UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS’ PERCEPTION OF COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PRIVATE SECONDARY FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Effective teacher professional development has required an understanding of the various forms and structures of teacher learning that have supported skill development and collaboration. Previous research suggested that teacher collaboration and learning has improved through the use of reflective inquiry practices, professional learning communities, shared leadership, and peer mentoring. Despite the evidence of enhanced teacher collaboration through these components of professional learning, teacher perception of such development activities has varied. In particular, sparse research has investigated teachers’ perception toward collaborative professional development in the private secondary faith-based school context. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to understand how educators within this context perceived collaborative teacher professional development. The researcher used a purposeful sample of three educators who have participated in professional development at the research site. The researcher utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in order to interpret how participants made sense of their involvement in teacher learning activities. Using the theoretical frameworks of Garet et al. (2001) and Wenger (1990), the researcher reported the participants’ sentiments of how teacher collaboration affected their professional growth. The research findings demonstrated how individuals at this research site viewed professional learning. Moreover, the participants revealed the structures of professional development that enhanced or hindered their ability to participate effectively in the school’s teacher development program. The researcher concluded that future practice at this school must address the design and dissemination of collaborative professional learning activities in order to support teachers’ growth.

Key words: teacher professional development, teacher collaboration, faith-based education
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# Table of Contents

Chapter One 9

Statement of the Problem 9

Significance of the Research Problem 11

Positionality Statement 16

Research Question 24

Theoretical Framework 24

Exploring Core Structures and Values of Professional Development 25

Seminal Roots of Garet et al. Model 28

Contemporary Uses of the Garet et al. Model 29

Exploring Effective Collaboration in the Workplace 29

Seminal Roots of Wenger’s Model 31

Contemporary Uses of the Wenger’s Model 32

Rationale for the Proposed Theoretical Frameworks 32

Combining Two Theoretical Frameworks 32

Addressing Strengths and Weaknesses of the Frameworks 34

Analyzing other Theoretical Frameworks 34

Conclusion 35

Chapter Two 37

Literature Review 37

Overview of Teacher Professional Development 38

Overview of Collaborative Professional Development 42

Implementing Structures that Sustain Collaborative Teacher Development 43
The Structures and Tools Necessary for Collaborative Professional Development 44
Fostering Collaboration in Professional Learning Communities 45
Collaboration Through Engagement in Reflective Inquiry Practices 49
School Leadership that Fosters Teacher Collaboration: Supports and Structures 52
Fostering Lasting Support of Collaborative Professional Development: Shared Leadership 55
Mentoring Relationships that Build Trust and Support 58
Professional Development in Private Secondary Schools 59
Trends in Professional Development in this Study’s Context 62
Findings/Discussion 63
Chapter Three 70
Methodology 70
Research Paradigm and the Role of the Researcher 70
Research Design 73
Research Tradition 73
Participants 77
Recruitment and Access 78
Data Collection 80
Data Storage 81
Data Analysis 81
Trustworthiness 82
Chapter Four 85
Research Findings 85
Participant Profiles 85

Participant 1: Rose 85
Participant 2: Samantha 90
Participant 3: Connie 96

Participants’ Collective Understanding of Professional Development 101

Theme 1 102
Theme 2 104
Theme 3 107
Theme 4 110
Theme 5 111
Theme 6 116
Theme 7 119

Conclusion 122

Chapter Five 124

Discussion of Research Findings 124

Extracting Meaning from Participants’ Responses 125

The Ideal Length of Collaborative Professional Learning in this Context 125
Collaborative Professional Development Devoid of Growth and Learning 126
Learning from Experts and Colleagues Alike 127
Staying Current in an Ever-changing Field 129
Insufficient Follow-up on Collaborative Professional Development 129
A Negative culture Toward Collaborative Professional Development 130
Administrative Support and Follow-up on Teacher Learning Initiatives 132
Understanding the Significance of Collaborative Professional Development 133
Re-evaluating the Researcher’s Positionality to the Study’s Problem of Practice 136
Conclusion 138
References 146
Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

Addressing the professional learning needs of educators has required an understanding of the role of collaborative professional development programs that have utilized different teaching and learning structures. These teaching and learning structures have served to develop teachers’ skills (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). School leaders and administrators have implemented a multitude of learning platforms and programs with the goal of assisting educators in their own learning in order to improve student instruction. Research has indicated that many platforms have existed with the intent of delivering valuable teaching and learning resources to educators (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). These opportunities have existed in order to improve teachers’ practices through new strategies and methodologies. Moreover, components of professional development focused on team learning and shared leadership have sustained ongoing collaboration. (Crockett, 2002; Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). These platforms have facilitate teacher collaboration that enabled educators to work together in order to learn from each other while simultaneously developing pedagogy and methodology to address student learning. Despite the evidence of increased teacher collaboration through these components of professional development, teacher perception of such learning structures has differed (Johnson, 2007). This study examined the question of collaborative teacher professional development within the context of private faith-based secondary schools since the nature of these schools do not necessarily adhere to district, state, or national guidelines for professional development practices. As a result, this difference in the perception of these learning initiatives often has diverted teacher interest and involvement away from their professional learning.

In particular, sparse research has investigated the role of collaborative professional
development on teachers’ attitudes toward its practical implications in private faith-based secondary schools (Drago-Severson, 2012; Eggleston Hackney, 1998; Lucilio, 2009; Mayotte, Wei, Lamphier, and Doyle 2013). Since private schools need not follow prescribed models of teacher development or curricula practices, understanding teacher perception toward the practical use of professional learning programs can enhance teacher performance and student achievement. Research that focuses on teacher perception of how components of collaborative professional development in private secondary schools affect their practice has the potential to reveal why some educators in this setting do not subscribe to these learning opportunities. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to understand private secondary faith-based school teachers’ perception of collaborative professional development.

Prior research on teacher professional development identified the importance of teacher collaboration (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Danielowich, 2012, Burke, 2013). This collaboration enabled teachers and school leaders to work collectively in order to foster improved teaching and learning strategies (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Burke, Marx, & Berry, 2011). Accordingly, the literature on collaborative teacher professional development recognized major themes that provide a strong basis for teacher learning. Building professional learning communities organized teachers by interest or topic in order to address problems of practice that plague their particular context (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Reflective inquiry allowed teachers and administrators to address problems of practice as they consider the best educational approaches that will support their professional learning (Drago-Severson, 2009). Visionary school leadership provided teachers with the support and resources needed to work collaboratively in order to enhance teaching practices in and out of the school building (Burke, 2013). Peer mentoring and coaching facilitated teacher collaboration as trusting relationships
yield collegial interaction over time (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). Although research indicated that these components of professional development augment teacher collaboration, additional research was needed to understand how private faith-based secondary teachers perceive these learning initiatives.

This research provided information for private school leaders who are in search of understanding why not all faculty members willingly participate in collaborative professional learning. Teachers have understood the complex nature of sustaining collaboration with their colleagues in order to avoid feelings of isolation in their practice. This study has been valuable to researchers in the area of private faith-based secondary education who study how teachers’ perceptions of professional development impacted the teaching and learning experience.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

Research indicated that teachers who participate in collaborative professional development not only improved their own learning but also improved communication over time (Libermann, 1995; Drago-Severson, 2009). Previous research has identified four major themes in collaborative teacher professional development. These themes identified in the literature on collaborative development underscored the importance of building school communities that valued teacher interaction in order to avoid isolation and burn out (Burke, 2013). Accordingly, collaboration through the themes of professional learning communities (Bray, 2002), reflective thinking practices (Kazemi & Hubbard, 2008), visionary leadership practices (Schwarz McCotter, 2001), and peer mentoring practices (Burke, 2013; Danielowich, 2012) increased teachers’ ability to learn from one another because of their ongoing interaction during such activities. Studies suggested that these components enhanced the role of the traditional one-day workshop or seminar that minimally impacted teachers’ collaboration and learning (Garet,
Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Similarly, work place experiences demonstrated that teachers who collaborate on an ongoing basis developed and sustained teaching and learning practices. These experiences altered the educators’ instructional approaches and intentionally improved student success (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Jewett & MacPhee, 2012).

In order to apply the major themes presented in the literature on collaborative teacher professional development to this study, the researcher contextualized the essence of this particular research environment. Collaborative teacher professional development within the context of private faith-based secondary schools has required an understanding of the traditions of such a learning context. In particular, this study examined the role of collaborative teacher learning in a Catholic secondary school. At times, the traditional hierarchical structures of the Catholic educational systems have had the potential to inhibit teacher professional learning and student success (Mayotte, Wei, Lamphier, & Doyle, 2013). This hindrance has resulted from issues concerning funding, time, appropriate and relevant learning materials, and access to teacher support programs. These issues challenge what educators have taught and how they have instructed their students. Moreover, these issues have exacerbated teachers’ abilities to learn from one another and to use the concept of collaboration as a tool to enhance their practice.

Teachers of such Catholic schools often have found themselves in difficult positions regarding their need and desire to facilitate professional growth and collaborative learning. As schools have been governed by a diocese or archdiocese, the bishop or archbishop and the superintendent of schools of the diocese or archdiocese typically have controlled school funding and the overarching curriculum. Such a structure has posed an intimidating presence to educators who have seen this design as an impediment to their own development and students’
success. In essence, educators have assumed that any requests to enhance the learning structures or change the system of teacher development have reflected poorly on their support of the school, governing structure, or the clerical leadership. Moreover, such a system may have restricted a teacher’s ability to redirect practices or apply the themes of collaborative professional learning as described in the literature because of fear of job loss or other punitive outcomes. These ideals have described various facets of the Catholic parochial education system for many years as scarce resources and inadequate funding typically impact teacher development and student learning (Lucilio, 2009).

However, as these traditional issues have affected the Catholic school system, the research site in this study has differed from the common Catholic faith-based school. As a school under the guidance of a particular religious group, this research site has found itself financially independent of the Archdiocese. Although the school has respected the leadership and governance of the Archbishop, the school has not had to subscribe to any archdiocesan programing or typical day-to-day school policy. Guided by the premise that the school has desired to commit itself “to ongoing personal and communal formation that fosters the orientation of ourselves and our students toward God” (Fundamental Principals of founding religious order) has spoken to the notion of the importance of collaboration. This collaboration has created the foundation of this school and the work its educators have undertaken on a daily basis. Accordingly, diverse opportunities have existed for teachers to develop skills and improve their practice in a collaborative fashion. These activities have focused on technology integration, understanding adolescent development, and content-specific learning opportunities. In conjunction with the school leadership, the school’s Professional Learning Committee has solicited ideas from the faculty as to the types of professional learning that may be of interest.
Moreover, this joint decision-making process has allowed for multiple voices to be present in the professional development planning process. The school leadership has encouraged and financially supported individuals who have wanted to enhance their teaching repertoires with development activities on and off of the campus. The school in this study has adhered to the belief that conversation and process has guided its daily function. Nevertheless, school leaders have conveyed the notion of transparency. This transparency has encouraged teachers to voice openly their concerns, fears, or anxiety regarding their work. Despite of the fact that the school leadership has supported such teacher collaboration and learning opportunities, many faculty members have resisted these opportunities (Drago-Severson, 2012). This issue has identified that teachers’ perception of collaborative learning within this contexts has differed even though various structures have been in place in order to sustain these initiatives.

