too much.” Each of the meetings were scheduled at the beginning of the year, highly structured, and held to consistent norms.

Teachers expressed that each of the meetings had a clear purpose and agenda. The professional learning series took the teachers from developing the goal, to learning and implementing strategies, to refining the leaning, and to deciding how to communicate the learning to others. “It [the agenda] varies kind of from meeting to meeting, depending on where we are in the year and what we need to be doing on our goal,” noted Rachel. When teachers made a plan to do work outside of the meetings, this work was recording in a Google doc table where all the teachers in the groups could see their efforts. Rachel said about her group, “when we make assignments in our group, people do it. And they come prepared to share. There is record of it and everyone will know what they are supposed to do.”

The classroom community goal group decided to read *Teaching Children to Care* (Charney, 2002) as a foundational text. At the first meeting, the group examined the table of contents and each teacher selected a section of the book related to their interest to read and to summarize for the group. Table 4.4 presents the reading assignment decisions made by the members of the group. Alex recounted, “because we were a group, I could pick the part of the book that I felt was most relevant to me. And that’s all I read. But I’ve heard about all of it.” Teachers in groups were sharing the work. Rachel said, “And so that’s nice because you feel like no one person is pulling all the weight.”

Table 4.4

Excerpt from group notes on November 11, 2013

Question from the group notes chart.	Response made by the Classroom Community goal group.
What will you bring to the next meeting to share?	<i>Teaching Children to Care</i> by Ruth Sidney Charney Section 1- 1 CC Section 2- Alex Section 3- 2 CC Section 4 - Rachel Section 5 – 3 CC

Beth described the importance of the meeting structure using the analogy of a classroom lesson plan. Beth explained in a well planned lesson the teacher has every second planned, and the students know what to expect and how to do what they are asked. Beth stated, “We feel like we are not wasting anytime in there [goal group meeting]. We know exactly what to do.” Within the meetings, it was important to teachers that there were structures in place to do the work and that everyone in the group would participate. Beth said, “We are good at taking turns and usually everyone has input, because we know there is a time for each of us to talk.”

The teachers shared about the individual awareness necessary for working in a group. One teacher felt like she needed to talk more, another wanted to talk less, and one confessed she worked at being prepared for the meeting. Alex revealed that in her personal work in her group:

I feel like I’ve tried to show support to everyone kind of equally, like I’ve tried to show sincere interest in what they’re doing, to remember what got said before, to follow-up with more discussion or questions or interests. But I’ve worked very hard not to dominate the group.

Teachers expressed an awareness of their natural behaviors in a group setting and how they need to compensate to be more effective member in their goal group. For example, Emily confessed, “I’m a little chatty and sometimes I get off topic. So, I really tried to stay focused on the work.” And Lisa admitted to not always being prepared for meetings. However for goal group meetings, Lisa “made the effort to prepare, because I knew I was going to have to share.”

For teachers, understanding the logistics of how to work with other teachers in goal groups was important to foster effective collaboration. The number of meetings needed to be just enough to help teachers maintain forward movement of their goal work. The agenda for each meeting needed to be clear. It was helpful to teachers to recognize and address their own struggles when working in collaborative groups. When logistical issues were addressed, teachers found the work in goal groups more effective for collaboration.

Accountability

“There was a level of accountability that puts just enough pressure on you to get it done.” (Alex)

The participants disclosed struggles with feeling overwhelmed with work, procrastination, and the need for accountability. Beth remembered:

My first year, we didn’t have goal groups when I was teaching. I had an idea of what I wanted to do, but I was kind of on my own and didn’t really know what I was doing. And kind of let it slide for a long time until it was the end of the year and we had to present on what we did. And so I think the goal groups helped me stay accountable towards actually working towards that goal.

Alex, the most experienced teacher in the group, clarified the demands of teaching through this simile:

Working in an elementary school is like living in a blender. As soon as you get to work, it's like full tilt. There is no warm up. There is no I need 20 minutes to get my head on. There's no pause. There just isn't.

These passages articulate the incredible demands on teacher's time and the need for accountability for working toward goals, but don't specifically state what it is about goal groups that help teachers maintain focus on the goal.

Every one of the participants revealed feeling pressure to stay on top of all they are required to do. Rachel shared "There are so many other pressing things, that the goal can really be put on the back burner until close to the time it is due." There were several structures inherent in goal group professional learning that provided opportunities for teachers to experience a high level of accountability. The meetings were mandatory and scheduled at monthly intervals. The tasks at each meeting changed over time to help move teachers through the process of goal attainment. Within the goal group meeting, the collaborative work was set-up in an attempt to require participation from all members of each group. Goal group notes provided a public record of intended and accomplished work.

Teachers were required to participate in goal group professional learning as part of the professional learning plan at Edge Elementary School. Beth pointed out "Well, there are meetings. Everyone has to go. It's not optional." Halle stated, "It is important to have that specific time set aside to work on our goals." Rachel clarified "The goal group schedule causes you to get on a schedule and stay on a schedule. You have to have that monthly contact." Alex suggested, "it's just the right amount of gentle pressure to prod you." The "gentle pressure" of meeting with peers monthly to work on goals supported teachers' forward movement toward goal attainment.

At each meeting, teachers were engaged in work that reflected where they might be in the process of working on goals or preparing for their final evaluation. Alex stated:

The work we do changes from meeting to meeting as we get closer to our evaluation. There are deadlines associated with the work, and then I know I have to do it. There is a level of accountability that puts just enough pressure on you to get it done.

Beth explained “It makes sense to stay on schedule because the work prepares you for your annual evaluations.”

Within each meeting, teachers were assigned tasks to ensure both individual and group accountability for participation. Protocols were used to increase individual participation of members. Lisa disclosed “knowing that you were going to have to speak in the group makes you do the work, versus if you’re trying to do it by yourself.” On-line platforms, such as Padlet were also used to publicly share learning within and across goal groups. Teachers had to participate in the work of goal groups, because if they did not participate, it would be evident to their colleagues. Beth stated:

Then whatever is set up for us to do in there (goal group) revolves around everyone having conversations or writing about, ‘What have you done? What are you going to do?’ We all know what each of us are doing or not doing.

The thinking and learning related to teachers’ goal attainment becomes public through the work in goal group professional learning.

Each group had a column in a Google Doc to record the work plan for each group.

At each meeting, the groups of teachers responded to the following questions:

- What is the focus for the group?
- What do you plan to do between now and the next meeting?
- What supports will you need?
- What will you bring to the next meeting?
- Who are the members of your group?

Nina clarified “at each meeting we would say ‘At the next meeting, I’m going to have this achieved.’ So we would set little goals and that helped keep me focused.” Likewise, Beth shared, “I think it keeps me accountable for designing and implementing plans that reflect the goals that I’m working on.” Madge stated, “And it’s good at the end of the year, when you’re going to your evaluation, because you are prepared.”

Alex summed up the importance of accountability “Even if it’s (goal groups) just reduced to accountability, I think that’s big. Because it makes you keep your goal in the forefront of your head the entire year, which is what you’re supposed to be doing.”

Teachers attributed their sense of accountability to the regularity of goal group meetings, the agendas supporting goal work, and their work on goals made public.

Value of Working on the Same Goal

The data revealed that teachers valued the opportunity to work in goal groups with other teachers who share the same learning goal. When teachers work in their grade level teams, teachers often bring different strengths and needs to the group. What each teacher in a grade level team might be learning or working on could be very different from their teammates. Alex said:

People (on your grade level team) are working on different things in their own teaching and their own classroom and what you want, they don’t have the energy to give you. Like I’m all about relationships and I don’t know what Eric’s doing, but I think Nina is technology. And I’ve just let that go. That’s not as important to me. We use a little technology here and there, but I just can’t do it all, so I’m not doing that now. So it’s nice to have a place where the thing that’s basically important to me that’s driving me, some aspect of that is driving other people.

Goal groups provided a space where teachers can work together around their particular interests or needs. Emily shared, “I like that I know that other people have a common goal and they’re working towards the same thing I am.”

Alex further articulated this idea, “Well, I think it’s interesting to have community. I’m building relationships with my peers who share a common goal. I’ve never had an opportunity to do that before.” Teachers in grade level teams worked toward students achieving the grade level curriculum. What seems to differentiate grade level team goals from a goal group goal is that teachers are selecting the topic of the work in which they are engaged. The participants were decision makers.

All the teachers at Edge Elementary School participate in goal groups, even the most veteran teachers. Emily, Eric, and Beth, the least experienced teachers in the participant pool, all expressed their relief in knowing that even veteran teachers have things they want to work on. Emily shared, “I can see that I am not the only person struggling with differentiation or trying to figure out how in the world do I fix or work with this or make this happen.” Eric voiced “some of the teachers, even experienced teachers are having some of the same concerns I am.”

Teachers recognized the differences between a grade level team and a goal group. The opportunity to share in the learning around a goal was valued by participants. Alex stated “it was one of the few ways I had to connect with my peers, professionally, over a topic we had chosen, that was our own choice, so we bought into that.” Teachers also experienced a sense affirmation in the realization that other teachers were working on similar issues. The common goals fostered a sense of belonging that extended beyond grade level teams.

Conversation

“Really – it’s all just been a lot of conversation.” (Emily)

It was surprising and humorous to the focus group participants to admit that collaboration all came down to talking. The second question asked to the focus group was “How did you learn what you learned?” All the participants answered almost in unison, “talking/conversation/discussion” followed by laughter. Nina followed the laughter with “I know it sounds silly, but it’s in the conversation.” In Emily’s interview, she shared in a surprised tone “I mean, we just really – it’s all just been a lot of conversation and talking about how we can reach some of these children.” Despite how surprising and humorous it seemed to the participants, the work is in the talking.

The collaboration that happens in goal groups hinges on teachers’ discussion through speech and writing. Eric shared “it’s when we sit down and talk, it’s a lot of excitement.” In the observation notes from the November 2013 meeting, there is a description that contrasts the teachers entering the professional learning room and the beginning of the meeting:

The teachers seem exhausted; usually there is conversation before meetings. The room is quiet as teachers wait for the meeting to begin. Three teachers even have their heads on the table. (After the meeting has begun.) Would never know this was the same group of people from before. As I look around the room, every teacher is either talking or looking at the person who is talking. There is animated discussion in the room.

The contrast was remarkable between the quiet of waiting and the conversation in the meeting.

The discussions in goal groups were important to the participants because the conversation afforded the opportunity to offer and receive feedback, to see a variety of perspectives, to clarify thinking, and to solidify their own expertise. Emily explained in

her first interview, “if you have people to talk it out with, you can start to see the problems or the benefits.” In the second interview, Emily further elaborated, “It (participating in goal groups) gives you an opportunity to talk to teachers you would never get a chance to talk to. It makes those conversations happen.”

Creates Connections

“I think anything that helps people connect professionally is good and I think it’s good to get outside your team.” (Alex)

Teachers often express feelings of isolation. At Edge Elementary School, teachers had been working in grade level collaborative teams for two or three years before beginning work in goal groups. Teachers were spending the majority of their planning time in grade level team meetings. When Eric shared what he valued about goal groups, Eric stated, “it (goal groups) gets you outside of your grade level and it gives you a chance to talk to teachers outside of your grade.” Goal group professional learning gave teachers the opportunity to work closely with teachers in different grade levels on a common goal.

Alex was new to Edge Elementary School during the year of the study. She described getting to know the teachers in her goal group like this:

Well, I didn’t know most of them by name at that first meeting. And I met some people at the retreat and kind of got their names down, but then we came to work, and I’m just not around anybody over here. I’ve lost a lot of names because I don’t interact with teachers outside my team. I don’t pass their door every morning to get to my door. But I feel like I know all these people [in the goal group] pretty well. These are people I would know nothing about. So it’s nice to know their names and what grade they teach and what they value or what they’re working on and get a little sense of their personality by how they interact in the group.

Alex was able to get to know teachers outside of her grade team more quickly and discovered more about what was happening instructionally at Edge Elementary School.

Eric shared how his experience in goal groups during the previous school year connected him to other teachers who offered support to him in his first year of teaching:

I think that Cassie (a teacher at Edge Elementary School) coming in new a couple of years before I did, she kind of understood some of the struggles I was having as a new teacher. And I think having someone to kind of talk to about my experiences and then say, “Eric, it’s going to be okay, hang in there. We’ve all been there.” I think that meant a lot. It’s just having someone just to support you and know that they’re on your side. I wouldn’t have had any interaction with her, if we hadn’t met in our goal group that year.

Goal groups help new teachers connect more quickly to teachers in other grade levels, but it also helps teachers who have been in the school for years connect with teachers they may only see in monthly faculty meetings.

Emily explained she liked “being able to see what teachers in other grades do that I wouldn’t have any idea about.” Madge conveyed, “It’s more than just sharing resources. You learn things from other grade levels that you normally wouldn’t get to see or talk about.” Beth described an example of learning from teachers in other grade levels:

I like working with, getting to talk with the other teachers about what they do in their classrooms because I’m working with my grade all day every day, and I know how we work, but I don’t really know how other teams in the school work and how they plan their blocks. And it makes us think about how we could incorporate more activities into our planning. So it’s interesting to hear, I mean, all I know is first grade for three years.

Through the goal group meetings, teachers were having conversations about classroom practices and instruction with teachers outside their grade level teams.

Even teachers who co-teach may never have the opportunity to talk about their practice and the instructional decisions they are making. Rachel, a special education teacher, spends much of her day collaborating in other teachers’ classrooms. She revealed

an interesting perspective on what collaborating teachers may or may not know about each other's practice:

The fourth grade teacher and the second grade teacher [in my goal group], I have worked in their classrooms before, both of them. But still, there were things that they shared that I didn't know. You don't know why they're doing what they're doing unless you sit down have a goal group kind of discussion where you can see, oh, that's why you're doing this differently and this is what you're aiming for by doing that.