Although the literature summarized the major themes of collaborative professional development and their ability to affect teacher practice at school similar to this research site, fewer studies captured the importance of teacher perception toward these learning strategies. This study contributed to the academic literature and research on collaborative professional development because it highlighted the role of teachers’ perception of their own learning in the private faith-based secondary school sector. This particular focus filled a gap in the literature on the importance of teacher perception about collaborative professional development in this particular environment. In a global context, researchers and school leaders can utilize the findings of this study in order to address their own private faith-based secondary school culture and teacher perception of professional learning. Additionally, this research examined teachers’ perceptions of professional learning components in a private secondary faith-based school with the desire to identify trends in practice that may be useful when studying similar contexts.
In addition to the significance of this study to the research and academic community, there have been practical implications for practitioners and school leaders of the private faith-based secondary school context. When school leaders have provided the time and space for teachers to participate in learning activities, individual and group inquiry into best practices has taken place (Mullen & Hunt, 2008). As teachers regularly collaborated with one another, they have articulated tactical strategies, methodologies, and pedagogies that have best address their particular students’ learning needs. This collaborative practice has enhanced teaching methodologies and pedagogies. Simultaneously, educators working collaboratively have built collegial, trusting, and professional relationships among each other and school leaders (Estepp, Roberts, & Carter, 2012). As practitioners in the private secondary faith-based school context attempt to sustain such collaborative learning, both teachers and leaders have understood why some individuals have desired to participate in these initiatives. More importantly, as educators have worked to enhance their teaching repertoire, they have understood the types of programs and structures that a particular context has needed in order to cultivate a positive attitude toward adult learning. Moreover, school leaders and teachers have recognized individuals who have not valued the role of collaboration within their particular school context and have provided suggestions to overcome this barrier.

As educators and school leaders have benefited from identifying the tools and structures that affect teacher perception of collaborative professional development, this work has had an impact on the school examined in this study. This micro-level significance identified the major factors and impediments that have affected teacher perception concerning the relevance of collaboration in this particular context. Additionally, the school used in this research has understood the practical tools and structures of collaborative teacher development that directly
have attracted its faculty to participate in professional learning. Most importantly, this study has been significant for this school since teacher collaboration has had the potential to yield positive student learning outcomes. As teachers have worked together to improve their practice, they have utilized ideas and teaching strategies that have helped students succeed in school.

As this study has benefited school leaders at the micro level, understanding the role of teacher perception of professional learning has affected the global education community. Although individual private secondary faith-based school leaders have attempted to garner student success through teacher development, private school leaders in other communities may not have adopted similar teacher learning practices. This dissimilar approach to professional learning has created a disparity among these secondary schools. As a result of this disparity, students in these private, non-standardized settings have lacked common knowledge or skills because of inefficient teacher professional development. Researchers and school leaders who have studied the private faith-based secondary school context can use this study to promote the development of teacher professional learning, which has assured that a certain set of teaching competencies exist in an array of schools. Since private schools have enjoyed the freedom of not following state-mandated curricular frameworks, this study has promoted teacher-learning competencies across the private faith-based secondary school context that has enhanced teacher professional development. In turn, teacher professional development that has enhanced student achievement has prepared students for future endeavors without sacrificing their ability to compete in a global society.

**Positionality Statement**

My problem of practice addressed how private faith-based secondary school faculty members have perceived collaborative teacher professional development. This problem caused
me to reflect on why I have found the topic of collaborative teacher professional development intriguing. I attributed this intrigue to my own secondary and undergraduate learning experiences. As a student, I worked diligently to achieve excellent academic results. Although grades were important to me, the actual process of learning interested me. From the initial presentation of subject matter and my ability to process and apply this new knowledge, I greatly enjoyed the evolution of the learning process. More importantly, I enjoyed discussing these ideas in and out of the classroom with my peers and instructors. The constructive feedback I received on my work greatly shaped and improved my thought process and skills as a student and continues to do so today. Consequently, when I entered the teaching profession ten years ago, I expected this cycle of learning to be constantly present. If the learning process has shaped our students’ thinking and learning skills, I assumed that the adults in the school also would thrive on their continued learning and development. However, over these past ten years working in the same Catholic secondary school, I have noticed that some colleagues lack my zeal for professional development. This professional work has been hard to execute and maintain since it is not a shared interest of the entire faculty. Therefore, my own experiences as a student and those of my professional work have increased my desire to understand why some of my colleagues have not perceived, as I do, how professional learning opportunities positively have affected teaching practice and student learning outcomes.

Currently, I teach Spanish language, literature, and culture and serve as the World Languages Department Chair at a Catholic private secondary school for young men on the Northshore of Boston, MA. The school has required teachers to participate in professional learning activities on designated days during the year. Accordingly, the administration has delayed the start of school once a week by one hour so teachers can attend workshops and/or
group discussions. Additionally, the school has had three to four professional days during the course of the year. On these days, classes have not been held, but teachers have gathered for a speaker or workshop activity. The administration has mandated these learning opportunities for faculty. However, the majority of school-sponsored teacher professional development has taken place over the summer. These summer seminars have lasted for a total of fifteen hours over a three-day period and have had quarterly follow-up sessions during the school year. During the past ten years, I have participated in a number of professional development opportunities in the form these three-day seminars on campus or weeklong workshops off campus that followed a traditional pattern of outside expert or consultant facilitating the learning (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). These workshops, generally speaking, have had little follow-up and have not provided an opportunity for me to implement fully what I have learned. If I have been able to implement new ideas, I have done so typically in an isolated fashion with little or no discussion with my departmental colleagues. A number of reasons such as time constraint, administrative tasks, and colleague resistance to collaborate have inhibited my ability to work with my colleagues. Accordingly, these professional development activities have resembled the one-time learning opportunities that have lacked continuous dialogue and follow-through with other teachers who may or may not wish to participate in this professional development.

These traditional learning activities have underscored the typical nature of professional development at my school over the past years. Educators at my school have enjoyed the professional freedom to instruct in their content area while not worrying about the federal and state mandates of public education. This freedom has created a unique teaching and learning context in which teachers ultimately have controlled the amount of professional learning in which they have participated. Consequently, this control over the amount and type of
professional development has enhanced or stagnated my colleagues’ teaching practice because of their exposure, or lack thereof, to new ideas and strategies. Moreover, the way in which this learning has affected individuals’ practice has depended on their desire to collaborate with other colleagues and implement what they have learned. In order to enhance this learning perspective, my school has amplified its professional learning program by hiring an Assistant Principal for Mission and Identity a number of years ago. This administrator has overseen teacher observation and the rollout of various professional development opportunities. Although this initiative has enhanced the professional learning program, teachers’ attitude toward their own development has varied based on personal perception. Therefore, this problem of practice has represented a context-specific issue that I wanted to investigate in order to implement professional development that promotes collaboration and evolving methodology.

Attempting to overcome this traditional model of professional learning in my context, I have perused graduate degrees in both Spanish (Masters) and Education (Ed.D.). I have taken these initiatives with the hope of creating my own professional learning experience that have embodied the prevalent ideas in the literature concerning collaborative teacher learning. These graduate opportunities have provided years of interaction and dialogue with colleagues and professors from around the world focusing on issues central to the work we have done in our communities, schools, and individual classrooms. These educational opportunities have provided me with the stimulation and ongoing learning that lack in my own context. Throughout these degree programs, I have learned to apply content and skills to the various situations I have faced each day. More importantly, I have had the support and encouragement of colleagues who share similar interests in the field of education. In addition, I have been able to share some of these ideas with my departmental colleagues. However, since the current structure of
professional development has provided faculty with situated learning opportunities each month, I have been unable to share these ideas and skills as fully as possible.

As a result of my desire to improve my learning and professional practices, I have sought to collaborate with my colleagues departmentally and school-wide. I have identified individuals who have demonstrated an interest in talking about what we teach and how we teach. We have formed our own professional learning communities where we have enjoyed speaking about pedagogy and methodology in order to improve our individual and collective practices. Additionally, I actively have searched for colleagues with whom I could travel to seminars and conferences both within our content area as well as other areas of specialization such as technology integration. I have aspired to initiate and sustain dialogue over time in order for my colleagues and I to improve our practice while enhancing student-learning outcomes (Schwarz McCotter, 2001; Kazemi & Hubbard, 2008). This self-induced style of professional development has represented a model of servant leadership because some of my colleague and I have shared a passion for learning that we have hoped to pass on to other teachers (Yukl, 2013). We have wished to lead by example in order to help guide others to understand the benefits and values of collaborative professional development. Building off the examples of servant leadership found in the New Testament, sharing of our beliefs has characterized an essential component of strong leadership and positive influence over others (Greenleaf, 1977).

Similarly, as a servant leader in my particular context, my attitude and actions must nurture, empower, and animate my colleagues to become active in their own learning. However, I realize I must be sensitive to their needs and concerns (Yukl, 2013). The collaborative work of my colleagues and I have provided a model of leadership to our fellow educators that strives to improve teaching and learning practices. Moreover, we have worked to influence others as the
symbolic shepherds of our colleagues who have possessed doubts, concerns, and confusion about evolving professional practice. Along with the work my colleagues and I have done in an attempt to motivate our peers as servant leaders, the administration similarly has utilized this style of leadership in their own governing practices. However, I have recognized that striving to help others to share a vision of collaboration and professional learning has created tension among educators who have not subscribed to such a model of teacher learning. This tension has hindered collaboration because some teachers have perceived the work of those who have supported professional learning as an imposition on their traditional methodological freedom.

My goal of this research was to mitigate the tensions that have existed between colleagues and to utilize collaborative professional development as a way to improve teaching practice within my context.

As an advocate of collaborative teacher professional development, I have demonstrated a favorable position toward such learning initiatives. I have recognized and understood the need for teachers to work collaboratively over a period of time in order to improve practice. However, I have understood the fact that not all of my colleagues have shared the same enthusiasm or interest in this topic of study. The reason I have perceived this lack of interest has resulted from the idea that some teachers are at a point in their career where they are not willing or interested to collaborate with others. This disinterest has resulted from the potential fear of colleagues and administrators passing judgment on the credibility of their work. Similarly, teachers have lacked the desire to cooperate in such learning models because they have been used to working in isolation without experiencing constructive criticism or feedback. Moreover, in private faith-based secondary teaching, this isolation has served as a major factor in teacher attitude toward professional development. Although I have been open to my colleagues’ practical ideas in order
to improve my own practice, I have realized that some may fear the idea of receiving feedback for professional and personal reasons. I have defined this fear as an unsettling feeling of the unknown. Additionally, my colleagues have been afraid to take risks with their students, implement a new strategy, or integrate new technology into the classroom because of the anxiety caused by not knowing how such initiatives will have impacted student-learning outcomes. Based on previous successful methodologies, some of my colleagues have felt safe in continuing with these traditional practices. Nevertheless, since my school has not had to adhere to any state or district professional development guidelines, some colleagues have resisted the leadership’s attempt to provide us with collective learning experiences. This hesitance to participate in a collaborative fashion has resulted from a tradition of private faith-based secondary teaching as an individual practice conducted in the confines of a teacher’s classroom. Although hesitance has existed, my interest in this topic has possessed the ability to explore this hesitance in order to enhance teacher collaborative practices.

While understanding how my colleagues have reacted to collaborative professional development, I have acknowledged that my level of formal education may differ from many of my colleagues. Many of my colleagues have not received any formal instruction in teacher education since it is not an employment requirement. Additionally, some of my peers do not hold a master’s degree in their content area or teacher education. This lack of exposure to graduate level course work has inhibited their understanding of practices and pedagogical ideas that can improve their work and student achievement. Although the instructional leaders have promoted professional development outside of the school, many teachers have not taken advantage of these opportunities. Since I have believed in the importance of seeking learning opportunities outside of the school, I have realize that a lack of exposure to these outside
opportunities have hindered teachers’ ability to understand the value of collaborative professional development. The value I have placed on professional learning has spoken to the importance of this study for my particular work context.

I have believed in the importance and value of teachers sustaining collaborative professional development with their direct colleagues and peers. This belief came as a direct result of my interest and enthusiasm in seeking learning opportunities both individually and with other colleagues. My position on this topic has come from my own experiences and the literature on collaborative teacher professional learning and the positive impact collaboration has on student success (Burke, 2013). However, I have understood that not all of my current colleagues have had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the literature in order to understand the impact of sustaining dialogue around teacher development. Consequently, my work studying and promoting collaborative professional learning in a private faith-based secondary school may not have represented the majority interest of the faculty. However, my interest has represented an important part of the school’s professional working culture and ways to enhance its productivity.

In order to underscore my position pertaining to this topic, it has been necessary to understand that teachers, like students, have learned in different ways over varying time periods. Using Drago-Severson’s (2009) ideas surrounding adult growth and learning, I have known that my colleagues’ ways of learning have differed from one another. Additionally, their readiness to engage in collaborative professional development has differed because of their conceptualization of past learning experiences. With my previous knowledge of the literature surrounding the importance of collaborative teacher professional development, I have recognized that that all of my colleagues have not shared the same skills and aptitudes needed to sustain ongoing learning.
Although this particular problem of practice has been of great interest in my own professional life, I have understood that some of my colleagues have placed greater value on other areas of their work. Subsequently, investigating this aspect of this context’s culture has shed light on the relevance of teacher collaboration and the positive effects it has had on practice.

In promoting my position on this topic, I have understood that I carry preconceived notions of my colleagues and peers who have not subscribed to collaborative professional development. As a researcher working in my own context, I have ground my observations in the established literature and research practices. However, I have addressed how teachers have reacted to and shared their relationship with collaborative professional development. Additionally, I have engaged colleagues from both ends of the professional development spectrum in order to include multiple perspectives in my work. These steps have allowed me to extract data that has spoken to the heart of this phenomenon using teachers’ voices.

After a careful reflection on the importance of my problem of practice related to my particular context, I have addressed how my position on the topic has guided this study and inspired my work. In addition, I have addressed my preliminary position on collaborative professional learning while sharing the role it has played in my daily work. I have continued to show how my positionality toward this topic has found foundation in the scholarly literature in this field. Moreover, I have desired to promote the importance of collaborative professional learning in order to influence teacher practice and student leaning outcomes.

**Research Question**

How do faculty members in private faith-based secondary schools perceive collaborative teacher professional development?

**Theoretical Framework**
Understanding teachers’ perception of collaborative professional development has required an understanding of structures that support teacher learning. Additionally, a discussion of these learning structures has underscored how educators in communities of practice have interacted with one another in order to sustain this ongoing learning. Garet’s et al. (2001) core features model and Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice model represented two theoretical frameworks that related how the design and structure of teacher learning affected teacher collaboration. Garet et al. (2001) suggested that certain core structures and values of professional development must exist in order in order to sustain teacher collaboration. Subsequently, Wenger (1998) posited that the design of communities of practice and their members’ involvement impacted ongoing learning and collaboration through shared vision and resources. The combination of these theoretical frameworks addressed how teachers perceived the usefulness of ongoing learning and collaboration as it related to their practice. Moreover, these theoretical frameworks examined how the core structures and values that have sustained professional development related learning to the need for ongoing collaboration. The focus of the work of Garet et al. (2001) and Wenger (1998) have the potential to enhance teacher learning and practice while increasing teacher socialization, a collective sense of shared identity, trust, and daily communication.

**Exploring the Core Structures and Values of Collaborative Professional Development**

Garet et al. (2001) utilized a theoretical framework of teacher professional development that promoted core features and values of effective teacher training. This core features model presented the structural aspects of professional development activity. The structural features of this model included (a) the form of the activity, (b) the duration of the activity, and (c) the collective participation of individuals in the activity. Additionally, Garet et al. (2001) specified
the core values of this model that supported teacher learning, which included (a) the degree of content-specific focus of the activity, (b) the extent to which the activity promoted active learning, and (c) the degree to which the activity promoted coherence in teachers’ professional development. The authors of this framework suggested “although some researchers are beginning to examine the effects of professional development on teaching and learning, few studies have explicitly compared the effects of different characteristics of professional development” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 919). Accordingly, this framework offered a way to examine how the structures of professional learning contributed to effective teacher training and translate into practice.

The core features of professional development suggested by Garet et al. (2001) presented certain structural features that support teacher learning. The first major tenet of this model suggested that the type of learning activity a teacher participated in must be ongoing over time. Consequently, the traditional one-day workshop or conference formats failed to sustain ongoing teacher learning and collaboration. Therefore, Garet et al. (2001) suggested a transformation of these traditional learning structures into activities that have taken place within the confines of the regular school schedule. This structural aspect of teacher learning has allowed teachers to develop common time to plan, discuss, and evaluate practice on a continuous basis during their work day. Peer observation, peer coaching, professional learning communities, and general school-wide networks represented the various approaches to reform professional development activity. In addition, the second major tenet of this theoretical framework indicated that the duration of the professional development activity affected teacher learning. Garet et al. (2001) suggested that activities that have taken place over time provided an opportunity for in-depth discussion of teaching practices, content, and student needs. Moreover, these ongoing activities
have allowed teachers the opportunity to execute new ideas and practices in their own classroom as their level of comfort and experience increased. Finally, the last major tenet of the structural aspect of the Garet et al. (2001) framework asserted that collective participation affords time for teachers to evaluate common experiences, problems, and teaching strategies. In addition to understanding the concerns of colleagues, teachers who collectively participated in professional learning enhanced their understanding of instructional goals, methods, problems and solutions of their practice. These major tenets characterized the three structural features of teacher professional development presented in this model that have affected teacher perception of such learning initiatives.

In addition to the structural features of the Garet et al. (2001) theoretical framework, three core values of this model defined the effectiveness of teacher professional development. A focus on the content-specific professional development activities characterized that first major tenet of the core values aspect of this model. This model indicated that professional learning, which focused on subject-specific content development and the ways in which students learn, promoted the active negotiation of teachers’ practices. This active negotiation allowed teachers to adjust their practice in their content area in order to better meet the learning needs of their students. This type of professional development refrained from the teaching of certain pedagogies and skills in isolation from actual course content. Additionally, a second guiding tenet of the Garet et al. (2001) core values framework indicated that professional development must provide active learning opportunities for teachers. Accordingly, this aspect of the model suggested that the activity’s design allow teachers to engage in meaningful discussion, planning, and practice of content and methodology. Active learning practices suggested by this framework included peer observation, designing and reforming curriculum, reviewing student work, and
enhancing pedagogical practices through reading the professional literature. Finally, the coherence of teacher professional development represented the third major tenet of the core values aspect of this model. Garet et al. (2001) posited that effective professional development focused on the extent to which learning directly correlated to teacher practice. Moreover, this aspect of teacher learning indicated that development activities promoted content, skills, and knowledge over a period of time. Nevertheless, such activities have fostered greater coherence of practice. Teachers’ perception of the positive value of professional learning have increased when such learning activities have related to and directly impacted teacher practice. The coherence of these learning activities established a systematic program of teacher professional development that supported ongoing inquiry into practice. These major tenets described the three core values of teacher professional development presented in this model.

**Seminal Roots of Garet et al. (2001) Model**

The Garet et al. (2001) framework for understanding the central structures and core values of teacher professional development originated from the work of education reform experts. Little (1993) discussed how teacher learning impacted individual construction of knowledge. Subsequently, the use of teacher development that focused on (a) school organization, (b) teacher experiences, (c) various approaches to learning, (d) student needs, (e) teacher needs, and (f) inquiry into practice has enhanced the work of teachers and their perception of learning. In addition, Garet et al. (2001) referenced the work of Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) because it spoke to the coherence of teacher learning. These authors posited that teacher development must (a) engage the teacher in the activity, (b) promote experimentation, (c) suggest sharing practices with colleagues, (d) relate to teacher and student needs, and (e) connect to school reform. Garet et al. (2001) used the work of these seminal
authors in order to explain how various aspects of teacher professional development informed their framework and sustain ongoing teacher learning.

**Contemporary Uses of the Garet et al. Model**

In addition to the seminal influences on the work of Garet et al. (2001), contemporary scholars continued to build off the framework in order to explore the field of teacher learning. For example, Hiebert et al. (2002) used this framework to suggest the importance of the creation of a teacher knowledge base of information that has evolved from effective professional development practices. Additionally, Thoonen et al. (2011) built from Garet et al. (2001) in order to analyze how school leaders used the effective structures of professional development in order to improve teacher and student learning experiences. A careful examination of contemporary scholars who used the Garet et al. (2001) model revealed the relevance of this framework in the teacher professional development literature.

**Exploring Effective Collaboration in the Work Place**

In addition to an examination of the core structures and values of teacher professional development as presented in the *core features model* (Garet et al, 2001), an understanding of how communities of practice have facilitated teacher collaboration represented another aspect of effective professional learning. Furthermore, Wenger’s (1998) theoretical framework presented a detailed understanding of how communities of learners have interacted in order to promote a shared understanding of their work. This shared understanding has had the potential to create a toolbox of common practices and collegial relationships that have built trust and affirmation among colleagues. In his model of *communities of practice*, Wenger (1998) suggested that as people work together they (a) develop mutual agreement among individuals that bind members of a community into a social entity, (b) allow community members to develop a shared repertoire
of tools and knowledge, and (c) develop their purpose and mission collectively as a group. This framework offered a way to explore how the core structures and values of teacher professional development imbued themselves into a community of learners while promoting ongoing collaboration.