The purposeful act of creating cross grade groups of teachers based on goals lead to teachers feeling less isolated and more connected to their fellow teachers. Connecting teachers across the school provides opportunities for teachers to provide feedback to each other, offer other perspectives, share instructional strategies, generate new ideas for classroom practice, and find support from teachers outside grade level teams.

Feedback from Peers

Eric and Rachel were they only two participants that used the word “feedback” to describe the conversation that was happening in goal groups. Eric shared that he learned from other teachers in his group through the feedback they offered in goal group meetings. Eric offered:

That's what makes it work because you're able to give feedback, good or bad. And you're able to go back and make those changes or maybe adjust it a little bit. But yes, it is feedback, which that's what makes the goal group work. I don't think – and I say this, there's no pride in authorship in there. We're all able to go in and make suggestions.

Eric later described a meeting where he took his lesson plan for an opening activity he planned to increase students' engagement in the lesson. He described the feedback he received from the teachers in his group and planned to make the changes in the lesson. The interaction Eric described as feedback was highly valued by Eric.

Rachel also believed the feedback she received from the members of her goal group was important to her growth. She expressed that feedback from peers is easier to hear than feedback from a supervisor. Rachel said, “It’s easier to me to take that constructive criticism from peers than it is from your supervisors, just because it feels more equal.” Rachel suggested that when peers offer feedback to each other, it feels less judgmental and more like refinement or building on an existing idea.

The notion of feedback appeared in the focus group transcript when Lisa reflected on an experience in her goal group. Lisa shared “And the validation of sharing what I was doing, and then if they thought that was a good idea, or had an additional suggestion, or such.” The feedback she received from her goal group peers is implied. Lisa felt validated when she received feedback that supported her plans. She also received “additional suggestions” from the members of her group to refine her ideas. Feedback surfaced for these three participants, where other participants were more likely to describe the conversations as sharing or seeing alternative perspectives.

Alternative Perspectives

Goal group conversations led to interactions where teachers were sharing their perspectives on their work. In most of the goal groups, teachers were in a group with none or only one of their grade level teammates. The one exception was the K-2 differentiation group. The entire first grade team was together in this group. The diversity of teachers from different grades enables teachers to engage with others not on their team and seemed to allow more freedom in the conversation because members of goal groups are not a part of the day-to-day lives of teacher grade level teams.

Alex explained how goal groups provide some anonymity. Alex said, “It’s nice to go where I don’t really care if they know I’m good or not. I haven’t been in their classrooms to speak, they don’t see me next door, they don’t see me at my most harried and my most beautiful.” The novel context of goal groups gets teachers out of their day-to-day patterns of planning. Alex went on to share, “Maybe that makes you feel a little more anonymous, and maybe that means you might actually be more honest.” Teachers may feel more freedom to freely speak their opinions in a setting where there is less at stake, which opens possibilities for greater innovation.

Eric explained the importance of hearing a variety of perspectives from the members of his goal group. Eric stated, “So it’s good to have the different mixture of teachers because you get a different perspective on how things work.” In Eric’s group, when teachers share, they share everything –things they tried and worked and things they tried that didn’t work. Eric confided, “And maybe I had an idea that didn’t work in my class, but another teacher may say, yeah, let me try that. And it’s perfect. So that’s one of the great parts about having that mixture.” At any given time, teachers’ needs could be quite different. What works with one class or one student may not work with another. It is important to teachers to have poly-options for addressing classroom issues. Rachel further explained:

We all just have a different way of looking at things. I feel like that’s one of the advantages of collaboration because two are better than one because you get the perspective of more than one person, especially when you have small group. You have the perspective of four or five people, and you can take the best of the best.

Teachers want to collect knowledge and strategies that work to address issues that arise in their classrooms.

Even Madge who was in a group with her entire grade level team expressed the importance of cross grade grouping for goal groups. During the focus group as they were laughing about learning as “talking,” Madge followed immediately with “especially across grade levels. It was good to hear what other teams are doing. To hear about teaching from another point of view only makes my teaching better.”

Sharing Expertise

Sharing expertise can foster change in both the person who shares and the person who receives what is shared. For the teacher sharing expertise, explaining an approach to solving a problem and the reasoning behind the decisions helps solidify the sharers thinking. Sharing may also cause the sharer to reconsider or to make shifts to the approach and the reasoning behind the choices. The listener learns from hearing about the experiences and the reasoning of the sharer. Alex explained:

It's been interesting when we've had discussions because I feel like we can help each other out. As an example, because I know how to set up procedures and routines, I feel fine with that. But there's a teacher (Rachel) in there (goal group) that must struggle with that. And so I'm giving her some ideas. She's doing those things to try to improve.

Alex and Rachel are in the same goal group. Alex had 22 years of experience; she had command of classroom management. Alex offered Rachel her expertise in classroom management and Rachel accepted this expertise. In Rachel's first interview, she identified Alex as a “teacher who has a lot more experience than I have and is really good at classroom management.” Rachel went on to say “I'm getting ideas from a fifth grade teacher (Alex) about classroom management, that I go back to my class and do. She has really great ideas.”

Beth and Emily present another example of expertise shared within goal groups. Beth shared “Part of the goal group is assisting, since kindergarten needs help with their writing differentiation, sharing what I do for my writing differentiation with them is one of the ways I’m helping the people in my group.” Beth illustrated the experience with Emily sharing this antidote:

I was working with one of the kindergarten teachers who was struggling with her writing block and how to help her students. I was able to help her think of some strategies and support her that way by explaining how my writing block goes and how the students go through the writing process. I was able to pull groups of students based on where students are and work with them. And that was something she hadn't done before, and so she thought that was very interesting. And she's going to come observe me on how it works in my classroom. So I felt like I was able to support her in her desire to differentiate in her writing block.

Emily revealed this experience from her perspective:

One of our last meetings we were talking about differentiation and writing. And I was talking to one of the first grade teachers (Beth) about one of my higher kids and she told me how they’ve helped them edit and how they teach kids to add variety to their sentences and things like that. She sees groups in writing. I don’t do that. I’m going to go see her do that. And that’s something I wanted to work on this year, too, not just differentiating for lower kids, but how to help reach those higher kids, too.

Beth and Emily identified sharing expertise as a benefit to learning how to address instructional dilemmas. Beth explained how she supported Emily in learning new strategies and structures. Emily confirmed Beth’s assertion in sharing a similar account of the same conversation.

In the second round of interviews, Beth reflected on the experience of sharing expertise with Emily. Beth detailed her work in this way:

Well, working on writing workshop and sharing -- at first, I went back to my class and worked with those small groups to see if I could kind of work out any kinks. And then I thought about presenting that to Emily and the goal group. I shared with both about how the students responded to differentiated writing instruction.

And then working with the other teachers to see which of their students could benefit from differentiated writing.

In Beth's reflection, she identified making shifts in working with small groups in writing by working "out any kinks." Beth would also have to reflect on her practice and the choices she was making about small group instruction when sharing her expertise with Emily and later the goal group.

Develops Teacher Networks

"I wouldn't have had any interaction with her, if we hadn't met in our goal group that year." (Eric)

Helping teachers connect with each other can further develop a positive school culture. Teacher networks are created through all of the ways teachers formally and informally interact. At Edge Elementary School, formal interactions are planned through grade level collaborative planning sessions, goal group meetings, and other school meeting structures. Teachers also find support outside of formal opportunities in informal interactions such as in the hall on the way to lunch, passing by a classroom after school, or on bus duty. The participants in the study were asked to describe professional relationships that began by participating in goal groups.

Each of the interview participants described relationships with goal group members during meetings. Alex, Beth, Eric, and Emily additionally reported building professional relationships with teachers from their goal groups that began to extend beyond goal group meetings. Each of these four teachers developed additional teacher networks with colleagues through their participation in goal groups.

Alex and Chloe were both in the Classroom Community goal group. During the regular school day as they would pass each other at the Cafeteria door, they would make small talk. Chloe began to ask Alex how things were going in fifth grade. Toward the end of the year, Alex shared with Chloe that she had talked to a sixth grade teacher at the middle school about how to get students ready for middle school. Chloe and Alex began to talk about what Alex learned from the sixth grade teacher. Chloe asked Alex what the fourth grade teachers could do to prepare students for fifth grade. The two teachers began to make plans for the next school year based on their discussions about middle school readiness.

Beth developed a relationship with Cassie, another teacher at Edge Elementary School, through goal group work. They were not in the same goal group, but Beth wanted to see a working example of differentiation in math. Beth asked the instructional coach whom she might observe. The instructional coach recommended Cassie. Beth went to observe Cassie during her math instruction. Beth and Cassie followed up the observation with a conversation about what Beth saw during math instruction. The two teachers continued to get together to discuss instructional dilemmas. Beth shared “at first I went to Cassie to see math differentiation, but now we talk about all kinds of school stuff.”

Eric also identified Cassie as a teacher he met through goal groups that he probably would not have gotten to know any other way. He valued her support and understanding through his first year of teaching. Eric indicated that Cassie “is someone I still go to for advice.”

Emily was a new teacher during the 2012-2013 school year. In her first year of teaching, she participated in goal groups at Edge Elementary School. Emily acknowledged:

I didn't really know anybody when we started goal groups last year, and now those teachers, I can go talk to or I have a good relationship with. They are on completely different grade levels, but it's still nice to have conversation about students and how things are going.

Emily identified Eric from her goal group during the previous school year with whom she continued to have a relationship. Emily described their relationship as "I can just say hey, do you know how this works or do you know how to find this or it's not always about goals anymore."

Rachel related all that she learned from the members of her goal group, especially Alex. But Rachel was the only teacher who was not able to share a story about developing teacher networks that would extend beyond goal groups. Perhaps this is connected to her difficulties with interactions among peers, generally.

Clearly, the teachers at Edge Elementary School have the support of their colleagues not only in their grade level team, but also across the school. The school environment is conducive to collegially interactions among peers.

Findings – Individual Work

Teachers completed most of their goal work outside the goal group meetings. Alex shared "I think had my only learning been in the group that would not have been enough. But I like to learn on my own and think." Throughout the participant's reflections on learning, they would all agree that there was also much learning and work outside the actual group meetings.

Teachers had to write the IPLP's, complete reading assignments, implement new strategies, plan additional elements of lessons related to goal work, and maintain documentation of work completed toward goal attainment. Teachers also referenced other learning situations in which they participated such as workshops and graduate level course work.

Independent Learning

One of the main sources of new information for goal group participants was professional literature related to the goal. The technology group would be the only exception to that statement. Alex explained how she began reading about her goal before it was her formal goal in her IPLP:

This summer, my previous school, I was buddies with the media teacher. And so I checked out all kind of books for the summer and scanned them here and scanned them there and read summaries. They were mostly things I'd read before, but it had been a long time, so a lot of the responsive classroom stuff.

Alex was getting ready to return to the classroom after being an instructional coach. Alex wanted to refresh her knowledge of creating strong classroom community. Eric also shared, "I read books. There were a couple of books that my instructional coach gave me. Actually, I'm incorporating some of the strategies from those books right now into my classroom."

Teacher also used online resources from both professional organizations and sites that assembled materials created by other teachers. Beth stated, "I have been looking online for other differentiation resources and leveled activities to do, teachers pay teachers or different websites like those." Eric "did a lot of research online looking at schools that were exciting." Eric researched and read about the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta. Chloe searched "online. "Okay this is what we are studying, what can I find

songs, activities, to help them learn this.” Eric and Chloe wanted to increase student engagement even though their goal orientation toward engagement was different. Each of the participants identified online resources they used to learn about teaching strategies related to each goal.

Other Group Settings for Learning

Several of the participants enrolled in other formal learning opportunities such as graduate school courses, local or national conferences, or courses at the local Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA). Beth was working on her ESOL endorsement and taking classes in graduate school. In one of her ESOL classes, students read *Affirming Diversity* (Nieto, S., 1992). Beth stated, “In addition to the ESOL course, I had a class over the summer, Organization and Management for Early Childhood Education. In both, we talked a lot about learning about your students and using their funds of knowledge.” This tied into both of the goals Beth set during the 2013-2014 school year—classroom community and differentiation.

Three of the teachers in the technology goal group participated in a Google apps for Education summit over one weekend in January. Their participation sparked much learning and sharing in the February meeting. In the observation from February 17, 2014, it was noted that the technology group stayed in the professional learning room long after the meeting. The three teachers who attended were sharing learning from the summit, because there had not been enough time within the meeting for the teachers to share.

Emily completed a yearlong course at the local Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) on math differentiation. Emily shared, “I decided to a training class, and that’s really helped with differentiation, too. I’ve learned some math assessments for

counting and what that tells me and then what to do.” She clarified that other members of her kindergarten teaching team participated in the course on differentiation. Three out of the four kindergarten teachers complete the course at RESA. The learning experiences teacher have outside of goal groups are important to individual learning that occurs.

Findings - Impact on Teaching

In each of the interviews and the focus group, the following question was posed to participants. “How likely were you to implement something learned in the context of goal groups in your classroom?”

Not very likely 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Very likely

The transcript from the focus group read:

All: Five.

Chloe: Yeah, it was likely.

Lisa: Very likely

Halle: Yeah, I implemented everything that we talked about.

All of the interview participants also responded with a five, except for Alex who stated, “I think a 4 or 5 on most things.” Later in Alex’s second interview, she clarified, “I definitely think that working on the goal that I worked on, individually and in goal groups, impacted the way that I taught and the amount of learning that happened.”

Teachers implemented learning from goal groups in their teaching. Teachers would try ideas and strategies learned in the context of goal groups in classrooms, which teachers then reported as having an impact on students.