Wenger (1998) defines a community of practice as a group of people who have shared a mutual passion and common concern for specific topic of interest. Such a community has attempted to co-construct knowledge around such interests through ongoing collaboration. Therefore, the communities of practice framework presented three major functions of learning groups that support ongoing collaboration. The first major conceptual underpinning of this model suggested that mutual engagement among members of a learning community enabled people to develop a social entity that connected these individuals to their work. Accordingly, this tenet suggested that mutual participation in learning activities created relationships among a group’s members. This mutual inclusion created a sense of individual involvement in the overall function and process of a group. Moreover, Wenger’s (1998) second tenet implied that as community members developed a sense of mutual engagement in their learning activities, communal practices began to develop. These communal practices allowed individuals to establish a set of resources, routines, tools, and ideas that were necessary in order to carry out the group’s function. These collaborative resources characterized a group’s ability to preserve its past while defining its future direction. The final tenet of Wegner’s (1998) theoretical framework assumed that mutual participation in learning activities and a shared repertoire of resources established a collective enterprise that defined a particular learning community. Moreover, the creation of such a collective enterprise has allowed groups members to actively negotiate meaning of the work in which they participated. As a result of this joint construction
of knowledge, group members have developed mutual accountability, trust, and coherence that have become integral to their practice. The three major components of Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice framework have purported a practice-oriented approach to group collaboration, which has supported the ongoing evolution of a group’s shared practice.

Seminal Roots of Wenger’s (1998) Model

Wenger (1998) developed his communities of practice framework by expounding upon the seminal work of Vygotsky (1978) and his understanding of the social nature of learning. The research presented by Vygotsky (1978) suggested that individuals bring two levels of learning to any given task: (a) an actual developmental level of learning that represents what a learner can do without assistance and (b) the potential developmental level of learning that represents what a learner can do with the assistance of his or her peers. Subsequently, Vygotsky (1978) along with Wertsch (1994) and Wertsch and Bivens (1992) presented the idea of sociocultural theory. This theory postulates that members of a particular community learn best when their linguistic, cognitive, and social abilities combine. Therefore, individuals thrive when both cognitive and social processes combine and knowledge is co-constructed. Moreover, Wenger (1998) borrowed from this theory in order to establish the importance of individuals working together to co-create knowledge through mutual engagement in a learning activity.

Accordingly, previous research discussed how teacher professional development has characterized a social process whereby educators have worked together to construct knowledge.

In addition to the work of Vygotsky (1978), Wenger (1998) utilized the community of teachers framework developed by Quinn (1988). This framework promoted the concept of team culture in order to describe the importance of a shared belief and value system as it pertained to the learning process. In addition, Quinn’s (1988) framework suggested that (a) group decision-
making, (b) creativity, (c) process, and (d) efficiency established how a teacher team worked together to achieve its goals. More importantly, this framework emphasized a team as a social entity working together in order to extract knowledge from the learning process. From this work, Wegner (1998) further postulated that learners jointly constructed knowledge from their shared experiences. Furthermore, this joint construction of knowledge fostered group cohesion and intentionality as it pertained to practice-oriented learning. The influence of Vygotsky (1978) and Quinn’s (1988) work allowed Wegner (1998) to establish his communities of practice framework.

**Contemporary Uses of Wenger’s (1998) Model**

In addition to Wegner’s (1998) use of this framework, other researchers elaborated on this model in order to contribute to the field of collaborative professional development. Brouer et al. (2011) used Wegner’s (1998) framework in order to address the extent of which communities of practice occurred in the school workplace. This study suggested the importance of teacher participation in professional development and their attitude toward ongoing collaborative learning. Additionally, Anyidoho (2010) applied Wegner’s (1998) framework in order to demonstrate how communities of learners established a shared meaning of their work through inventing, forming, and imagining community. The implications of this work suggested that leaders who provided the resources and materials for individuals to develop a shared sense of their work helped to create a learning community instead of imposing such a community.

**Rationale for the Proposed Theoretical Frameworks**

**Combining Two Theoretical Frameworks**

Understanding the structural and core features of Garet’s et al. (2001) model for teacher professional development and Wegner’s (1998) communities of practice model for effective
collaboration created a new lens for analyzing teacher perception of collaborative professional development. Accordingly, this combination of frameworks allowed the researcher to understand the structural components of professional development and how teams of teachers worked together in order to sustain collaborative learning environments. Therefore, this study’s problem of practice aligned with the combined theoretical frameworks’ tenets because it sought to understand how teachers’ perception professional learning structures affected their individual and collective practice (Johnson, 2007). This combined theoretical lens allowed the researcher to analyze teachers’ perception of collaborative learning and its practical implications within the study’s particular context of private secondary faith-based schools. In addition, as this study’s research question desired to address teachers’ perception of collaborative learning, also it permitted the researcher to understand how this perception affected the kinds of professional development platforms used to support teacher learning (Garet et al., 2001). Moreover, by using this study’s research question, the investigator explored the extent to which teacher collaboration develops within a school community through these identified learning structures (Wegner, 1998). As a result of the utilization of this combined framework in conjunction with the study’s research question, the researcher understood how teacher perception of the structures of collaborative professional development in private secondary faith-based schools affected their practice. Both the problem of practice and the research questions have the potential to reveal why some educators in this setting have not subscribed to collaborative learning opportunities. Finally, the combination of these two frameworks further shaped this study because the researcher utilized an interpretative phenomenological approach to data gathering and analysis. This approach informed the research as to how teachers perceived the role of collaborative professional development.
Addressing Strengths and Weaknesses of the Frameworks

As this combined framework provided a lens in order to analyze this study’s problem of practice, strengths and weaknesses existed that may have affected the findings. The Garet et al. structural model of teacher professional development contained many multifaceted variables. These variables, including type of activities, duration of activities, collective participation, and activity coherence, posed potential difficulties for analyzing teacher perception of the usefulness of collaborative learning. This multiple variable approach to analyzing professional development represented a potential weakness of the framework since different logistics and structural features of teacher learning must be factored into the evaluation of effective development. However, such a multi-faceted model provided a thorough conception of what has made professional development effective. Additionally, a potential weakness of Wegner’s (1998) communities of practice model has resulted from the notion that a school community already has had strong social standards and practices in place. This perception may have overemphasized the idea that all teacher learning must occur in a group structure. However, such a lens was necessary to explore the effectiveness of a collaborative practice-oriented approach to teacher professional development. Nevertheless, the individual strengths of each model suggested an approach to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher professional development. Together, these ideas have worked to build a collaborative culture of mutual teacher engagement in the learning process.

Analyzing Other Theoretical Frameworks

In addition to the combination of these two theoretical lenses to evaluate this study’s problem of practice and research question, other theoretical frameworks addressed similar aspects of this study. Knapp (1997) proposed the idea of system reform thinking that analyzed
how school reform policy affected school leaders and their ability to conduct teacher development. Although this model rethought traditional forms of teacher learning, its focus on systemic school reforms was beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, this framework did not relate to teacher perception of professional learning. In addition, Allen and Penuel (2015) suggested a sense-making framework in order to address how teachers dealt with coherence of professional learning. This coherence related to the ways that teachers and school leaders negotiated the meaning and purpose of professional development as it pertained to their local environment. This particular framework addressed one aspect of teacher professional development, but it failed to address the collaborative nature of teacher learning presented in this study. Accordingly, these frameworks addressed teacher professional learning, but they lacked the detailed focus of the frameworks presented by Garet et al. (2001) and Wenger (1997) in order to analyze teacher perception of collaborative teacher learning and its impact on their practice.

Conclusion

The theoretical framework proposed for this study combined Garet’s et al. (2001) model of teacher professional development together with Wegner’s (1998) communities of practice model in order to address teacher perception of collaborative professional development. Although previous research has identified effective professional development structures, sparse research has evaluated teacher perception toward the value of such learning structures within the context of this particular study (Johnson, 2007). In particular, research that focused on teacher perception of collaborative professional development in private secondary faith-based schools has revealed why some educators in this setting have not subscribe to these learning opportunities.
The researcher used the theoretical frameworks of Garet et al. (2001) and Wegner (1998) in order to support this study’s problem of practice and research question. The major tenets of Garet’s et al. (2001) core features model presented the structural aspects and values of effective professional development. The structural features included (a) the form of the activity, (b) the duration of the activity, and (c) the collective participation of individuals in the activity. The core values of this model that supported teacher learning, which included (a) the degree of content-specific focus of the activity, (b) the extent to which the activity promoted active learning, and (c) the degree to which the activity promoted coherence in teachers’ professional development. The strength of this model centered on the recognition of the structures that promoted effective teacher learning. Although this model presented the effective tools of teacher learning, alone it failed to address a way to sustain ongoing teacher collaboration. Subsequently, Wegner’s (1998) communities of practice framework suggested that as people work together they (a) develop mutual agreement binding them into a social entity, (b) allow community members to develop a shared repertoire of tools and knowledge, and (c) develop their purpose and mission collectively as a group. This framework spoke to the ability of teachers to build collaborative communities but failed to address the kinds of learning activities that have made professional development effective. Combined, the strengths these two frameworks presented a model that analyzed teachers’ perceptions of the structures of professional development in the private secondary faith-based school context.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Teacher professional development has required an array of strategies and approaches that have supported ongoing learning. Administrators and teacher-leaders have understood a school context and particular culture as they have sought to develop effective learning opportunities (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Understanding a particular context and culture has allowed leaders to utilize professional learning opportunities that have enhanced adult learning and have transformed schools into active learning organizations. These active learning organizations have created environments where colleagues and leaders have worked together to address problems of practice pertinent to the particular school. Additionally, this approach has redefined ways in which educators have pursued curricular objectives and goals in order to enhance the teaching and learning process (Lieberman, 1995).

This type of professional learning has assumed a dedication to collaborative inquiry. This inquiry has required educators “purposefully examining and reflecting on one’s assumptions, beliefs, values, commitments, and convictions as part of the learning, teaching, and leadership process” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 154). The process of collaborative inquiry provides a protocol for understanding how individual learning preferences and interests has influenced the way in which educators have approached professional learning situations. The literature on effective teacher professional development has identified the need to provide learning opportunities that have engaged teachers in the art of thinking and reflecting on their practices in a collaborative context (Burke, 2013; Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Danielowich, 2012). Although this theme emerged from the literature, research indicated that these findings
did not align because of how teachers perceived the role of these learning initiatives in their practice (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Penuel et al., 2007).

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the structures and tools needed to support and sustain collaborative teacher professional development overtime. This review presented an overview of teacher professional development followed by an overview of collaborative professional development. Accordingly, the review analyzed how a) the development of professional learning communities, b) engagement in reflective learning practices, c) visionary leadership, d) school leadership that fosters lasting teacher development, and e) peer mentoring and coaching develop mechanisms that have sustained collaborative teacher professional development. In addition, this review examined how private faith-based secondary schools utilized the tools and structures of collaborative professional development within their particular contexts in order to promote effective teacher learning.

**Overview of Teacher Professional Development**

Although effective teacher learning has related to the practice of collaborative inquiry, traditional teacher professional development has deviated from this practice. Traditional development opportunities involved a school leader or outside professional expert facilitating a workshop or seminar on student learning and teacher practices (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Usually, these experiences have been one or two day events that have had little follow-up during the remainder of the school year (Lieberman, 1995). Additionally, these sessions occurred on a regular basis within a school, and the focus of these events tended to vary from session to session providing a series of disjointed learning experiences that have had little impact on teacher learning (Kazemi & Hubbard, 2008). Related to the workshop model of teacher professional development, Garet, Porter, Desimone,
Birman, and Yoon (2001) concluded that institutes, courses, and conferences represented other traditional forms of professional development that have taken place outside of a teachers’ contexts and their learning needs. As Garet et al. (2001) and Kazemi and Hubbard (2008) suggested, the extent to which professional learning was effective directly related to the practice of such ideas over time. Moreover, these opportunities provided little time for teachers and school leaders to engage in practices of inquiry, instructional methodologies, and peer review/observation (Mullen & Huntiger, 2008). Finally, the traditional style of professional development stemmed from inflexible daily schedules, teacher duty responsibilities, and student overcrowding that has resulted in a lack of common planning and collaboration time (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). This lack of time hindered teachers’ ability to discuss student/teacher needs and has affected student achievement.

The lack of structured time impeded teacher collaboration and increased teacher isolation. Teacher isolation exacerbated the notion of the teaching profession as an individual-centered occupation (Burke, Marx, & Berry, 2011). Teachers seldom found time to visit colleagues’ classes or discuss teaching practices. According to Rothberg (1986), teachers often felt powerless as they spent much time dealing with the more administrative matters of the profession that isolated them from interacting with their colleagues. Such a lack of interaction reduced the possibilities of understanding what practices colleagues used in similar learning situations to best support learning (Sears, 1991). Professional development opportunities, both the formal programing and informal teacher interaction through casual conversation, needed to transcend patterns that have isolated the teacher from his or her colleagues. These learning opportunities necessitated ongoing opportunities for teachers to experiment, reflect, dialogue, and share the failures and successes of the profession.
As educational reform has continued to affect school curriculum and the way in which student achievement is measured, teacher professional development has continued to evolve from the traditional models of the past. Borko (2004) stated policy makers and scholars suggested that professional development opportunities for teachers must “enhance their knowledge and develop new instructional practices” (p. 3) in order to meet the needs of their students and educational mandates. Consequently, scholars and educational reform leaders pointed to the importance of teacher professional development that fully engaged the individual from the beginning of a particular learning initiative (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). By fully engaging an educator in a particular learning initiative, professional development has enabled educators to explore strategies and take the risks necessary to sustain the initiative over time. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) stated that content, context, and design of professional development has played a critical role in its successful implementation in today’s schools. Additionally, successful implementation of professional development has depended on teacher perception of how these learning initiatives relate to their particular context.

In order to address the particular learning needs of teachers based on their individual contexts, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) developed a framework to address how teacher professional development has evolved from its traditional form in order to affect teacher learning. According to Garet et al. (2001), and evaluated in subsequent studies by Penuel et al (2007) and Desimones (2009), professional development reform required a particular set of structural features in order to guide its successful implementation. These structural features indicated that a) the type of activity used, b) the duration of such activity, c) the collective participation of colleagues in such work, and d) the focus on coherence of the development
initiative supported teachers’ learning and growth over a period of time. These structures redefined traditional teacher learning that occurred within a set time frame as it focused on meaningful teacher interaction on topics pertinent to the individual’s context. Thus, the evolution of teacher professional development over the years expanded on traditional teacher learning by developing communities of educators who worked together to enhance practice. Working together over time and focusing on specific goals and objectives has made teacher development continuous, authentic, and organic (Brouwer, Brekelmans, Nieuwenhuis, & Simons, 2012).

The core structures of effective teacher professional development have had the potential to support teacher growth and student achievement over time. The structural features of teacher professional development have allowed school leaders to focus on the content of professional development in order to improve teachers’ content knowledge, methodological and pedagogical knowledge, and strategies to improve student learning (Garet et al., 2001). In addition to examining the content of professional development, teachers who actively participated in these initiatives sustained professional growth in their fields. Active participation in professional development has allowed teachers to observe other educators in action, lead discussions, plan curriculum with teacher-teams, and discuss their practice with colleagues or administrators (Penuel et al., 2007; Desimone, 2009). Moreover, this type of active behavior reduced the passive learning typically characterized by the traditional workshop format and increased teachers’ participation in their learning process. The core features of effective professional development proposed by Garet et al., (2001), Penuel et al., (2007), and Desimone (2009) cultivated coherence of teacher learning activities. This coherence allowed school leaders to provide professional learning opportunities that teachers perceived as relevant to their particular
needs. Accordingly, a professional learning activity was more likely to be effective when it connected directly to teachers’ instructional objectives and goals. The result of focusing on professional development content, the role of active teacher learning, and fostering coherence improved teachers’ knowledge and skills. This effective style of teacher learning enhanced collaboration within a school community.

Overview of Collaborative Professional Development

Effective teacher professional development has sought to deprivatize teachers’ practices with the goal of encouraging collaboration. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) inferred that successful teacher development “encourages sharing, reflecting, and taking risks necessary for change” (p. 84). The nature of teaching and learning has suggested that a community of learners have comes together to discuss ways to enhance student achievement. Incorporating the many voices and experiences of novice and veteran teachers alike promoted a faculty’s shared history and knowledge (Dooner, Mandzuk, & Clifton, 2008). By the nature of this group sharing, collaboration regarding teaching practices occurred while supporting an individual’s sense of belonging to such a learning community. These models of collaborative professional development “engage teachers in joint inquiry about teaching as a means of shifting practice” (Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004). Additionally, these collaborative models promoted peer problem-solving and the pursuit of common learning goals. While teachers have worked toward these common learning goals, they have tended to develop a shared repertoire that enhances their practice over time (Buttler et al, 2004; Vescio et al, 2008). This common understanding supported teacher collaborative efforts within a school community.

Teacher collaboration within a particular context has underscored the importance of establishing a culture of sharing and openness during professional learning initiatives. Gilles,
Wilson, and Elias (2010) concluded that increased teacher collaboration encouraged greater transparency in individuals’ daily work. Furthermore, increased collaboration within a school community built professional trust among teachers in order to share practices and personal anecdotes pertaining to their own experience in the classroom. Rigelman and Ruben (2012) further developed Gilles, Wilson, and Elias’s (2010) notion of collaboration as a conduit of transparency and trust as they inferred that teacher learning occurs at a deeper level when increased social interaction, communication, and reflection took place regularly in a school community. Moreover, Doppenberg, den Brok, and Bakx (2012) supported these findings as they postulated that collaborative teacher development promoted learning that leads to a change in individual cognition and behavior over time. Accordingly, these authors built from the work of Little (1990) who suggested that collaborative teacher learning worked to address sharing of practice and peer assistance in practice that promoted joint learning initiatives over time. These joint initiatives allowed teachers to express themselves to their peers while developing a culture that afforded mutual respect and support in order to enhance collective practice (Akhavan, 2005). Teachers who worked toward mastering the art of collaboration not only enhanced their collective inquiry into the learning process, but they also established a school culture supporting trust in order to sustain open communication.

**Implementing the Structures that Sustain Collaborative Teacher Development**

Collaborative teacher development opportunities have differed from the traditional models of professional learning by increasing patterns of communication while reducing teacher isolation. A review of research studies and theoretical articles highlighted the importance of creating structures to cultivate and sustain a culture of professional learning (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012; Crockett, 2002; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond &
Richardson, 2009). Research showed how structures like professional learning communities (Bray, 2002), peer observation, feedback, and evaluation (Burke, 2013; Danielowich, 2012), critical friends groups (Burke, Marx, & Berry, 2011), and the formation of safe learning spaces by visionary leaders (Schwarz McCotter, 2001) fostered collaborative teacher interactions and effective professional learning opportunities. As a result of these emerging themes on collaborative teacher learning, an important question emerged: What are the necessary structures and tools needed for teachers to sustain a collaborative professional learning environment?

**The Structures and Tools Necessary for Collaborative Professional Development**

Creating a culture of collaborative professional development has required school leaders and teachers to understand the type of structures needed to facilitate the adult learning process. The extent of which teacher learning has been carried out in a particular school setting depended on a school’s past practices and cultural norms (Burke, 2013). Moreover, collaborative professional development “must engage teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection that illuminates the process of learning and development” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 1). As a result of this goal, collaborative teacher professional development has needed certain tools and structures to garner successful. These tools and structures have implemented new learning initiatives over time and have helped “teacher leaders and school leaders engage other educators in sharing and improving their practices through a group learning model...the ‘deprivatization’ of practice” (Burke, Marx, & Berry, 2011, p. 33). Tools and structures such as a) professional learning communities, b) reflective inquiry, c) visionary school leadership, d) school leadership that have fostered lasting teacher development, and e) peer mentoring and coaching, supported the development of collaborative adult learning in schools.
Fostering Collaboration in Professional Learning Communities

As teachers have faced the challenges of twenty-first century education, an increasing need to share concerns and ideas about their practice has emerged. As educators have desired to understand the various needs of their students, efforts have been made to provide a forum by which teachers have meet regularly in small groups in order to discuss the practices relating to curriculum, teaching methodologies, and assessment techniques (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). In order to achieve this cooperative meeting structure, research suggested the formation of professional learning communities (PLCs). These learning communities have focused on a particular aspect of education and have enabled teachers to delve into problems of practice that often affected their particular school culture (Dever & Lash, 2013; Caskey & Carpenter, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Ricardson, 2009). As a tool to support teacher learning, professional learning communities have been “embedded in the contextual needs and practices of a school [and] shift focus from what is taught to what the students learn” (Caskey and Carpenter, 2012, p. 55). Accordingly, as teachers openly studied the problems of their school communities, such a style of teacher learning and development focused on high-level achievement for many students. In order to achieve high levels of student success, teachers have avoided isolation that often resulted from the demands of the profession. By avoiding isolation, teachers better understood the needs of their students as they worked within the confines of their professional learning communities (Sears, 1991).

To understand the purpose and practices of a professional learning community, a suitable definition of such a group has been established from the surveyed literature. As the literature suggested, such definitions varied based on research purposes and authors’ prerogative, but some overarching concepts transcended these variations. Huffman and Jacobson (2003), for example,
suggested that PLCs have been adult learning groups where teachers and administrators involved themselves in the planning, the action taken, and the assessment of student growth and school improvement. Reynolds (2008) asserted that PLCs allowed teachers an opportunity to collaborate on a frequent basis as they shared teaching pedagogies and instructional practices in order to reach student achievement goals. Similarly, Burke, Berry, and Marx (2011) revealed that these professional groups met monthly on a voluntary basis to improve their teaching practices through collaborative learning with the goal of improving student learning. Katz and Early (2010) extended their version of PLCs, networked learning communities (NLCs), as teams of schools working together to enhance continuously teacher learning and student improvement.

Regardless of the combination of descriptors used to define PLCs, their underlying objective was for teachers to work together in order to help improve student achievement. Although authors presented the definition of PLCs broadly in the literature in order to encompass various components, for the purposes of this review, professional learning communities denoted groups of teachers working together to collaborate on and create curriculum and assessment to meet students’ learning needs. Common to all PLCs, the construction of teacher relationships and trust building opened the collaboration process to support unique visions and ideas.