Change in Classroom Practice

Eric was a member of the student engagement goal group. Eric described very specific lessons and activities he tried based on learning from his participation in goal groups such as activating strategies and connecting learning to student’s experiences. Eric

“used role play to teach economics, popular music to talk about monopolies, and Air Jordan’s to talk about supply and demand.” Emily voiced the impact more generally, “I learned how to build a better schedule to differentiate, how to look at assessments and group students, and how to plan small group instruction.”

Alex expressed the importance of her goal (connecting with students and their families) to shifts in her practice, because it was the “foundation” for everything else that happened in the classroom. She articulated “Well, I think setting a goal had everything to do with my teaching. I think because of the type of goal that I chose—I chose a very fundamental piece that you lay all your teaching on top of.” Alex explained how she worked on her own and in her group to learn ways to support student success through clear expectations, caring, and respect. In the classroom, Alex established clear routines and expectations, made contact with each student’s family, and connected with students personally. She made plain, “Any success we had academically came because I sat it on top of the relationship piece.”

Beth’s goal was differentiation, particularly in math instruction and for students who were performing above grade level benchmarks in reading. In Beth’s math block, she wanted to support students who were struggling to master grade level content and extend learning for students who quickly grasped new concepts. In goal groups, teachers shared and discussed ways to organize the classroom space and learning for students to achieve differentiated goals for students. Some of the teachers in the differentiation K-2 group made arrangements to observe teachers in third grade at Edge Elementary who were already providing differentiation during math. Beth described how the work influenced her teaching:

It's had me planning more for students based on formative assessment. When we are doing a lesson in math and I see 'this student has it or this student doesn't,' I have a plan of what to do. It has helped me come up with multiple ways of talking about the same topic.

Beth went on to share how differentiation for her math lessons was clearly in her lesson plans for all students. Beth also shared a story about implementing differentiation in reading.

During the previous school year, Beth worked diligently on providing differentiation in reading for students who were below the benchmark in reading and felt she neglected the students who were achieving at higher levels of reading. Beth confessed, "I looked at data a lot last year, but never actually thought about how to work with the students who were excelling in reading." During the year of the study, Beth had students who were achieving above the benchmark in reading. Beth began to plan and to implement work for the identified students. After a few weeks, Beth invited the teachers on her team to send high achieving students in other first grade classes to her group. Students across the grade began to benefit from Beth's learning, planning, and teaching.

Teachers also shared about the impact of working in goal groups during one of the meetings. In the February 17, 2014 goal group meeting, teachers were asked to respond to the prompt, "Before I started working on my goal, I used to... but now I..." and post the response to a padlet. Table 4.5 presents responses from two different teachers in each of the six goal groups. The "I used to... but now I" statements provide examples of how teachers describe ways working in goal group had an impact on their teaching practice.

Table 4.5

February 17, 2015 Goal Group Meeting Responses to: I used to...but now I

Goal Group	Response 1	Response 2
Assessment	Before I started working on my goal, I used to be confused as to how to translate teacher/student created rubrics from just ELA to other content areas.	Before I started working on my goal, I didn't realize the value of student-created rubrics and how they empower students and make them more self-efficacious.
Classroom Community	Before I started working on my goal, I used to become frustrated with students who had a hard time with following classroom routines, but now I realize it was because of how I was directing them. I have learned that I need to be more direct with my directions.	I used to give commands to students and give consequences for non-compliance. Now, I am working on trying to be more aware of what my students might be feeling. I am also helping them learn new behaviors instead of just punishing.
Differentiation K-2	I used to use centers as busy work. Now I use differentiated centers to help students with letter naming or letter sounds or sight words or reading.	I used to assess students and not really used the data to target student need. Now I am able to assess students and know exactly what to teach them.
Differentiation 3-5	I used to give similar work to all students and differentiate on the fly. Now, I plan in advance for differentiation and vary the tasks or supports based on students' need.	I used to have all the students working on the same independent and small group work. Now I create different assignments for students depending on their assessment data.
Student Engagement	Before I started working on my goal, I did more teacher-centered instruction. Now, I engage students more through student-centered activities and frequent checks for understanding.	Before I started working on my goal, I used to go through material more quickly without checking for understanding. Now, I break down the tasks and check-in more frequently as well as giving them more talk time about the material.
Technology	I used to feel frustrated with students trying to use technology and would limit what I would let them do. Now it is one of my first choices for instructional planning.	I used to think using technology meant show my lessons on the smart board. Now, my students are completely engaged in technology on their own devices both collaboratively and individually. They have really taken charge of their learning.

Not only were teachers implementing learning from goal groups about goals, but they were also implementing learning from their experiences as learners in goal groups. Teachers were learning about the importance of choice in learning. Because teachers were able to choose a goal and a goal group and then make decisions about how to best go about the learning and the implementation, teachers were beginning to allow students to have more choice in the classroom. Beth shared, “Next year I’m going to start off letting groups choose their book. Once kids started to have a choice, engagement went way up.”

In goal groups, teachers participated in protocols to share and respond within the group. Teachers would return to the classroom and use the sharing protocols with students in the classroom. Rachel explained, “Collaboration was good in groups because we learned not only about the goal, but we also learned a new way to share that we could use in the classroom.” Rachel went on to share that she used some of the sharing protocols and Connect-Explore-Challenge with her students.

Change in Expectations for Students

Another interesting finding that surfaced was that teachers reported how their expectations for students were changing. Teachers began to expect more from students. Nina was working to implement a more student-oriented use of technology in her classroom. She wanted kids to use their devices for research and problem solving. As she began to make changes to her instruction, she noticed she had to make changes in what she expected from her students. Nina share, “Kids really enjoyed their learning, and they were able to construct their own knowledge, rather than me having to just tell them or

whatever. So, I had to trust them to do the learning and I think that they did a very good job.”

Halle set a goal to develop rubrics with her kindergarten students that the students could then use to assess their own work in working and recording problem solving in math. Initially, Halle was worried that kindergarteners would be too young to do what she was asking. She shared “coming up with the rubric with the kids for their word problems was a little difficult in the beginning, because they’re really little kids, and having them think about, ‘What does she want on this paper?’” Once Halle talked the kids through some work samples and had the students talk about the different samples, the differences in quality and clarity of explanations among the samples became clearer to the kids. Once they developed the rubric, the kids learned how to use it. Halle explained “I really didn’t have to talk about the criteria anymore, because the kids were like, ‘It has this, this, this. Okay, it’s three stars.’ So in the beginning it was hard, but as time went on, it became a lot easier.”

Teachers were making changes to their practice, by learning and trying new ways to engage students. Once teachers made these shifts in their practice, students were going to have to respond in some way. In these example provided, teachers made shifts and taught students the new expectations. When Halle and Nina raised their expectations of students, the level of student engagement and the quality of student work increased. The students in Halle and Nina’s classes were given more responsibility for their learning.

Impact on Student Learning

When teachers raise expectations for students, there is often an increase in student performance. Nina watched her students become proficient at using online tools to do

research. Nina shared “Kids liked using the computer, by providing them with more opportunities to work online; they were much more excited about doing their work than they would have been if we’d used another method.”

Chloe, who was differentiating instruction based on presenting new information in multiple modalities, shared how her changes in instructional delivery caused students to request particular learning activities. Chloe reflected that her students would make requests “Ooh, can we listen to that today,” or “Could we do that activity again?” Chloe beamed, “They enjoyed it, so it made my job easier and more fun.” Chloe shared that the students would sing songs they learned in class about particular content when taking the end of year state test. Chloe stated, “You could hear them whisper sing to themselves, to remember what they learned.”

Teachers also reported improved classroom behavior and gains in student achievement. Beth explained that one of her highly achieving students was often getting into trouble in the classroom. He was trying to talk to other students or play during the lesson. Beth shared that “he needed the extension. When I started to plan differentiated work to extend his learning, the disruptive behaviors went way down.” Alex revealed that developing relationships with her students changed their willingness to put forth effort even though they continued to struggle academically.

Emily indicated that she knew that her efforts at differentiation had an impact on student learning. She stated, “I can see where students that were way below the benchmark in reading are now close to grade level and kids that were kind of below are meeting now. I see improvement in the scores.” Emily attributes her students’ achievement in reading and writing to her implementation of differentiation. Nina also

shared how implementing technology improved engagement that led to improved scores on teacher made assessments. Nina integrated technology into science and social studies lessons. Students were able to examine primary sources, go on virtual field trips, and participate in virtual science experiments. Nina self- reported that the integration of technology into her instruction improved students' knowledge of content learning.

Finding - Barriers to Goal Attainment

Another finding included the identification of barriers to goal attainment and to work in goal groups. Teachers referenced time as a barrier to goal attainment and completing work related to goals and goal groups.

Time...if we all just had more of it. Teachers conveyed lack of time as the single greatest barrier to accomplishing anything. Rachel said, "It just feels like we're always under time constraints." Goal groups – "Well, it means a lot of meetings," vented Emily. Beth acknowledged, "that maybe it's time in general for anybody's goals, just planning the time to do it." She went on to say:

I think a lot of teachers feel like it's one more thing to do, even though it's something they want to accomplish, it's just work, or extra work, and you already feel like you're doing a million different things. So I think that's a barrier for teachers is taking the time to actually devote each week or each day to your goal.

Alex framed the issue of time and being overwhelmed by all that has to be done:

I think that we are in a job where everything is urgent, but everything is not important. And so you get distracted and it all has to be done and it all matters, but it's not all equal. And so I think that's a huge distraction, trying to figure out day in and day out, okay, I'm going to go to work, and I'm going to be busy the entire time I'm there, and everything is pretty important. So the most important thing I should do today is what?

Teachers know that if any particular part of their work is going to take priority over another, a time must be established for the identified work to get done. Otherwise it will continue to get pushed “to the back burner”.

Planning Became More Difficult

The trouble with learning something new and incorporating new ideas into one’s teaching practice is that it takes time, more time to learn, more time to locate new materials, more time to plan a new lesson, and more time to plan effective assessment. The participants expressed some frustration with how difficult planning became when trying to implement their goal. Madge explained, “differentiation for me made it harder in the planning stages. So, I guess at the beginning it’s kind of harder, because you have to follow through with it (differentiation) for each different learner.” Lisa shared a similar struggle while “planning with engagement in mind, I was thinking of how can I present this to motivate kids to stay focused in what we’re doing. So, it was more in prepping for the lesson that took so much time.” Chloe confessed “the planning was difficult.” Nina explained:

Even with technology, if you’re going to research websites or make a WebQuest or something, that takes a lot of prep work to get all that done and, then get it in a format that the kid can use, and tell them exactly where to look, and plan some way to know learning has happened.

Teachers clearly expressed frustration about the amount of planning that was necessary to make changes to instruction.

Attitude

The attitudes of the participants can affect a group’s dynamics and make the group more or less effective. Eric shared that attitude could be a barrier to someone’s ability to achieve a goal, but he was speaking hypothetically, not from a specific example

from goal groups. There were four teachers that gave specific examples from their experience in goal groups where a person's attitudes negatively affected the group.

Emily and Beth were in the same goal group. They both talked about how the attitude of individuals in the group can get in the way of a productive meeting. Emily confessed that sometimes in her group "I'm just sitting there like 'okay, we've gotten this part finished, now what'? I think our group needs a little more motivation sometimes to get more done." About this same group Emily shared, "I think some people weren't focused some of the times. That would be the only part that was inhibiting." Emily and Beth shared a common perspective on barriers they encountered in their group work.

Rachel and Alex were in the same group, but share very different perspectives on ways in which attitude interfered with their group's work. Rachel shared "Just a particular person didn't do all of their reading before they came, and you could tell they were kind of just skimming before they presented. And just, they just kind of have a negative attitude towards it." Alex did not disclose anything about a teacher being unprepared for a meeting. Alex did share a very different perspective about one of the group's member:

There's one person in this group that has great social challenge. She's rude. And she has no idea that she's rude, so you can get mad at her, but that's really not going to do you any good. And you could talk to her about it, but it's not going to change. And so I feel like she's very well intentioned and she's actually like seen me in the building and been very friendly in her own way and shown a lot of interest in me. And I've tried to reciprocate with that, and it's just interesting, it's just a great dilemma. I've known somebody in almost every school I've ever been in who fits in that category. But she is – she takes the wind out of our group sometimes because she's so task oriented and she interrupts, and that's just the way she is.

Alex went on to say that the group works around her by ignoring the interrupting behaviors and just trying to move the conversation forward. While this teacher is a

momentary barrier to the work of the group, she has never shut down the group or made it impossible to continue.

According to teachers, goal group professional learning affected Edge Elementary School in multiple and overlapping ways including teacher reflection, school culture, teacher efficacy, teacher learning and practice, and student performance. Chapter 5 illuminates the themes derived from the findings presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a form of job-embedded professional learning. This study examined teachers' perspectives of their participation in goal groups, an emerging professional development process at Edge Elementary School. The teachers at Edge Elementary School developed annual goals at the beginning of the year as part of the teacher evaluation system within the Nuway School District. The goals determined teacher placement in the topic-based learning groups called goal groups.

The guiding questions of the study were:

1. How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals?
2. How does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice?

In the previous chapter, findings were presented by themes across data sets. This presentation structure provided a collective view of data around emerging themes where similarities and differences of teachers' perspectives could be brought to light. This process relied heavily on teachers' words to describe their experiences in goal group activities.

In Chapter 4, the findings were explicated from five different data sets: (1) interviews with teachers; (2) a focus group; (3) participant observations; (4) field notes; and (5) artifacts from goal groups. In all, 25 distinct findings were uncovered across the data sets. Table 5.1 presents all of the findings grouped by research question.