As professional learning communities have d to be a part of teachers’ professional development in K-12 schools, it has been necessary to discuss how PLCs have contributed to teacher improvement and student achievement. Nelson (2008) suggested that communities fostering dialogue, reflection, and inquiry helped teachers use their knowledge and that of their peers to improve curricular practices reflecting their students’ needs. In so far as its relation to student achievement, Siguroardottir (2010) characterized effective PLCs as groups that promoted shared values and visions related to high expectations for students, collaborative learning among
adults, and shared leadership regarding curriculum and pedagogical decision-making. Moreover, this researcher linked these characteristics of effective professional development to student achievement. Teachers improved their practice and students achieved because PLCs focused on how students learned thorough adapting instruction and assessment based on observation and collaboration. In line with Siguroardottir (2010), Louis and Marks (1998) suggested that teachers developed a shared vision of academic excellence and student achievement by way of collaboration. Accordingly, educators reached this shared vision if common meeting time was set aside and administrators provided feedback for teachers’ efforts. According to Louis and Marks (1998), teachers refined their vision of student success by way of reflective dialogue and inquiry.

As teachers and schools leaders established an adult learning environment that have addressed the needs of all its students, professional learning communities offered a structure that promoted a shared learning context for teacher growth. Dever and Lash (2013) posited that increased emphasis on meeting state and national learning standards required educators to understand the resources and support available in order to help meet these demands. Consequently, “a promising reform model, the professional learning communities (PLC) was a means to change the paradigm of professional development” (p. 12) that looked to increase support for school improvement efforts and solve school-wide problems in a team-like manner. This team-like approach fostered a sense of value related to team members’ ideas and opinions pertaining to the particular focus of the professional learning community. Moreover, such a feeling of belonging created a culture of mutual support that encouraged risk-taking and continued professional growth through inquiry (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). As educators developed the paradigm of professional learning communities, they “work together to engage in
continual dialogue to examine their practice and student performance and to develop and implement more effective instructional practices” (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009, p. 49). The structure of the professional learning community created a job-embedded sense of teacher professional learning. This embedded nature of teacher learning emerged from these small groups. Educators collectively reviewed curricular progress and disseminated strategies in order to address gaps in student learning as they “create norms that value mutual aid above privacy” (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009, p. 49). Participation in these learning communities helped teachers and leaders remain focused on the concerns of their particular school community.

As educators have looked to democratize their teaching and learning practices to support student learning, research has indicated that a revised understanding of professional development must continue to evolve. Further review of the literature pointed to another fundamental aspect of PLCs, which was known as critical friends groups (CFGs). These groups desired to foster teachers’ goals of improving instructional practices in order to reach school-wide student achievement (Curry, 2008). For instance, these critical friends groups offered educators an expanded network of opportunities to learn from other administrators, teachers, and experts beyond the confines of their individual school building (Lieberman, 1995). As educators moved beyond the micro level of their particular school, they began to widen their professional networks. By increasing these networks, the pool of available resources increased and helped teachers and administrators to secure the materials needed in order to enhance their own learning and that of their students. These fundamental ideals helped define the purpose and practices of professional learning communities.
In a related study on critical friends groups, Burke, Marx, and Berry (2011) described the outcome of a three-year, district-wide collaborative professional development program. As a particular form of professional learning communities, critical friends groups (CFGs) provided protocols for administrators and teachers to reflect on issues of instruction, methodology, and student achievement in a collaborative fashion both within and beyond the school setting. The findings of this study demonstrated that continued learning in a cooperative context required a revised understanding of teacher professional development. As a result, “coming to understand the nature of the CFG innovation requires teachers and principals to adopt new norms of interaction, unlearn old ways of thinking, [and] acquire new knowledge and skills…” (Burke, Marx, & Berry, 2011, p. 46). The confines of CFGs provided a structure for teachers and administrators to work collaboratively in order to reach such goals. Critical friend groups symbolized another tool that sustained collaborative professional development over time. In addition, these groups supported individual and collective inquiry into teachers’ practice and student outcomes. Accordingly, the literature on CFGs provided helpful insights describing another main characteristic of PLCs and how they sustained student achievement. These characteristics required a unified approach to addressing the learning needs of students. Nevertheless, this unified approach centered on the importance of teacher collaboration in and out of the school setting.

**Collaboration Through Engagement in Reflective Practices**

As professional learning communities and critical friend groups have provided a platform for sustaining collaborative teacher learning, individual and group reflection on teaching and learning practices also has fostered teacher development. In order for educators to implement new ideas that emerged from professional learning communities, a dedicated time in their daily
schedule should exist for communication (Kazemi & Hubbard, 2008). In the traditional sense of the word, dialogue has allowed for two people to share ideas and thoughts related to a given topic in order to express personal convictions. Moreover, according to Schwarz McCotter (2001), dialoguing has involved an exchange of ideas between people and their careful listening of these ideas. This process has allowed individuals to exchange ideas and make sense of multiple learning perspectives related to a particular topic. As teachers and school leaders have built a culture of reflective practitioners, “collaboration in professional development, then, means meaningful, intellectual involvement, with a community of colleagues, [which] may include critique and dissent among members” (Schwarz McCotter, 2001, p. 698). In addition to teachers’ discussing and dialoging on the various aspects of their work, these professionals better understood each other’s pedagogical and methodological approaches to their practice.

In order to expose how various teachers view their own work and that of their colleagues, reflective inquiry has promoted dialogue as a mechanism to garner such results. Burbank and Kauchak (2003) proposed a theoretical framework of collaborative action research “which combines groups of teachers in the design, implementation, and evaluation of action research projects [and] provides one mechanism for professional development that addresses the needs of teachers in contemporary classrooms” (p. 499). As teachers began to participate in learning projects germane to their needs and those of their students, they communicated their ideas, visions, and values with one another. Therefore, as a structure that supported teacher discussion and inquiry, “professional development must include opportunities for active interpretive processes that examine the complex contexts of classrooms and school” (Burbank and Kauchak, 2002, p. 500). This interpretative process provided teachers with an active role in the planning
and decision-making that underscored what students have needed in order to achieve in and out of the classroom.

As teacher interpretive and reflective practices searched to provide insight on each other’s work in the classroom, peer observation and feedback have embodied another tool of the dialogic process. In an analysis of faculty professional development to improve teaching, Estepp, Roberts, & Carter (2012) applied a theoretical framework of constructivism to understand how and why teachers have learned from one another. These authors asserted that a major factor in teachers’ learning was their willingness to study the actions and practices of their colleagues. By reviewing each other’s practices, educators enhanced their own repertoire of teaching tools. Moreover, in an attempt to reach a collaborative learning culture among faculty, a sustained dialogue on teaching and learning should be fostered (Bray, 2002). In order to make meaning from individual teaching and learning experiences, faculty should participate in learning communities that have centered on peer evaluation and feedback. Such a model of professional development would “require faculty participants to observe and evaluate a colleague’s classroom teaching followed by a debriefing session between evaluator and their colleague about the experience” (Estepp, Roberts, & Carter, 2012, p. 84). From this process, both colleagues not only learned from each other, but also learned how to adapt their colleagues’ lessons to better fit their needs and teaching style. This experiential learning model should develop faculty interest in their colleagues’ work. Moreover, this model provided a tool to support an individual’s ability to make sense of this alternative learning experience.

As school leaders and teachers sought to participate in conversations around teaching practices and peer observation, an effort should be made to make the inquiry process part of a school’s culture. Drago-Severson (2009) commented that in order “to build a school that is a
true learning center – a place that nurtures adults and children’s learning developments – reflective practice and collegial inquiry need to become part of the fabric of that school’s culture” (p. 155). Accordingly, as teachers engaged in dialogue and reflected upon their values and those of their colleagues, teachers intentionally have worked toward understanding their colleagues’ behaviors and thoughts. This joint understanding of each other’s ideas has built upon a teacher’s original perspectives. Moreover, Crockett (2002) used this multiple perspective approach to understand how different values affected teachers’ work. In her study, she examined collegial inquiry as a theoretical framework that offered an alternative strategy toward teacher professional development. As teachers and school leaders worked to identify teaching and learning problems, they met regularly to reflect on the elements of their work that contributed to both adult and student success. The theme of collegial inquiry that emerged from this study demonstrated that collaboration designed to challenge teachers’ preconceived notions of students’ abilities differed, but “it was precisely this [collaborative] process that moved them toward a consensus, recognizing the value of different positions” (Crockett, 2002, p. 622). The end result represented a process through which teachers discussed and review methodology, pedagogy, and personal philosophies concerning student education. Individuals enriched their own context by coming to understand the conceptions of their colleagues. Collegial inquiry permitted teachers and school leaders the opportunity to develop a collaborative learning culture. In turn, this culture created a safe learning space for individuals with unique perspectives.

**School Leadership that Fosters Teacher Collaboration: Supports and Structures**

As methods of collegial inquiry have offered a mechanism to enhance teacher collaboration, such learning opportunities have required the support of visionary leaders. School and district leaders have had the potential to represent another important cornerstone of
collaborative professional development. These leaders symbolized the “shared values and vision, collective responsibility, teacher collaboration, and promotion of group and individual learning” at the district or school level (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008, p. 280). Moreover, these leaders possessed the authority to provide the time, guidance, materials, and funding to enact meaningful professional learning opportunities over a period of time. Similarly, Burke (2013) contended that the role of superior leadership was one of “resource provider, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, data coach, catalyst for change, and learner” (p. 251). The tasks of the leader have been many, but effective leadership provided a catalyst for collective teacher participation in the learning process.

As strong leaders have developed a good reputation through daily interactions with their faculty and staff, such faculty and staff have looked to school leaders as role models. Therefore, effective leadership has needed to model the positive behaviors that faculty should emulate in order to take active roles in their own learning and that of their colleagues (Hewson, 2013). Moreover, administrators who utilized distributed leadership tactics allowed teachers the joint responsibility of planning their own learning endeavors. Through professional learning communities and the process of collaborative inquiry, administration established a culture “where leadership is shared and adults are collectively responsible for student learning [and] will build individual and organizational capacity [in order to] develop a shared vision…” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 110). Furthermore, visionary leadership offered teachers the opportunity to share and reflect on their individual ideas and values. This individual reflection and personal sharing enabled leaders to create a safe space for teachers to take risks while promoting continuous adult learning and development (Aubusson, Steele, Dinham, & Brady, 2007).
The cultivation of a safe space for teacher learning has required school leaders to create a flexible daily schedule that has permitted time for teacher collaboration. Time represented a component of professional development that crafted collaborative teacher learning. Moreover, time provided a platform for teachers to immerse themselves in the inquiry and reflection process regarding their teaching practices and personal values (Aubusson, Steele, Dinham, & Brady, 2007; Dever & Lash, 2103; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Hewson, 2013). Accordingly, Hewson (2013) described that school principals must recognize the need to provide a reserved time slot for teacher meetings and collaboration periods as part of the regular daily schedule. By taking part in these meetings as an active participant, the principal (or other school leader) has understood the need and value of a regular meeting time. Additionally, the principal has provided a significant platform for each grade level team/unit to meet: time. The embedded time into the schedule recognized a principal’s vision for a collaborative school community where teachers discussed prominent issues and concerns of their grade level and the school. Moreover, by interjecting himself/herself into team meetings on a regular basis, the principal ultimately shifted “toward working with teams rather than as an instructional manager observing individuals” (Hewson, 2013, p. 17). This approach to principal leadership allowed the school to sustain effective professional development and learning opportunities as a result of the leadership’s participation and non-traditional approach to structuring the school schedule. Similarly, Aubusson, Steele, Dinham, & Brady (2007) reported that strong school leadership looked for ways to release teachers from their schedules in order to pause, think, and reflect with colleagues. Finally, as indicated by Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon (2001), school leaders sustained effective collaborative professional development over time. As a result of dedicated time to teacher professional learning opportunities, school leaders provided in-depth
opportunities for faculty to engage in dialogue and reflection on their teaching and learning practices. The idea of a structured meeting time represented a tool that sustains collaborative teacher professional development.