Table 5.1

Findings Organized by Research Questions

Research Questions	Findings
How do teachers perceive goal setting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal setting as an opportunity for reflection • Determining self-selected goal is important to teachers • Setting a goal implies action • Goal setting as a means to prioritize • Setting goals prompts continual learning • Set goals evolve over time • Goals can affect all areas of teaching
1. How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals?	<p>Collaborative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting logistics must be addressed for productive work • Creates individual accountability • Value in working on goals with others • Conversation precedes learning • Connects teachers across grades • Peers provide nonjudgmental feedback • Affords alternative perspectives • Teachers share expertise • Develops teacher networks beyond goal groups <p>Individual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent work is essential to the collaborative process • Individuals participated in other group learning experiences <p>Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time is perceived as a barrier to continued learning • Planning becomes more difficult when implementing new learning • Teachers experience anxiety when implementing new learning • Groups members attitudes can impede collaborative work

Research Questions	Findings
2. How does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes classroom practice • Changes teachers' expectations for students • Perceived impact on student learning • Changes teachers beliefs about teaching

This chapter draws connections from these findings presented in Chapter 4 and presents the results of cross analysis, which reveal themes that emerged throughout the findings. The chapter is organized by exploring five main themes as grouped around the two research questions. The themes explored in this chapter are:

1. Teachers value the collaborative process of goal groups while they encountered barriers related to time, increased difficulty in planning, and frustrations with group members.
2. The continued development of teacher relationships and networks connected to professional practice creates positive shifts in school culture.
3. The synergy between individual and collaborative work propels learning forward at the individual and group levels.
4. Goal group professional learning supports coherence among evaluation, goal setting, and professional learning.
5. Teachers not only made lasting changes in their teaching practice but they also made changes in their beliefs about teaching.

Themes

Theme 1: Teachers value the collaborative process of goal groups while they encountered barriers related to time, increased difficulty in planning, and frustration with group members.

The first research questions asked how do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals? After examining the findings, (Table 5.1) the first theme was identified. The following section offers an amplification of the findings leading to the development of this theme.

Teachers identified several barriers to working in goal groups –time, increased difficulty in planning, and the attitudes of some participants. Despite these barriers teachers found value in goal group professional learning. Nina shared, “I guess maybe all of us are saying the learning and planning is time consuming and hard, but I think the fruit that comes from it, it’s very worthwhile.” Finding the time to work on goals, implement new learning and plan for instruction related to goals, and reflect on the experiences between goal group meetings while maintaining all other teaching responsibilities was challenging to teachers.

The planning that is involved in implementing new strategies is more demanding than renewing previously taught or canned lessons. When discussing planning, teachers often identified having to search for new materials or additional activities. Teachers also needed the support of a more fully developed lesson plan, when learning a new instructional strategy, with components of the lesson written out. When Eric developed lesson plans to teach a unit on supply and demand using Air Jordan athletic shoes as an example, he had to find the idea, build and extend the existing unit to meet his needs, develop and score assessment pieces, and reflect on the effectiveness of the lessons. This level of planning is hours of work beyond what Eric would have done to teach this economics concept the way he used to teach supply and demand.

Emily, Beth, Alex, and Rachel each identified experiences in goal groups where individual participants could interfere with group work. In their two groups, a teacher might not be prepared for the meeting, begin to have personal conversations during the meeting, or interrupt the conversation. These examples of barriers during meetings were

recognized as problematic, but were barriers that only created a temporary digression to the forward movement of a goal group meeting.

Each of the findings related to goal setting, collaboration, individual work, and impact on teaching illustrate the value of goal group professional learning to teachers. Goal setting as part of goal groups allows teachers to reflect on their current practice and self-select goals to improve their teaching practice. Teachers believed it was important to engage in reflection and be able to make their own decision about their professional learning needs. Teachers communicated that they experienced greater attachment and commitment to the professional learning. Most importantly, teachers valued the increased accountability, conversations about teaching, developing relationships with teachers beyond their grade level team, and the impact the work had on their teaching. Figure 5.1 illustrates how the value teachers found in goal group professional learning outweighed the barriers.

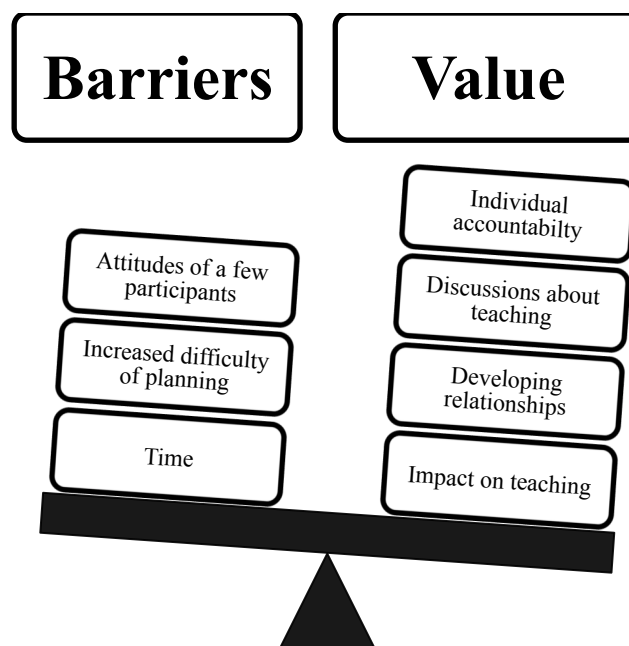


Figure 5.1. Benefits Outweighed the Barriers

The right side of figure 5.1 highlights what teachers valued most about goal group professional learning. The accountability teachers experienced while participating in goal groups was highly valued by teachers. Collaboration afforded teachers the opportunity to engage in discussions about teaching and develop relationships with teachers outside their grade level. Teachers recognized the impact of participating in goal group professional learning on their classroom instruction.

Teachers expressed a strong sense of accountability from working in goal groups. Alex shared, “Even if it’s (goal groups) just reduced to accountability, I think that’s big.” The consistency of meetings and pressure of working with peers contributed to the feelings of accountability and subsequent sense of accomplishment.

Collaboration is a critical element of goal group professional learning. For teachers, the conversations in goal groups helped teachers make shifts in instruction. These learning conversations were not contrived, but rather directly connected to the individual teacher’s desire to improve. Goal groups gave teachers the opportunity to give feedback to each other in a non-evaluative manner. Teachers also clarified how they felt when developing relationships with other teachers. These additional relationships offered support for the new learning teachers were experiencing. Halle explained, “Our group is diverse in grade levels and teaching responsibility and this will lend itself to a wide range of experiences and thoughts.”

Teachers valued how their participation in goal groups had an impact on classroom instruction and student learning. Halle shared, “I believe that any time spent sharing with colleagues is progress toward professional growth.” Teacher expressed time

as a barrier, but recognized the value of investing time into research and planning as a benefit to themselves and students.

Theme 2: The continued development of teacher relationships and networks connected to professional practice creates positive shifts in school culture.

The second research question asked how does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice? After examining the findings, (Table 5.1) this theme was identified. The following section offers an amplification of the findings leading to the development of this theme.

The development of teacher relationships and networks connected to building collective capacity for instruction creates positive shifts in school culture. There is a cycle of influence among the key players within a school: individual teachers, groups of teachers, students, and the administrative team. In this cycle, the individual teacher is improving as well as the group of teachers this in turn influences student learning and is supported by the administrative team.

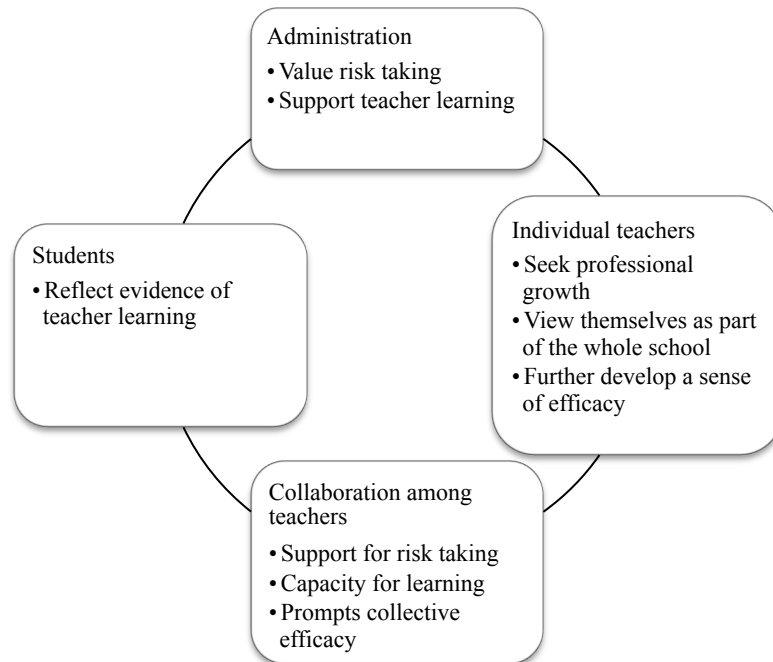


Figure 5.2. Cycle of Influence on Positive School Culture Related to Goal Groups

Figure 5.2 illustrates the role of each entity in the cycle of improving school culture in relationship to goal group professional learning. Individual teachers recognized that being a professional requires continued work on developing practice. Participants articulated a desire to continually improve their teaching practice to be both more engaged in teaching and effective for their students. Eric explained, “I’ve learned that – you never stop learning. So, I see myself growing as well as my students in this process.” Beth shared, “I think about what I need to be working on in order to become a better teacher and be most effective for the students in my classroom.” This idea of teachers as learners is further articulated in the support teachers at Edge Elementary School give each other through collaboration.

When goal group professional learning began at Edge Elementary School not all of the teachers were excited about the work. Chloe shared that in the beginning, “I was like ‘Oh, man, I don’t want to do this. Ugh!’” Throughout the year Chloe’s opinion of

goal group professional learning changed to, “It’s beneficial to everyone that’s involved.” Even though Chloe did not want to participate in the beginning the benefit she found in the collaborative process changed her opinion.

Theme one identified elements of collaboration valued by teachers: the intrinsic motivation that comes from accountability to the group, the increased focus and learning that comes from discussions about pedagogy, and the nonjudgmental support of working with peers to solve problems. When professionals work together to improve practice both the individual and group improve. Halle explained, “we are all doing one thing together” and Lisa shared, “we’re sharing what we’ve figured out and whether it worked out or not.”

As teachers developed competence and confidence with new strategies, it was reflected in what was happening in the classroom. Teachers reported changes in classroom practice and improved student learning. An unexpected finding was the changes teachers had in their expectations for students. Just as teachers were taking on more responsibility for their own learning, so were students. Teachers were receiving authentic feedback from students on the effectiveness of the implementation of new strategies.

Another important piece of the positive school culture cycle is the support of the administrative team. Administrators and the instructional coach needed to communicate the value of risk taking and support teachers as learners. The administrative team at Edge Elementary School supported the collaborative work of goal groups. Alex spoke of the administrative support in this way, “I feel like our administrative team is very kind and that goes as long way with me. And I feel like they would be very supportive of anybody

who said I really want to work on this.” Teachers felt like they could do their job because they had the resources and help they needed. The administrative team allowed teachers freedom to take risks and try new strategies in the classroom. Eric explained “We have the ability to make mistakes without being criticized.”

All of the teacher participants acknowledged the need to feel supported in risk taking— trying new ways of communicating with students, implementing new ways to use technology, exploring ways to group and plan instruction for differentiation. All of this work requires teachers to step out of their comfort zone and live with some anxiety. When teachers are learning a new skill or changing their beliefs about how learning happens, it takes time to gain a sense of mastery. Alex said, “So I feel like there is support for people who are learning, and I feel like there is forgiveness and realistic expectation that goes with that.”

The increased collaboration shaped and reshaped the culture of Edge Elementary School. Lisa shared, “So if you’re in an environment that’s more open and willing to grow, that makes for a more positive experience as a whole, and sharing what we’ve figured out makes us a stronger school.”

Theme 3: The intersection between individual and collaborative work propels learning forward at the individual and group levels.

The first research question asked how do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals? After examining the findings (Table 5.1), the second theme was identified. The following section offers an amplification of the findings leading to the development of this theme.

Teachers engaged in individual and collaborative learning activities while participating in goal groups. Individual learning is defined in this discussion as work teachers did outside of working with goal group members on goals. Teachers worked individually in multiple ways researching on-line, reading professional materials, observing other teachers, and participating in other group learning experiences such as conferences, workshops, and graduate coursework. This individual work prepared teachers to share independent work in their goal groups. Alex explained, “I think had my only learning been in the group that would not have been enough. I like to learn on my own and think.”

Teachers implemented new learning in classrooms independently from their group members. The frequency of meetings allowed teachers to experiment in the classroom and with their grade level teams between meetings. Teachers engaged in reflection of the experimentation and reported back to the group. Teachers also found that they often need to locate additional resources to teach in new ways. This was work they were doing on their own or with their teams in planning for instruction.

The collaborative processes of goal groups are the activities that happened when teachers worked together either in the formal setting of goal group meetings or in informal work teachers did together outside of meetings. Teachers reported multiple benefits from working collaboratively in goal groups as discussed in the previous section. Goal groups provided a space where teachers could work together around their goal that addressed teacher interests or needs. Teachers experienced a heightened sense of accountability from working on individual goals in a group. The discussions in goal groups were important to the participants because the conversation afforded the

opportunity to offer and receive feedback, hear a variety of perspectives, clarify thinking, and solidify and share their own expertise.

Goal group professional learning gave teachers a reason to work closely with teachers in different grade levels on a common goal. Alex stated, “I think anything that helps people connect professionally is good and I think it’s good to get outside your (grade level) team.” Teachers were meaningfully connecting with teachers they may only see in a faculty meeting where teachers did not have much interaction.

The individual and collaborative experiences of teachers ran in cycles of individual and collaborative work, which created synergy. Figure 5.3 illustrates the relationship between individual and collaborative experiences in goal groups and the synergy that was created.

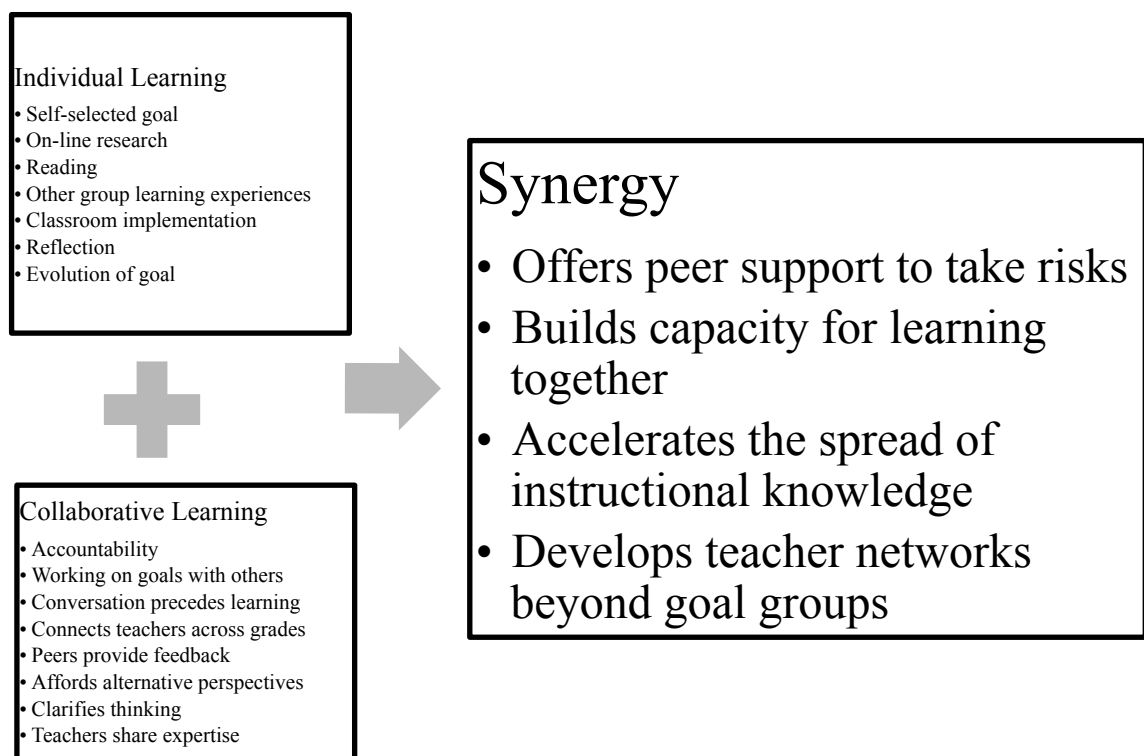


Figure 5.3. Individual + Collaborative = Synergy

Figure 5.3 illustrates the synergy generated by the individual and collaborative work of teachers in goal group professional learning. The synergic outcomes related to goal groups offered teachers peer support to take risks, built capacity for learning, accelerated the spread of instructional knowledge, and developed teacher networks beyond goal groups.

Changing classroom practices causes teachers to enter a state of disequilibrium, where they may not have the competencies and confidence to implement change on their own. The increased sense of risk inherent in new learning produces varying levels of anxiety in teachers. The peer support offered through collaborative work allowed teachers to develop new ways of addressing issues in classrooms and the some sense of safety in struggling through the implementation. Teachers expressed feelings of connection and comfort in knowing that other teachers were struggling with similar issues.

Through the processes practiced in goal group meetings teachers built capacity to learn together. The capacity to learn includes identifying issues, generating potential solutions, and persevering to solve the problem. The support found in working together on goals allowed teachers to bring real issues from their classrooms to their goal group. Working together teachers generated ideas to solve these issues. Exposure to multiple perspectives developed openness to new ideas. Teachers revealed the need to be “open to ideas presented.” Beth explained, “Goal groups provided me with a group of people as resources to help me develop new ideas.” The mindset for teachers became a “just try it” way of thinking. If the problem remained unsolved in the first attempts the group would be there to help figure out what to do next.

Teachers think of goal groups as one of the places where they work together to support each other. Rachel used the metaphor of iron sharpens iron to describe how she thinks about working in goal groups. Amplifying this idea, Rachel shared, “I think of iron sharpens iron, one person sharpens another. I feel like that’s where I go to get sharpened. That’s where I’m going to get improved, literally. This is my time to work on being more effective.” This sentiment expresses a strong sense of support and interdependence among the teachers at Edge Elementary School.

The cross grade structure of goal group professional learning accelerated the spread of instructional knowledge. Teachers participated in a cycle of working with their goal group on their goal and returning to their grade level team. As teachers learned new ideas and strategies, they would talk to their grade level teams and begin to implement the learning into lesson plans for the grade level. And within grade level teams, teachers were learning from the members of their grade level team then returning to share with their goal group.

Examples of goal group learning that extended beyond just one group’s participants were present in the data. Teachers gave examples of strategies they acquired in goal groups that were written into grade level plans. Teachers at that grade level, who were not necessarily in that group, were implementing the new strategy. Halle, who was in the assessment group, planned lessons for the Kindergarten team to implement the development of math rubrics with students. Halle was the only kindergarten teacher in the assessment group, but all of the kindergarten teachers benefitted from her learning and planning.

Teacher expertise at the grade level also supported learning within goal groups. An example of sharing was when a third grade teacher invited Beth, a first teacher, to observe math workshop. Another example of expertise at the grade level supporting goal work was in the differentiation goal group. A kindergarten teacher was working on improving differentiation in writing. A first grade teacher in her group was already proficient in this area of differentiation, as the first grade team had work on this the year before. The first grade teacher supported the kindergarten teacher in implementing differentiation into her writing instruction.

Teacher networks are created through all of the ways teachers formally and informally interact. At Edge Elementary School, one of the ways formal interactions between teachers are planned is through goal group meetings. The interview participants in the study were asked to describe professional relationships that began by participating in goal groups. Alex, Beth, Eric, and Emily reported building professional relationships with teachers from their goal groups that began to extend beyond goal group meetings. Each of these four teachers developed additional teacher networks with colleagues through their participation in goal groups. Facilitating meaningful interactions connects teachers with each other and can further develop a positive school culture.

The intersection between individual and collaborative work propels learning forward at the individual and group levels. Teachers believed they had the support of their group, could learn and implement new ways of teaching and connecting with students, share the learning across the school, and develop more and more teacher supports. Eric sums up the feeling this synergy created in him:

I think when I meet with my goal group; it's like rejuvenation. It's like a source of energy because so many great ideas come from different teachers. And I think that

it helps reenergize me. “How about I try this, how about I implement that, or how about I have my students to do this?” I leave knowing I can.

Eric’s sentiment expresses the support he feels from his group and the sense of efficacy these interactions give him.

Theme 4: Goal group professional learning supports coherence among evaluation, goal setting, and professional learning.

The second research question asked how does participating in goal groups influence teachers’ knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice? After examining the findings (Table 5.1), this theme was identified. The following section offers an amplification of the findings leading to the development of this theme.

Coherence is defined by how well expectations for teachers, their professional learning activities, and teacher’s own goals for themselves and their students align. The teacher evaluation system implemented at Edge Elementary School is predicated on a growth model. The teacher is at the center of evaluation framed as the learner in an effort to improve instructional practices. At the beginning of the year, the teacher meets with the administrator. The teacher reflects on past performance and selects an area in which they would like to grow or strengthen their teaching practice.

Teachers drew from the set of standards used in the system-wide teacher evaluation system to determine goals for the school year that were related to their classroom practice. Halle explained, “The district wants us to be able to do this, this, and this. So, I would look and see, okay, so what do I feel like I need to work on to meet what the district want me to do?” The data revealed that teachers decided on goals based on feedback from their administrator and reflection on their own practice. The most important aspect to teachers in making a decision about goals was that the teacher had the

final say in the set goals. Madge shared, “I do think we are stronger in our commitment to our goals if we pick them. Giving us the choice makes it more positive and more motivating.”

The goal group professional learning is a mechanism to keep the goal alive, rather than being tucked away on a shelf. Beth remembered:

My first year, we didn’t have goal groups when I was teaching. I had an idea of what I wanted to do, but I was kind of on my own and didn’t really know what I was doing. And kind of let it slide for a long time until it was the end of the year and we had to present on what we did. And so I think the goal groups helped me stay accountable towards actually working towards that goal.

Rachel articulates the importance of the group meetings throughout the year to support her forward movement on her goal. Rachel stated, “The goal group schedule causes you to get on a schedule and stay on a schedule. You have to have that monthly contact.”

Goal group professional learning is the map that connects the goal to the professional learning to the evaluation.

Teachers valued goal groups as a venue to address their own learning related to their teaching practice. Alex stated, “it (goal groups) was one of the few ways I had to connect with my peers, professionally, over a topic we had chosen, that was our own choice, so we bought into that.” Teachers described goal groups as a place to bring real issues they were having in the classroom. Emily shared, “I felt like I could come talk about ‘I don’t know how to make this work. I don’t know how to reach these kids. I don’t know what to do.’ My group would help me figure it out.” Emily’s description of her experience in goal groups directly connects her goals for learning with her professional development activities. This level of coherence has an impact on teaching.

The communication in goal groups was important to the participants because it promoted the opportunity to offer and receive feedback, to hear a variety of perspectives, to clarify thinking, and to solidify and share their own expertise. Emily explained in her first interview, “if you have people to talk it out with, you can start to see the problems or the benefits.” In the second interview, Emily further elaborated, “It (participating in goal groups) gives you an opportunity to talk to teachers you would never get a chance to talk to. It makes those conversations happen.”

At the end of the year, teachers met again with the administrator for the final evaluation. Alex shared:

I’m accountable for this. I have to sit down with my administrator and I have to talk through this goal and what I’ve tried and I have to self rate myself on the evaluation piece and all of that, so that’s all going to happen and so this (goal groups) made me think about that all through the year, so I think that’s how it best supported learning.

Beth also explained, “It helps prepares you for your annual evaluations with your principal.” While teachers felt prepared to meet with the administrator at the end of the year, what is more important is how they felt about their own learning facilitated through goal group professional learning. When asked about learning in goal groups at the end of the year, Alex shared:

I thought, “Good job!” I think that was part of the point of it, was to make you intentionally think through the things you’ve done, what you’ve tried, how much effort you’ve put into it, and how far you’ve come with it. It was very affirming to me. I felt like the process made me accountable and it helped me realize, instead of what I hadn’t done, it helped me realize what I had done.

The process of goal groups ties together the goal, the professional learning, and teacher change shared in the final evaluation.

Theme 5: Teachers not only made lasting changes in their teaching practice but they also made shifts in their beliefs about teaching.

The second research question asked how does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice? After examining the findings (Table 5.1), the fourth theme was identified. The following section offers an amplification of the findings leading to the development of this theme.

Teachers implemented learning from goal groups in their teaching, which teachers then reported as having an impact on students. Teachers not only made lasting changes in their teaching practice but also make changes in their beliefs about teaching. The changes teachers made in their classrooms surfaced in several places within the data. Teachers reported specific examples of classroom changes in artifacts from the meetings, interviews, and the focus group. The implemented changes varied from including student use of technology, to where the teacher placed herself in relationship to students when teaching, to the addition of data based small group differentiated instruction, to the teacher calling all parents a couple of times during the year to talk about students. Alex explained, "I definitely think that working on the goal that I worked on impacted the way that I taught and the amount of learning that happened."

Within the academic year of the study, teachers were making changes in classrooms that they believed had a positive impact on student learning. Teachers who had participated in goal groups in previous years additionally provided examples of how the previous years' goal group work continued to have an influence on their teaching. Teachers shared lasting changes they made to their practice. Beth shared an example from her work the previous year in the classroom community goal group. Beth stated,

“Last year, I implemented things like a closing circle and student reflections. Now, those things are just part of our routine.” Teachers made long term changes to what they were doing in their classrooms.

Figure 5.4 illustrates the connections among the goals teachers set, the subsequent learning in which they engaged, and how this influences both the current and future work in classrooms. Rachel shared an example of long-term change made through her work in goal groups from previous years. Rachel explained how she used to stand in front the classroom with all of the desks in rows and “talk at the students.” Now, Rachel has students sitting in groups, sits down with students in small group instruction, and checks for student understanding during the lesson. In talking about this change in her practice, Rachel stated, “It’s a big deal.”