**Fostering Lasting Support of Collaborative Professional Development: Shared Leadership**

School leadership that has provided the resources, materials, and time for teachers to engage in collaborative activities has characterized an important initial step in the professional development process. More importantly, school leaders have looked to sustain this collaborative professional development over teachers’ careers in order to promote continuity in and respect for the learning process. As Mizell (2012) suggested, advocates of professional development promoted teachers’ learning over the span of their entire career. In addition, career-long development allowed educators to use these learning experiences in order to become more proficient in their practice. Teachers achieved this increased level proficiency over time only when school leadership shaped the adult learning culture to reflect the importance of collaboration. This support enhanced teacher methodology and student achievement as a result of increased teacher proficiency in their practice. Similarly, Mitchell, Riley, and Loughran (2010) posited that fostering support for teacher collaboration that will last over time has required an emphasis on a shared leadership perspective. While professional development opportunities in schools resulted typically from principal or administrative committee implementation, it has been important that these leaders “bring the field of leadership and professional learning together in ways that might be responsive to participants’ needs and concerns; not as a top-down mandated program but rather as a collaborative school-based teacher-directed learning experience” (Mitchell, Riley, & Loughran 2010). This explanation of
shared leadership symbolized an important component of professional development that inspired a culture of adult learning and collaboration over time.

The idea of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006) as it pertained to sustaining teacher professional development represented how school administration needed to value a collaborative learning environment. Accordingly, Slavit and McDuffie (2013) presented the contextual factors of how school leaders have promoted continuous teacher learning. These authors indicated that, over time, collaborative professional development must be intensive, focused on instructional planning, grounded in hands-on learning opportunities for teachers, and integrated into the daily life of the school. As administrators have made a conscientious effort to structure professional learning opportunities in schools, they should allow their faculty to participate in the design and implementation of the characteristics of effective development as presented by Slavit and McDuffie (2013).

Furthermore, research has indicated that an important dimension of school management has enabled leaders and teachers alike to participate in the planning and dissemination of professional development initiatives (Imants, 2002; James & McCormick, 2009). This joint management style allowed school leaders to involve many members of the school community to decide on what is useful to their own development. This group decision-making mentality allowed administrators and teachers to decipher what is important in terms of their professional learning needs. Moreover, leadership has recognized the expertise of its staff members as a collective entity with the capacity to make critical decisions regarding the continuity of their professional growth (James & McCormick, 2009). This sense of distributed leadership allowed leaders and teachers to take responsibility for their learning while collaboratively articulating desired outcomes for their own development over time.
In addition to a model of distributed school leadership regarding professional development, other aspects of effective school management have fostered ongoing collaboration. Schleicher (2011) identified effective school leadership qualities that have promoted contextualized collaboration. These attributes included a focus on developing teacher quality, developing particular learning objectives, providing strategic resources over time, and engaging in partnerships beyond the school walls. This framework for school management enabled leaders to act in conjunction with faculty in order to share accountability and responsibility for teacher development and student learning outcomes. Horng and Loeb (2010) shared a similar perspective with Schleicher (2011) because they suggested that the role of the administration is “to turn to school leaders and other teachers for resources or advice on how to improve their teaching practice” (p. 3). This sharing of responsibilities and advice among the administration and faculty induced conversations about what matters in the life of a school.

In agreement with Horng and Loeb (2010) and Schleicher (2011), Bezzina (2006) asserted that school leadership that involved faculty members in the construction of its learning programs allowed for an ongoing dialogue on the values and visions of a school community. This ongoing dialogue produced a collaborative work environment that has empowered both school leaders and faculty in way that has fostered enduring personal relationships and trust. Therefore, structuring the leadership of a school around the idea of joint decision-making and shared learning responsibilities conceptualized the role of effective school management. This conceptualization correlated to the ideals of teacher empowerment, transformation, and community building. As a result of this model of leadership, the role of school administration should “focus on establishing relationships and a shared sense of purpose, the collective capacity of the staff, and an emphasis on teaching and learning” (Bezzina, 2006, p. 162-163). Therefore,
school leadership has played an integral role in the cultivation of ongoing dialogues and learning opportunities that has fostered teacher collaboration.

**Mentoring Relationships that Build Trust and Support**

As school leaders have developed structures that have permitted shared leadership of professional learning initiatives, they also have allowed for colleagues to form unique partnerships. These partnerships represented a type of inquiry based learning known as peer mentoring or coaching. As another tool that supported effective collaborative learning, Drago-Severson (2009) pointed out that mentoring relationships “promote personal and professional learning and organizational growth through a more private relationship or a series of relationships” (p. 211). Important to note is the fact that individual mentoring and coaching relationships typically met a particular need of the mentor or the mentee. As Drago-Severson (2009) suggested, most teachers and school leaders formed various partnerships with individual colleagues. These individual partnerships allowed colleagues to work collaboratively in order to address their strengths and weaknesses at any point during their career. Moreover, these professionals formed “constellations of relationships,” (p. 215) or mentoring communities, that supported and challenged the needs of teachers and school leaders as they grew and developed over time. Jewett and MacPhee (2012) concurred with Drago-Severson (2009) because they suggested that as teachers and leaders worked together in mentoring or coaching situations, “they paid close attention to their partner’s interests and needs. They searched for common ground, ways that would engage their peers in authentic learning that would be mutually beneficial” (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012, p. 106). When colleagues partook in authentic and reciprocal learning relationships, teachers and school leaders worked to break down the barriers of teacher isolation and loneliness that often plagued professional development (Keedy & Robbins, 1993).
As peer mentoring and coaching relationships intended to reduce teacher isolation over time, this collaborative structure provided a safe space for novice and veteran teachers to work together to address individual needs in an informal manner. In a study conducted by Heider (2005) that reviewed the benefits of nation-wide peer mentoring/coaching programs, the author indicated that the more successful programs were those that allowed teachers “to discuss their teaching in a non threatening environment [that] made the experience enjoyable for all participants” (p. 7). Educators indicated that their pedagogy improved when they implemented practices they learned in conjunction with their mentors. Moreover, a key observation made by Heider (2005) suggested that a non-threatening atmosphere provided a safe learning environment where open observation, feedback, and critique occurred. Drago-Severson (2009) stated, “robust and effective mentoring relationships, as developmental holding environments, need to offer a delicate balance of supports, challenges, and continuity that are aligned with a person’s way of knowing to support growth” (p. 221). As teachers and leaders tried new ideas and implemented new practices in their work, they have felt disoriented in the initial stages. Accordingly, colleagues needed to provide a support mechanism that not only built trust within the partnership, but also offered a safe space for such individuals to take the risks necessary for self-improvement. With the proper support by school leadership, mentoring/coaching relationships symbolized a mechanism that fostered safe and trusting teacher relationships beneficial for novice and veteran teachers (Heider, 2005; Jewett & MacPhee, 2012).

Professional Development in Private Secondary Schools

After analyzing the collaborative professional development tools that support teacher professional learning, a review of the literature revealed that research on teacher professional development in private secondary schools was quite sparse (Drago-Severson, 2012; Eggleston
Hackney, 1998; Lucilio, 2009; Mayotte, Wei, Lamphier, and Doyle 2013). In addition, the literature defined private secondary schools as institutions that did not depend on “national or local government for financing its operations, does not rely on taxpayer contributions, and is governed by an independently elected board of trustees” (Dronkers, 2008; Murray, 2012). Accordingly, this definition encompassed religious and nonreligious affiliated schools. In conjunction with defining private secondary learning institutions, Eggleston Hackney (1998) argued that in the spirit of private education, these schools needed to focus attention not only on the learning of its students, but on the ongoing professional learning of its teachers.

As Eggleston Hackney (1998) suggested the need for ongoing teacher professional development in private and Catholic schools, Rogus and Wildenhaus (2000) concurred that principals and leaders of Catholic schools, for example, should remember the importance of providing their faculty with the appropriate development opportunities. These experiences enhanced student learning while promoting teacher inquiry and professional growth. Mayotte, Wei, Lamphier, and Doyle (2013) suggested, “professional development is a critical tool for Catholic school personnel as it is for public school personnel but research on its implementation and effects on teachers and student outcomes in Catholic schools is limited” (p. 267). The sparse body of research stemmed from the fact that private schools, whether Catholic or independent, have not had to abide by district, state, or federal curricular frameworks or teacher proficiency standards. Moreover, such a lack of a centralized governing agency has allowed teacher professional development to take on many forms including the possibility of no developmental programs in such a private school setting (Drago-Severson, 2012).

Although the literature identified the need for private school leaders to support teachers’ ongoing learning and development, past and current professional learning initiatives greatly
varied. In many independent schools, professional development has consisted of in-service training in the form of one-day workshops, guest speakers, or short-term courses provided by outside experts in a particular field (Murray, 2012). Comparatively, teacher professional development in Catholic schools has resembled that of the independent sector but often treated as something extra when funds, time, and resources permitted (Eggleston Hackney, 1998). Catholic school professional development programs most often focused on the role of spiritual leaders with the hope of carrying out the school’s mission while educating the whole student. In an attempt to shape school climate, Catholic school leaders tended to emphasize the macro concerns of the school as they employed in-service teacher learning programs. Often times, these programs directed less attention to the micro-level concerns of individual teachers and students at the school (Drago-Severson, 2012). Compared to the focus of Catholic schools’ teacher development, independent schools had been working toward shaping a professional learning climate that increased teachers’ skills, pedagogical, and content knowledge. The focus on this type of teacher development aimed to create collaboration among independent school leaders and teachers in order to prepare students for post-secondary academic work (Murray, 2012).

As private and faith-based school leaders have desired to provide a challenging academic experience for their students rooted in the history of a particular institution, teacher preparation in these schools often has lacked a systematic approach. Mayotte, Wei, Lamphier, and Doyle (2013) contributed this lack of professional development organization to the fact that private school leaders often have had insufficient exposure to advanced pedagogical training, degree programs, and/or the financial support than their colleagues in the public sector. Furthermore, Lucilio (2009) stated that private schools maintained a hierarchical order of power. The author posited that private school leaders needed to distribute leadership among administrators and
teachers in order to generate a more organic adult learning experiences supporting continuous
dialogue. This collaboration “must express appreciation and recognition for the work of
teachers, be caring and humorous, allow for experimentation while maintaining high standards,
provide tangible support for faculty projects, [and] protect the values that are important to the
faculty” (p. 62) through open and honest communication. Similarly, Eggleson Hackney (1998)
commented that private school leaders should support their teachers’ open-mindedness, risk-
taking, and inquiry into their own learning and that of their students in order to create a
collaborative school culture. Although the authors described how private and faith-based
secondary schools have or have not address teacher learning, these school leaders lacked a
framework for fostering consistent teacher collaboration and professional development.