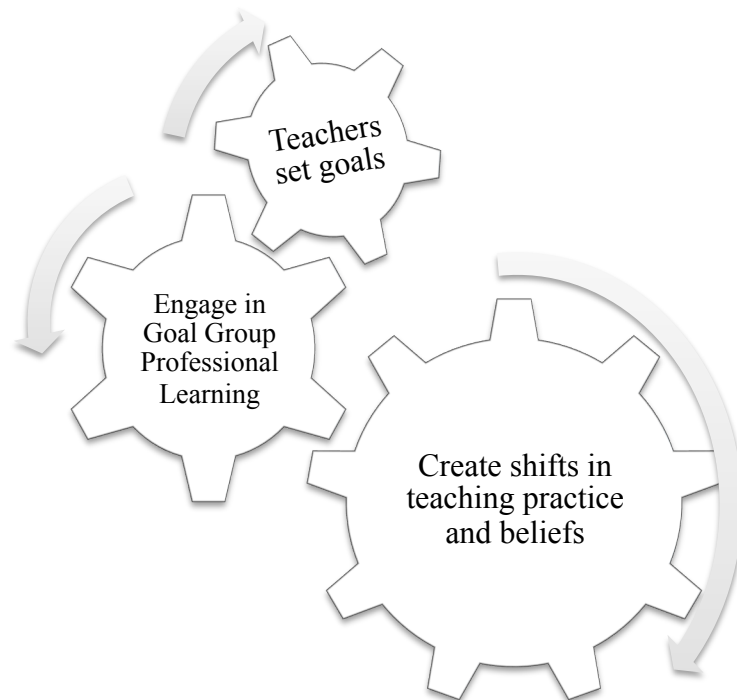


Figure 5.4 Connections: Goals, Learning, Practice, and Beliefs

These changes Rachel made are not only about what she does with students, these changes are indicative of a change in what she believes about teaching. She shared, “I used to believe my job was to stand up there and tell the students what to learn, if they didn’t get it – it wasn’t my fault.” Now she believes her job is about developing relationships with students and making sure students are learning. Rachel explained, “It’s not simple. Teaching is much more three dimensional than I thought.” Rachel identified some of the ways teaching has become “three dimensional” for her. The teacher has to interact in meaningful ways with the students to ensure that student learning is happening. Rachel described it as, “I’ve become more observant and responsive to students.” Rachel has a new understanding of what it means to be a teacher.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of a cross-case analysis, which reveal themes that emerged throughout the findings. The five main themes explored in this chapter were:

1. Teachers value the collaborative process of goal groups while they encountered barriers related to time, increased difficulty in planning, and frustrations with group members.
2. The continued development of teacher relationships and networks connected to professional practice creates positive shifts in school culture.
3. The synergy between individual and collaborative work propels learning forward at the individual and group levels.
4. Goal group professional learning supports coherence among evaluation, goal setting, and professional learning.
5. Teachers not only made lasting changes in their teaching practice but they also made changes in their beliefs about teaching.

Chapter 6 will include a summary of the study, discussion of the themes, and the implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a form of job-embedded professional learning. This study examined teachers' perspectives of their participation in goal groups, an emerging professional development process at Edge Elementary School. The teachers at Edge Elementary School developed annual goals at the beginning of the year as part of the teacher evaluation system within the Nuway School District. The goals determined teacher placement in the topic-based learning groups called goal groups.

The guiding questions of the study were:

1. How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual professional goals?
2. How does participating in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practice?

This chapter presents a summary of the study, a discussion of the study's themes, and implications for practitioners and future research.

Summary of the Research Design

This qualitative study was framed within the interpretive qualitative research paradigm and used thematic analysis to explicate the findings. Case study methodology

was used to reveal teachers' perceptions of goal setting, collaborative professional learning, and the subsequent impacts on teachers, and school culture. The theoretical framework for the study combined constructivism, social constructivism, and communal constructivism. The following literature informed this study: adult learning, goal setting, teacher professional learning, and collaboration.

The study was conducted at one elementary school in Georgia, which was implementing goal group professional learning during the 2013-2014 school year. Ten teachers from Edge Elementary School participated in this study. Each teacher was a member of one of the six goal groups. Five teachers were interviewed twice, once during the professional learning sequence and again at the end of the school year. The other five teachers participated in a focus group during the middle of the professional learning sequence. Data were collected from February to May of 2014. Findings were explicated from five separate data sets:

- interview transcripts
- a focus group transcript
- participant observations
- field notes
- artifacts from goal groups

The interview transcripts and the focus group transcript were the primary sources of teachers' perspectives of their work in goal groups. The additional forms of data provided triangulation to support findings from interviews the focus group meeting, and the observations of the teachers in the goal groups

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Initial codes were formed in the first reading of all the data sets. The texts were read repeatedly as data was organized into a spreadsheet where codes were further refined. Through analysis, 25 findings emerged and

were further synthesized into five themes. The data reflected the participants' experiences in goal group professional learning at Edge Elementary School.

Discussion of Themes

The discussion will address the five themes identified in Chapter 5 that resulted from conducting a cross-case analysis. Connections will be made to existing research.

The themes explored in this chapter are:

1. Teachers value the collaborative process of goal groups even while they encounter barriers related to time, increased difficulty in planning, and frustrations with group members.
2. The continued development of teacher relationships and networks connected to professional practice creates positive shifts in school culture.
3. The synergy between individual and collaborative work propels learning at the individual and group level.
4. Goal group professional learning supports coherence among evaluation, goal setting, and professional learning.
5. Teachers not only make lasting changes in their teaching practice but they also make changes in their beliefs about teaching.

Theme 1: Teachers value the collaborative process of goal groups even while they encounter barriers related to time, increased difficulty in planning, and frustrations with group members.

Collaboration is a critical element of goal group professional learning. Colbert et al. (2008) reported “teachers find benefit in the collaborative process, both within their teams and in their schools” (p. 148). The value of collaboration for teachers in this study was revealed in the findings related to goal setting, collaboration, individual work, and impact on teaching. Teachers identified the benefits of the collaborative experiences goal groups offered as increased accountability, conversations about teaching, developing relationships with teachers beyond their grade level teams, and the impact the work had on their teaching.

According to Johnson et al. (2007), group dynamics play an important role in effective collaboration, and positive interdependence or cooperation is key to a group's ability to accomplish a common goal. "*Positive interdependence* exists when individuals perceive that they can reach their goals if and only if the other individuals with whom they are cooperatively linked also reach their goals and, therefore, promote each other's efforts to achieve the goals" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 16, emphasis in the original).

Individual and group accountability is key to the success of the overall group's success and ultimately the success of the individual's goal achievement. Teachers attributed their sense of accountability to the regularity of goal group meetings, the agendas supporting goal work, and their work on goals made public. The regularity of goal group meetings was important to teachers. Rachel clarified, "The goal group schedule causes you to get on a schedule and stay on a schedule. You have to have that monthly contact."

The agendas and protocols supported an environment where each teacher had a voice and the group had strategies to develop effective cooperative work during the meetings. Protocols were used to increase individual participation of members. Lisa disclosed "Knowing that you were going to have to speak in the group makes you do the work, versus if you're trying to do it by yourself." On-line platforms, such as Padlet and Google docs were used to publicly share planning and learning within and across goal groups. Teachers had to participate in the work of goal groups, because if they did not participate, it would be evident to their colleagues. Additionally, at the end of each meeting, teachers set smaller goals to complete prior to the next meeting. These

procedures that promoted accountability helped teachers gain a sense of interdependence within the goal group.

Desimone (2011) recommended that professional development should “support sustained professional communication among teachers who are working to reform their teaching in similar ways” (p. 65). In Parise and Spillane’s (2010) study, collaborative discussion between teachers was the strongest predictor of teacher change. Teachers acknowledged this need for on-going sustained communication. The discussion in goal groups was important to teachers because the conversation afforded the opportunity to offer and receive feedback, to see a variety of perspectives, to clarify thinking, and to solidify their own expertise. Emily explained in her first interview that “if you have people to talk it out with, you can start to see the problems or the benefits.” Rachel said, “It’s easier to me to take that constructive criticism from peers than it is from your supervisors, just because it feels more equal.” Rachel suggested that when peers offer feedback to each other, it feels less judgmental and more like refinement or building on an existing idea. Eric shared that he learned from other teachers in his group through the feedback they offered in goal group meetings. Eric offered:

That’s what makes it work because you’re able to give feedback, good or bad.
And you’re able to go back and make those changes or maybe adjust it a little bit.
But yes, it is feedback, which that’s what makes the goal group work.

Eric’s group encouraged him to experiment with his instructional practices. Learning is stimulated when teachers engage in conversation to push one another to experiment (Balan, Manko, & Phillips, 2011).

Connecting teachers in collaborative groups across the school also provided occasions for teachers to find support from teachers outside grade level teams. Eric

valued his goal group work because, “it gets you outside of your grade level and it gives you a chance to talk to teachers outside of your grade.” Madge conveyed, “It’s more than just sharing resources. You learn things from other grade levels that you normally wouldn’t get to see or talk about.” The purposeful act of creating cross grade groups of teachers based on goals lead to teachers feeling less isolated and more connected to their fellow teachers. Connecting teachers across the school creates opportunities for teachers to provide feedback to each other, offer other perspectives, share instructional strategies, generate new ideas for classroom practice, and find support from teachers outside grade level teams.

Niesz (2007) stated, “When teachers come together in network spaces to discuss and think about educational practice generally and their own practice specifically... teachers are poised to produce new orientations to their work” (p. 608). Goal groups were a space in which teachers could discuss and think about educational practices. Beth explained, “I learned that it’s important to collaborate and work together, to share things that you want to grow in, and to have the teachers around you to support you and offer ideas.” Effective collaboration is a process that facilitates learning by providing practitioners of differentiated abilities opportunities to discuss, debate, observe, and share practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Wenger, 1998).

Theme 2: The continued development of collaborative teacher networks connected to professional practice creates positive shifts in school culture.

Neisz (2007) described teacher networks as “groups of teachers organized for purposes related to teacher learning, inquiry, support or school improvement” (p. 605). In learning networks, teachers work in collaborative settings to advance teacher learning and

thoughtful change within the context of schools. At Edge Elementary School, goal groups could be defined as teacher networks. Within these networks teacher participated in a cycle of learning and support situated within the school. In this cycle, the individual teacher was learning as well as the groups of teachers. The learning was supported the administrative team and influenced teachers and students in classrooms.

Another definition of teachers work together to learn in schools is offered in the professional learning community research. In a discussion of professional learning communities, Hord (2009) builds a bridge from constructivism to job-embedded professional development in which she shared:

The professional learning community models the self-initiating learner working in concert with peers. Constructivism recognizes learning as the process of making sense of information and experiences. Learning constructively requires an environment in which learners work collegially and is situated in authentic activities and contexts. (p. 41)

In this study, participants characterized themselves as “self-initiated learners” in expressing their need to continually improve their teaching practice to be both more engaged in teaching and effective for their students. Eric explained, “I’ve learned that – you never stop learning. So, I see myself growing as well as my students in this process.” Beth shared, “I think about what I need to be working on in order to become a better teacher and be most effective for the students in my classroom.” Teachers have individual needs, different motivations for learning, and prior knowledge and experience that will influence the type of learning in which they choose to engage (Bonner, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2002, 2013; Zeichner, 2003). Jan explained, “It was important to me to choose my own goal. And how to learn more to help me get better at it.”

Through goal groups teachers were “working in concert with peers” to learn. When professionals work together to improve practice both the individual and group improve. Halle explained, “we are all doing one thing together” and Lisa shared, “we’re sharing what we’ve figured out and whether it worked out or not.” Teachers “situated in authentic activities and contexts” are better positioned to implement learning in the classroom. Rachel explained, “in goal groups you’re learning through experience in your school. You’re learning by discussing, and you’re learning by participating, and your learning as you work with students.” In the situated context of classrooms, teachers were receiving authentic feedback from students on the effectiveness of the implementation of new strategies. As teachers developed competence and confidence with new strategies, it was reflected in what was happening in the classroom. Teachers reported changes in classroom practice and improved student learning. Goal group professional learning supported the timely implementation of new learning into the classroom.

Teachers acknowledged the need to feel supported. The implementation of new learning requires teachers to step out of their comfort zone and live with some anxiety. When teachers are learning a new skill or changing their beliefs about how learning happens, it takes time to gain a sense of mastery. The administrative team allowed teachers freedom to take risks and try new strategies in the classroom. Eric explained “We have the ability to make mistakes without being criticized.” Nina also explained how teachers across the school supported each other to persevere. Nina said, “Having the goal group and having encouragement from the teachers in my group helped me keep going with it (goal).”

When all of the key players within a school: individual teachers, formal groups of teachers, students, and the administrative team work collaboratively in a school building the culture of the school begins to change. According to Fullan (2011), a culture for school improvement includes a focus on facilitating purposeful interaction where teachers are building capacity when learning while they work. In this cycle, the individual teacher is improving as well as the groups of teachers this in turn influences student learning and is supported by the administrative team. Eric explained, “It’s not just about me connecting with this teacher or that teacher, it’s way more. It’s about us sharing what we learn and feeling like we know what to do and how to help each other get better.” Teachers felt empowered to share learning and make decisions.

According to Avalos (2011), professional learning creates positive changes in school culture “due to four main characteristics: collaboration, a focus on student learning, teacher authority described as the ability of teachers to make decisions within their communities, and finally recognition of the importance of teacher continuous learning” (p. 17). The development of teacher networks connected to cross grade collaboration helped to shape and reshape the culture of Edge Elementary School. Lisa shared, “So if you’re in an environment that’s more open and willing to grow, that makes for a more positive experience as a whole, and sharing what we’ve figured out makes us a stronger school.”

Theme 3. The synergy between individual and collaborative work propels learning at the individual and group levels.

A cycle of learning is built into goal group professional learning –individual and collaborative learning, applying learning in classrooms, and reflecting and sharing

practice. The importance of this cycle to teacher learning is articulated in the following statement made by Eric:

I would say each step in my group and on my own depends on the other. I would say that if I get an idea and I take it to my goal group and I incorporate it in my teaching and I take it back to my goal group and say hey, this worked, this didn't work, and then I go back and rethink the process all over again, I think they're all interconnected all together.

This exemplifies how the individual and collaborative learning in which teachers engage creates synergy within goal groups. Viewed through the lens of communal constructivism, teachers are creating knowledge both for themselves and for their group (Tangney et al., 2001) as they participate in a cycle of learning, implementation, and reflection. The synergic outcomes related to goal groups offered teachers peer support to take risks, built capacity for learning, accelerated the spread of instructional knowledge, and developed teacher networks beyond goal groups.

Van Horn (2006) found that when teachers have opportunities to solve problems collaboratively and have access to rich resources, they are more likely to take risks, sustain attempts to make change, and develop, adapt, and/or apply approaches designed to support student learning in their classrooms. Madge explained, "If I try something and fall flat, it's going to be okay. Because we are working together, I can go back to my group and get it figured out." The mindset for teachers became a "just try it" way of thinking. If the problem remained unsolved in the first attempts the group would be there to help figure out what to do next. Through collaborative experiences in goal groups teachers were developing greater willingness to take risks.

When professional educators embrace conflicting opinions, strategies, and value systems through thoughtful questioning and collaborative activities, they make their

practice public and teacher empowerment possible (Levine & Marcus, 2007). Eric explained the importance of hearing a variety of perspectives from the members of his goal group. Eric stated, “So it’s good to have the different mixture of teachers because you get a different perspective on how things work.” In Eric’s group, when teachers share, they share everything –things they tried that worked and things they tried that didn’t work. Eric confided, “And maybe I had an idea that didn’t work in my class, but another teacher may say, yeah, let me try that. And it’s perfect. So that’s one of the great parts about having that mixture.” Exposure to multiple perspectives developed openness to new ideas. Teachers revealed the need to be “open to ideas presented.” Beth explained, “Goal groups provided me with a group of people as resources to help me develop new ideas.” Teachers become empowered to generate ideas and make instructional decisions.

Gallimore et al. (2009) found that when “teachers slow down and make planning and analysis visible in a collective and intentional way this affects general patterns of cognition”, including one of their findings “greater interest in gaining more knowledge about practice and alternative approaches” (p. 549). The cross grade structure of goal group professional learning accelerated the spread of instructional knowledge. As teachers learned more about instructional practices across the school they become more curious. Emily explained that she benefited from “being able to see what teachers in other grades do that I wouldn’t have any idea about.” Teachers participated in a cycle of working with their goal group on their goal and returning to their grade level team. As teachers learned new ideas and strategies, they would talk to their grade level teams and begin to implement what they learned into lesson plans for the grade level. And within

grade level teams, teachers were learning from the members of their grade level team then returning to share with their goal group.

Teacher networks are created through all of the ways teachers formally and informally interact. At Edge Elementary School, one of the ways formal interactions between teachers were planned is through goal group professional learning. Teachers also developed additional informal teacher networks through their collaboration in goal groups. Neisz (2007) suggests an additional benefit of teacher networks. “Networks offer learning experiences in a context of dignity and respect that teachers do not always experience. Being treated as a professional, with one’s own experiences and perspectives valued” (p. 606) Eric identified Cassie as a teacher he met through goal groups that he probably would not have gotten to know any other way. He valued her support and understanding through his first year of teaching. Eric indicated that Cassie “is someone I still go to for advice.” In this scenario, Cassie is respected by Eric for her experience and expertise. Eric is supported through the struggles of his first years of teaching in a way that honors his perspectives. Teachers were exploiting synergy between the existing structure of goal groups and the creation of new networks.

The synergy that originates from goal groups is a complex blend of organizational structures, self-direction, collaboration, positive learning, and support for implementation. Put together, it gives individuals, groups, and the school community the power to sustain learning over time (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006).

Theme 4: Goal group professional learning supports coherence among evaluation, goal setting, and professional learning.

The Nuway School District teacher evaluation system was founded on a theoretical model of coherence developed by Zepeda (2012b). This model of coherence links goal setting, supervision, professional development, and teacher evaluation. Goal group professional learning was designed to extend the model illustrated in Figure 6.1. Goal group professional learning contextualizes the peer support and teacher learning that occur in Zepeda's (2012b) coherence model.

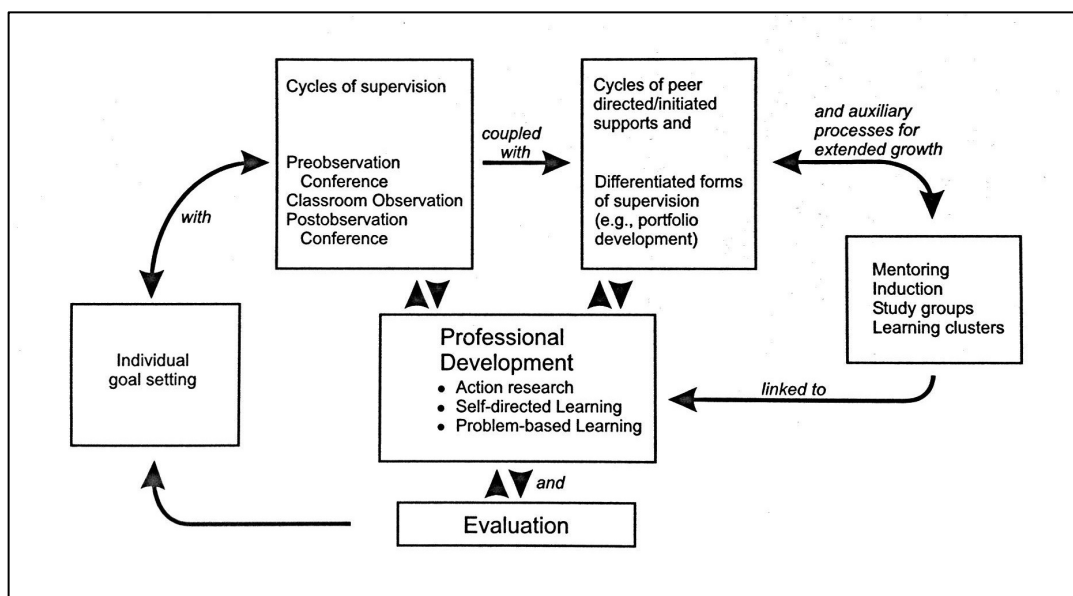


Figure 6.1. Linking Instructional Supervision, Professional Development, and Teacher Evaluation. Zepeda (2012b). Used with permission.

For the principal, teacher evaluation happens every year. The goal group process emanated from initial teacher evaluation meetings when administrators and teachers discussed teacher goal setting at the beginning of the school year. In 2010 during these initial meetings with teacher and administrator, the instructional coach (previous role of the researcher) noticed that groups of teachers were setting similar or related goals. This

led to the idea that professional learning could be developed to organize teachers into collaborative groups working on similar goals.

The goals set by teachers would drive a major portion of the school level professional learning plan for the year. This professional learning for teachers would create a connection between goals and evaluation. From a principal or building leader's perspective, facilitating the goal group process with or without an instructional coach requires minimal time and effort beyond what is already required as part of teacher evaluation. Building leaders initially coordinate groups then make the time and space for teachers to meet seven or eight times a year. The remainder of the planning and work is left to the teachers.

The minimal effort is worth the potential benefit to administrators. If supervision is meant to improve teaching and learning, here is a process that seamlessly connects supervision, professional learning, and evaluation as depicted in Figure 6.1. As goal setting is part of many evaluation systems, instead of teachers working toward goal attainment individually, they work collaboratively in groups. The goal group process supports teacher accountability and supports an overall teacher evaluation system as teachers document work toward expectations. In the fury of teacher evaluation tied to accountability, goal group professional learning is a model that codifies the relationships among supervision, teacher learning, and evaluation.

Coherence as defined by Desimone (2011) identifies three dimensions that are critical for effective teacher professional development. 1) New learning should build on what teachers already know. 2) Professional development should align “with national, state, and local standards; assessment; curriculum; and other reforms” (p. 65). 3)

Professional development should “support sustained professional communication among teachers who are working to reform their teaching in similar ways” (p. 65). Penuel et al. (2007) identified an additional element of coherence, that professional learning needs to support teachers’ own goals for learning, describing coherence as “teachers’ interpretations of how well aligned the professional development activities are with their own goals for leaning and their goals for students” (p. 931).

The idea of building on what is known (Desimone, 2011) is inherent in the process of individual goal setting (Figure 6.1, Zepeda, 2012b). Goal setting requires reflection. At the beginning of the school year, teachers reflected on their teaching practice and based their goals on prior experience, knowledge, and feedback. Beth expressed it this way “I think about what I need to work on to become a better teacher and be most effective for the students in my classroom.” Nina considered herself to be self-reflective, sharing that “I know what I’m good at and what I’m not good at.” Nina’s reflection on her teaching led her to set a goal that would address her self-identified need.

The professional standards in the Nuway district align with the district’s initiatives and state curriculum documents as illustrated by Zepeda’s conceptions of coherence. All of the teachers set goals related to the professional standards as outlined the Annual Evaluation Rubric (Zepeda, 2012b). Halle explained how she chose her goal by reflecting on her planning, teaching, and assessment in relationship to the standards used for teacher evaluation:

So the district wants us to do this and this and this. I would look and see. What do I think I need to work on to meet what the district wants me to do? And that is how I picked my goal.

Teachers determined what they knew, decided what their next steps should be, and set a professional goal or two identified in their Individual Professional Learning Plan (IPLP, see Appendix A).

In the year of the study, once a teacher set self-selected goals for the year, the instructional coach examined the goals of each teacher and then matched teachers into groups related to the goals identified in the IPLP. From there, goal groups formed so that teacher professional learning groups centering on these goals (see Table 4.1) could be established to support individual and group goal attainment. Chloe noted that “it helped us stay more focused in this one area.” Lisa shared that setting a goal and connecting that goal to professional learning makes one “mindful of what you’re doing with your teaching.” The subsequent professional learning in which teachers engaged was directly related to helping them grow professionally in their goal area. Additionally, Penuel et al. (2007) identified the need for professional learning to support teachers’ own goals for learning. Madge clarified the importance of self-selection of goals when she stated, “I do think we are stronger in our commitment to our goals if we pick them. Giving us the choice makes it more positive and more motivating.”

Coherence requires collaboration among members of a school community. The collaborative element of goal groups professional learning “supports sustained professional communication among teachers who are working to reform their teaching in similar ways” as recommended by Desimone (2011, p. 65). Goal groups provided a space where teachers could work together around their particular interests or needs. Emily shared, “I like that I know that other people have a common goal and they’re working

towards the same thing I am.” Emily went on to explain “if you have people to talk it out with, you can start to see the problems or the benefits.”

Goal groups create a map that supports teachers’ journey from goal setting as part of evaluation through differentiated professional learning to the end of year evaluation. Not only were teachers prepared to meet with the administrator at the end of the year, but also what was more important was how they recognized and celebrated their own learning facilitated through goal group professional learning. When asked about learning in goal groups at the end of the year, Alex shared:

I thought, “Good job!” I think that was part of the point of it, was to make you intentionally think through the things you’ve done, what you’ve tried, how much effort you’ve put into it, and how far you’ve come with it. It was very affirming to me. I felt like the process made me accountable and it helped me realize, instead of what I hadn’t done, it helped me realize what I had done.

The process of goal groups ties together the goal, the professional learning, and teacher change shared in the final evaluation. In other words, this program supported teacher growth and development much like the evaluation system was aspiring to do.

Theme 5: Teachers not only make lasting changes in their teaching practice but also they make changes in their beliefs about teaching.

Professional development can enhance teacher knowledge and improve instructional practice when it is connected to teacher’s work with students, sustained over time, linked to concrete tasks of teaching, and creates opportunities for collaborative learning from peers that builds strong working relationships (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone et al. 2002; Penuel, et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2010). Teachers reported implementing learning from goal groups in their teaching. The changes teachers made in their classrooms surfaced in several places within the data. Table 6.1 presents teachers

reflections on changes in instructional practice. Teachers reported specific examples of classroom changes in artifacts from the meetings, interviews, and the focus group. Alex explained, “I definitely think that working on the goal that I worked on impacted the way that I taught and the amount of learning that happened.”

Table 6.1 *February 17, 2014 Goal Group Meeting Responses to: I used to...but now I*

February 17, 2015 Goal Group Meeting Reflection Activity Examples of Responses to: I used to...but now I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I used to think using technology meant show my lessons on the smart board. Now, my students are completely engaged in technology on their own devices both collaboratively and individually. They have really taken charge of their learning. • Before I started working on my goal, I did more teacher-centered instruction. Now, I engage students more through student-centered activities and frequent checks for understanding. • I used to assess students and not really used the data to target student need. Now I am able to assess students and know exactly what to teach them. • Before I started working on my goal, I used to become frustrated with students who had a hard time with following classroom routines, but now I realize it was because of how I was directing them. I have learned that I need to be more direct with my directions. • Before I started working on my goal, I didn't realize the value of student-created rubrics and how they empower students and make them more self-efficacious.

Teachers who had participated in goal groups in previous years additionally provided examples of how the previous years’ goal group work continued to have an influence on their teaching. Teachers not only made lasting changes in their teaching practice but also make changes in their beliefs about teaching.

Rachel shared an example of long-term change made through her work in goal groups from previous years. Rachel explained how she used to stand in front the classroom with all of the desks in rows and “talk at the students.” Now, Rachel has students sitting in groups, sits down with students in small group instruction, and checks for student understanding during the lesson. In talking about this change in her practice,

Rachel stated, “It’s a big deal.” These changes Rachel made are not only about what she does with students, but also these changes are indicative of a change in what she believes about teaching. She shared, “I used to believe my job was to stand up there and tell the students what to learn, if they didn’t get it – it wasn’t my fault.” Now she believes her job is about developing relationships with students and making sure students are learning. Rachel explained, “It’s not simple. Teaching is much more three dimensional than I thought.” The teacher has to interact in meaningful ways with the students to ensure that student learning is happening. Rachel described it as, “I’ve become more observant and responsive to students.”

Rachel has a new understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Opfer and Pedder (2011) explain that changes in teacher’s practice, beliefs, and outcome for students can occur in one area of influence but may not lead to change in another. However, “learning in one system must affect and be enacted and supported in another system. As a result, “effective” teacher learning requires multiple and cyclic movements between the systems of influence in teachers’ worlds” (p. 386).

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study suggest that goal group professional learning, if properly structured and supported by administrators, contributes to individual and collaborative teacher learning. Additionally, the study found that teachers value collaboration, and that collaboration connected to professional practice creates positive shifts in school culture. Finally, a very strong correlation emerged between changes in instructional practice and reported increases in student learning. These findings have implications for policy and practice, and future research on the topic, and are addressed in the following sections.

1. Teachers value the collaborative process of goal groups even while they encounter barriers related to time, increased difficulty in planning, and frustrations with group members.
2. The continued development of teacher relationships and networks connected to professional practice creates positive shifts in school culture.
3. The synergy between individual and collaborative work propels learning at the individual and group level.
4. Goal group professional learning supports coherence among evaluation, goal setting, and professional learning.
5. Teachers not only make lasting changes in their teaching practice but they also make changes in their beliefs about teaching.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Findings from this study hold promise as a guide for school leaders and professional developers interested in improving student outcomes. Hammond et al. (2009) reported “efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice and the capacity of school systems to promote teacher learning” (p. 7). Professional learning needs to honor teachers’ abilities to self-select learning through goal setting and engage in appropriate professional learning that responds to the real needs of teachers in the school setting.

Practitioners considering similar reform efforts must take steps to ensure that goal groups are actualized in an effective fashion. As was noted in Chapter 3, the district under study established the conditions necessary to support a teacher evaluation system predicated on a growth model. The teacher was at the center of evaluation and framed as the learner in an effort to improve instructional practices based on teacher professional standards. School administrators must subscribe to premise that the purpose of teacher evaluation is to “improve teacher practice and promote teacher learning” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 7). The school then established the conditions for collaborative teacher work based on set goals. Regular meeting times, with a corresponding

requirement to meet, were established at Edge Elementary School. A school-wide expectation, promotion of teacher collaboration with a specific focus on instructional improvement and student outcomes, was created and steps were taken to embed this expectation into the school's culture.

Implications and Recommendations Research

This study examined teachers' perspectives of their participation in goal groups, an emerging professional development process at Edge Elementary School. While significant findings were noted, the study was limited due to the fact that the data used in the study were drawn from a single year. Future studies attempting to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a form of job-embedded professional learning may benefit from a longitudinal design, examining changes in teachers' practice and beliefs and tracking shifts in school culture. Future researchers may wish to explore the impact of goal group professional learning implemented within a school district. The small number of teacher participants and the small scale of the study site was a limitation of the study; hence, future research may benefit from expanding the sample size by selecting multiple schools or an entire school district. While support from the administration and instructional coach is implied in the findings, future studies may wish to develop a more comprehensive approach for examining the role of administrators or coaches to identify the variety of ways in which they influence goal group professional learning.

The present study also contributed the following operational definition for goal group professional learning: Teams of teachers working together with a common goal based on standards related to teacher evaluation who meet on a regularly scheduled basis

to promote individual and collaborative teacher learning. The sequence of goal group work across a school year would include the following practices:

1. Teachers set goals and are placed their teacher learning groups based on common goals
2. Teachers work within these groups to establish learning needs and objectives
3. An instructional coach works with teachers to find learning materials and other opportunities to further learning
4. Teachers work face-to-face and in e-learning communities with the instructional coach and teacher leaders
5. Teachers experiment with new practice based on learning
6. Teachers share experiences and learning in formal goal group meetings
7. Teachers observe other teachers within the groups to further learning around goals
8. Teachers work in teams to consider artifacts in preparation for annual evaluations
9. Teachers met with principal for final evaluation
10. Teachers share learning across goal groups in a formal whole-school setting and in smaller informal groups

Concluding Thoughts

This study builds on the existing research base regarding the importance of coherence among goal setting, professional development, and teacher evaluation. This study examined an emerging professional learning model called goal groups. At the surface, goal group professional learning creates a map that supports teachers' journey from goal setting as part of evaluation through differentiated professional learning to the end of year evaluation. However, the real power was uncovered as teachers were empowered to learn together, take risks, and make instructional decisions –to act as professionals.

Professional learning for teachers is important to improving student outcomes, but it is also an essential vehicle for teachers becoming more knowledgeable and gaining a sense of professionalism in their field. When teachers believe their job is challenging and also believe they have resources to learn how to meet those challenges there is a high level of commitment and professionalism. Teachers must have opportunities to develop

the necessary skills to solve the instructional dilemmas in their classrooms. On-going, job-embedded learning gives teachers the capacity to leverage their instruction knowledge to make decision about how best to help students. I really like this paragraph

Goal group professional learning offers a way to operationalize collaboration offering a structural and procedural model of school based collaboration. The essential elements for operationalizing collaboration revealed in the findings of this study appear to be:

- Grouping teachers by common goals
- Teachers regularly working together
- A cycle of individual classroom implementation and collaborative discussion
- Reflective dialogue
- Focus on student learning

The goal group model helps administrators and teachers acquire a better understanding of a way teachers can work together using the leverage point of goals set in teacher evaluation. Within this framework, teachers can effectively work together to improve instruction.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDES

INTERVIEW GUIDE #1

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a means of job-embedded professional learning.

Each Interview will begin with the following:

- A personal introduction
- A statement of purpose
- A confidentiality statement and signing of the Project Consent Form
- A statement on audio-recording and note-taking

Teacher Interview:

General Introductory Questions

- Would you please tell me about your teaching experience? (Years teaching, grades taught, and level of education)
- What do you think of when you hear the word ‘goals’ in relationship to your work as a teacher?

How do teachers **perceive** the **collaborative process** of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual goals?

- Tell me about the professional goals you set for yourself this year as part of your teacher evaluation.
 - Tell me about those goals. What did you hope to see happen in your classroom from pursuing those goals?
- Tell me about your goal group. (How many teachers? Grade levels? Knowledge about topic?)
 - Think about your group around one of the tables in the professional learning room. Paint that picture for me.
- Tell me about your experience in working with goal groups.
 - So, you have individual goals and your group develops a group goal – how did you figure this out?
 - How did your group decide what to research and read?
 - After your group’s research in the goal area, how did your group decide to try out what you learned?
 - Based on what was happening in the goal group, what did you decide to do, individually?
 - How did members of your group share work you were each doing individually with the group?
 - Has there ever been disagreement in your goal group? How was that handled? What did you think about the situation?
- What do you think about working in goal groups?
 - Can you think of an example where working with others in goal groups was particularly stimulating?

- Can you think of an example where working with others in goal groups was particularly supportive?
- Can you think of an example where working with others in goal groups was particularly challenging?
- Can you think of an example where working with others in goal groups was particularly frustrating?
- *(Think about other descriptors that get at perception.)*
- What do you think about working with teachers that you might not work with in any other school setting?
 - Tell me about relationships with teachers that you have now that you didn't have before the group formed.
- What kinds of work did you do independently on your goal, unrelated to the goal group?
 - Have you shared this with any members of your group? How was this shared?
 - Were there any other ways that you could have learned about things related to your goal? (Is this about missed opportunity? Pay attention to the grammar and what it suggests. . .)
 - Do you have examples of these various learning experiences working together to further your individual learning in relationship to your goal?
- What meaning did being involved in goal groups have for you?

How does participation in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practices?

- What are you learning?
- How likely are you to implement something learned in the context of goal groups or related activities in your classroom?
Not very likely 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Very likely
- Does what happen in goal groups affect what happens in your classroom?
- *(More than three years of teaching)* As a classroom teacher in Clarke County, goal setting in some form has always been a part of teacher evaluation. How has participating in goal group professional learning changed your thinking about working on professional goals?
- *(Historical participation)* There's a place where what you have learned becomes just a part of what you do and you don't think about it anymore. So, I wonder are there ways your historical participation in goal groups and goal work has had an impact on your teaching. For example, I used to think... now I think...
- What do you think are the barriers for teachers in trying to achieve professional goals?
- What do you think are the support systems for teachers in trying to achieve professional goals?

General Concluding Questions

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me related to goal groups?

INTERVIEW GUIDE #2

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how teachers perceive the pursuit of individual professional goals in a collegial group setting as a means of job-embedded professional learning.

Each Interview will begin with the following:

- A statement of purpose
- A statement on audio-recording and note-taking

Teacher Interview:

General Introductory Questions

- Remind me of the professional goals you set for yourself this year as part of your teacher evaluation.
- Tell me about those goals. What did you hope to see happen in your classroom from pursuing those goals?

How do teachers perceive the collaborative process of goal groups as a means for pursuing individual goals?

- Talk to me about the rest of your experience in working with goal groups since we last talked.
- Did you participate in peer observations? What was that like? Observer? Observed?
- What do you think about working in goal groups?
 - Can you think of an example... ?
- What was is about the goal group process that supported learning?
- What was is about the goal group process that inhibited learning?
- What meaning did being involved in goal groups have for you?

How does participation in goal groups influence teachers' knowledge, perspectives, and/or practices?

- What did you learn?
- How likely were you to implement something learned in the context of goal in your classroom?
Not very likely 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Very likely
- What impact do you think participating in the goal group process has had? I would like to know about the impact of participating in goal groups in relationship to some specific areas:
 - Your teaching?
 - Other teachers?
 - Students?
 - School community?
 - Your perspectives of teaching and learning?
 - Are there any other ways other than what we've talked about?

- How did you monitor and evaluate improvement of instructional practices related to the goals?
- At the end of the year, you created a portfolio of artifacts to demonstrate where you are in relationship to the goal you set at the beginning of the year. So, what do you think when look at your portfolio?
- How did you feel when you took your portfolio to your end of year evaluation conference?
- What did you learn about your teaching practice through the process of setting professional goals?
- What you learned this year – will that support your practices next year? How or not?
- If a teacher from another Nuway school came to you and said, “The teachers at my school were told that we are going to start using the goal group process as part of professional learning next year? What do you think about that?” What you would say to that teacher?

General Concluding Questions

- Is there anything else you would like to share with me related to goal groups?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group Protocol

They will be asked open ended questions that will include the following:

- What did you learn related to your goal and the goal group process?
- How did you learn what you learned?
- What was it about the goal group process that supported or inhibited learning?
- What meaning did being involved in goal groups have for you?
- What is the value of the experience of participating in goal groups?

On a scale of:

Not very likely 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Very likely

How likely were you to implement something learned in the context of goal groups or related activities in your classroom?

APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLANS

**Individual Professional Learning Plan
Tier I**

Teacher:

School:

Grade/Subject:

School Year:

Supervisor/Principal:

Goal I: Related to a Performance Standard and Element(s)

Goal:

Standard:

Element:

Goal Statement (What I want to accomplish this year – desired results)

- a) Strategies for Improvement (Activities I will use to accomplish the goal – Action Plan)
- b) How are you going to measure your progress toward meeting the focus of the element?
- c) Measurement of Success (How will you know the goal was met? End of year data, accomplishments, and other artifacts and evidence to show growth and development should be readily available).

Goal II—Related to a Performance Standard and Element(s)

Goal:

Standard:

Element:

Goal Statement (What I want to accomplish this year – desired results)

- d) Strategies for Improvement (Activities I will use to accomplish the goal – Action Plan)
- e) How are you going to measure your progress toward meeting the focus of the element?
- f) Measurement of Success (How will you know the goal was met? End of year data, accomplishments, and other artifacts and evidence to show growth and development should be readily available).

Comments:

Supervisor's Signature:

Date:

Teacher's Signature:

Date:

Individual Professional Learning Plan
Tier II

Teacher:

School:

Grade/Subject:

School Year:

Supervisor/Principal:

In the Tier II Teacher Evaluation System, one goal must center on the Teacher Leader Standard, and the other goal centers on one of the other five Performance Standards.

Teacher Leader Standard: The teacher consistently assumes a variety of leadership roles that fits their talents and interests which shape the culture of their schools, improve student learning, and influence practices among peers.

I. Goal I—Teacher Leader

1. Review the following Teacher Leader Elements. Check only one Element that you will focus attention on during the year. Focusing on the one Teacher Leader Element you choose in consultation with your principal or evaluator, develop a specific goal.

☐ The teacher facilitates professional learning opportunities among staff members providing teachers an opportunity to learn from each other/one another.

☐ The teacher shares in the responsibility for the continuous improvement of the school.

☐ The teacher leads their peers in conversations which analyze data to strengthen and to adjust instruction.

☐ The teacher takes responsibility to seek out professional growth opportunities to support high levels of learning for students.

☐ The teacher leads colleagues in the use of innovative technologies to engage students and to improve student achievement.

3. Think through the following points to help frame the work needed to accomplish the goal and to frame your discussion with your evaluator.

a) What do you want to accomplish related to the Teacher Leader element you chose?

b) How are you going to measure your progress toward meeting the focus element?

c) What types of artifacts and evidence will you collect to illustrate progress toward meeting the focus of the element you chose?

Goal II—Related to a Performance Standard and Element(s)

Goal

Standard:

Element:

Goal Statement (What I want to accomplish this year – desired results)

- g) Strategies for Improvement (Activities I will use to accomplish the goal – Action Plan)
- h) How are you going to measure your progress toward meeting the focus of the element?
- i) Measurement of Success (How will you know the goal was met? End of year data, accomplishments, and other artifacts and evidence to show growth and development should be readily available).

Comments:

Supervisor's Signature:

Date:

Teacher's Signature:

Date:

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APPENDIX D

ANNUAL EVALUATION PERFORMANCE RUBRIC