**Trends in Professional Development in this Study’s Context**

The historical nature of collaborative professional development in Catholic schools has
demonstrated a lack of consistent implementation (Lucilio, 2009). Such a tradition spoke to the
confusion surrounding the role of professional development in this context. The mission of
many Catholic schools, including the school presented in this study, “encourages students to
develop their spiritual, intellectual, moral, physical, and creative potential” (School mission,
2015) through a rigorous academic and co-curricular program. In order to accomplish this task,
educators must continually advance their own learning in order to meet the demands of such an
institutional mission. According to Carlson and Patterson (2015), teachers in these particular
settings refuted change because of their lack of awareness to ever-changing educational trends
and their access to scarce resources. However, in the context of schools similar to the one
presented in this study, the mission and its religious order has strived to support all teachers in
their effort to meet the challenge of educating the whole student (Foundational Documents of Governance of this study’s site).

In addition, the essence of the mission of Catholic education has sought to edify all faculty of such a community in order to bring their voice to the conversation on teaching and learning practices. Faculty members have become well acquainted with their surroundings and their ability to contribute to the overall learning environment when they have felt ownership over their work (Hession, 2001). The mission of the school in this study and its founding religious order allowed educators to find “support in their growth as people of faith” (Foundational Documents, 2) and thrived in an atmosphere where leadership fostered collaborative relationships for discussing teaching and learning practices. The leadership of this study’s school used these guiding principles as hallmarks of this order’s educational philosophy to guide professional learning practices. However, teacher perceptions of such initiatives greatly varied based on their understanding of collaborative professional learning.

**Findings/Discussion**

A review of the literature on collaborative teacher professional development suggested that school leaders and teacher-leaders have utilized certain structures to create an environment of collegial inquiry. If today’s educators seek to prepare students for twenty-first century learning, school leaders and teachers must transform schools into active learning organizations. These active learning organizations can examine how certain teacher practices and methodologies better prepare students for future success (Lieberman, 1995). Moreover, such leaders must evaluate the art of professional development in order to promote teacher learning that is not only timely but also improves student outcomes. Drago-Severson (2009) used a framework of collegial inquiry in order to represent how the continuous interaction of teachers
over a period of time has sustained teacher learning. According to this framework, school leaders who wish to develop a school culture that values the ideas of individual teachers must utilize professional development models that move away from the traditional one-day workshops/seminars. By moving toward a new model of collaborative professional development, school leaders and teachers support a process of reflection and inquiry on their individual and collective practices over time (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Additionally, Burke (2013) argued if school leadership and teachers wish to dismantle barriers that produce teacher isolation, they need to partake in inquiry and reflective exercises in order to become professionally connected to their colleagues. The research indicated the need to articulate the tools and structures that need to be in place in order to support collaborative professional development (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) represented a primary structure that has supported a cultural of collaborative teacher learning. If school leaders and teacher-leaders want to develop an environment of collegial inquiry that focuses on a school’s problems of practice, then professional learning communities must become an embedded element of the school’s normative culture (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). These professional learning communities have demonstrated a shared sense of reflection and inquiry into practice that have allowed colleagues to mutually support one another. This support has worked to minimize teacher isolation and make teaching a more collaborative activity (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012; Dever & Lash, 2013; Rothberg, 1986). This mutual support has permitted a team of individuals, with different skills and experiences, to direct the decision-making process in order to better serve the adults and students of the school (Burke, Marx, & Berry, 2011). Finally, as leaders want teachers to take risks and share insights concerning their work, they strive to embed
professional learning communities into the school’s cultural practices. The implementation of these communities has encouraged teacher openness while offering different perspectives on teaching and learning process (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

A willingness to share diverse teaching and learning practices has required teachers to think critically about their own professional practice and that of their colleagues. By engaging in dialogue, school leaders and teachers have learned to understand the values and needs of each other and their students (Drago-Severson, 2009; Kazemi & Hubbard, 2008). Consequently, if school leaders and teachers want to engage in reflective inquiry in order to enact changes in their practice, then the use of dialoguing enables colleagues to achieve this ideal. By dialoguing, educators have not only present a particular viewpoint or sentiment, but they simultaneously have listened to the concerns of others. The process of listening to one another reflects on the positive and negative experiences of their craft allowing for a meaningful exchange of ideas between colleagues (Swartz McCotter, 2001). Moreover, the communication of ideas and values through reflective inquiry has presented an opportunity for colleagues to critique constructively and disagree with one another. As colleagues have worked to expose each other to new perspectives, active interpretation and processing of one another’s experiences have challenged a colleague’s way of knowing and doing (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Drago-Severson, 2009). School leaders and teachers who have taken time to observe one another’s classes also have contributed to the inquiry process. This inquiry process contribution has reviewed how teaching and learning practices have affected student outcomes (Estepp, Roberts, & Carter, 2012).

Another structure related to the concept of teacher reflective inquiry was mentoring and peer coaching relationships. This construct aided in the development of collaborative
professional learning as both school leaders and teachers have maintained an informal relationship of mutual support and understanding of each other (Drago-Severson, 2009). Accordingly, teachers who shared their needs, concerns, and interests with mentors had the opportunity to communicate honestly their strengths and weakness in the hope of receiving non-judgmental feedback and support (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012). If teachers and school leaders desire to reduce the feeling of isolation, they can enter into a mentor-mentee relationship. By entering into such a relationship, individual and collective reflection takes place in a non-threatening environment (Keedy & Robbins, 1993). These non-threatening mentor-mentee relationships have promoted openness and honesty between colleagues so as to address their most intimate concerns while receiving continuous support (Heider, 2005).

Finally, each of the supports and structures mentioned above rely on the presence of visionary school leadership. Visionary leadership has fostered collaborative professional development as school leaders have presented themselves as open to sharing leadership possibilities with their faculty and staff. School leaders, who want to promote a culture of collaborative professional development, must provide the resources, materials, and time needed in order to achieve this goal (Mullen & Hunt, 2008). In addition, the instructional leader, usually the principal, must take an active role in the learning community of his/her school in order to model positive collaborative behaviors. Similarly, if this leader desires his/her faculty and staff to engage with colleagues in reflective inquiry, the leader must participate in such conversations in order to share each other’s values and visions (Hewson, 2013; Caskey & Carpenter, 2012; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). In order for leadership to promote ongoing dialogue and reflective practices, leaders need to provide a safe space for their faculty and staff to take
risks and fully express their ideas, vision, and values (Aubusson, Steele, Dinham, & Brady, 2007).

Providing the resources and materials to sustain effective collaboration has represented an important element of teacher learning, but school leadership must foster lasting support for professional development. In order for teachers to increase their content and pedagogical skills, school leadership must promote and support respect for ongoing development over the course of teachers’ careers (Mizell, 2012). Simply providing time, money, and supplies has not cultivated respect for the learning process. Rather, school leaders who have embedded the value and importance of teacher collaborative learning ultimately have shaped a school culture that truly has valued the merits of ongoing professional development. Consequently, a school culture that has valued teacher collaboration also has valued the role of shared leadership among administrators and faculty (Mitchell, Reiley, & Loughran, 2010). School administrators who have avoided a hierarchical model of leadership also have promoted a distributed leadership style that has elevated the voice and concerns of their faculty while simultaneously building trustful relationships and continuous dialogue. Moreover, a shared sense of leadership not only has promoted a constant dialogue, but also has fostered the importance of collaboration into the fabric of the school community (Spillane, 2006). If school leaders desire to foster interactions and development among members of a school community over time, they should strive to share ownership of the teaching and learning process with their faculty.

A review of the literature on collaborative teacher development suggested that certain core structures of professional learning must be present in order to foster communication. However, in the private secondary school sector, sparse research indicated that more investigation in the area of collaborative professional development was needed in order to
determine its value within this particular context (Drago-Severson, 2012; Eggleston Hackney, 1998; Lucilio, 2009; Mayotte, Wei, Lamphier, and Doyle 2013). Since private secondary schools do not depend on the financial support of a local school district or government agencies, leaders within this context often times do not find value in ongoing teacher development (Dronkers, 2008; Murray, 2012). Nevertheless, the attitudes of private school leaders greatly varied regarding the need to educate further their teachers in content specific or pedagogical skills. As a result of this attitude, current teacher development platforms in private secondary schools have resembled the traditional models of one-day workshops and guest speakers. These initiatives have exposed teachers to new ideas but did not promote teacher collaboration as they have taken place in isolation of actual practice (Eggleston Hackney, 1998; Murray, 2012; Drago-Severson, 2012). If private school leaders hope to increase teacher proficiency over time, they have to evaluate the type and frequency of professional development offerings in these schools.

**Conclusion and Implications**

Research suggested that school leaders and teachers who have implemented the above mentioned professional development mechanisms have established an environment that has promoted collaboration and adult learning. These structures have acted as a holding environment that has supported teachers as they have participated in the process of reflective inquiry. This inquiry examined how teachers’ individual practices related to those of their colleagues in order to cultivate a co-construction of knowledge (Kegan, 1982). The studies reviewed show the extent of which a) professional learning communities, b) reflective inquiry, c) visionary leadership, d) leadership that fosters continued professional development, and e) mentoring relationships have provided guided opportunities for teachers and school leaders to work together and support each other’s learning. In addition, research on professional development in private
secondary schools displayed inconsistent patterns of teacher learning that have not adhered to the core structures present in this review. However, these research findings did not suggest why some educators’ perceptions of collaborative learning did not change as a result of their exposure to these professional development initiatives (Johnson, 2007). In the context of this review, further research is needed to investigate why teachers’ perception of collaborative professional development vary in private faith-based secondary schools.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Addressing how educators perceive the role of collaborative professional development practices in the private faith-based secondary school setting requires an in-depth study of one’s understanding of this phenomenon. Accordingly, this study’s central research question described how the perception of collaborative professional development allowed teachers to make sense of their experiences and overall learning:

How do faculty members in private faith-based secondary schools perceive collaborative teacher professional development?

Therefore, this study’s overarching research question required the investigator to enter the private faith-based secondary school context. This context allowed the researcher to analyze the perceptions and beliefs teachers foster in order to make sense and personal meaning of collaborative teacher learning. Accordingly, the researcher used a social constructivist approach to address this study’s research problem. Such an approach permitted the researcher to collect qualitative data through which participants shed light on how they experience the phenomenon of collaborative teacher professional development. This qualitative approach produced data that the researcher used in order to interpret how educators evaluated the affect this phenomenon has on their practice.

Research Paradigm and the Role of the Researcher

The research question posed in this study explored the lived experiences of the participants who directly interacted with the phenomenon of collaborative teacher development. Accordingly, the researcher utilized a social constructivist paradigm in order to understand the world in which the participants live and work relating to this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).
From the ontological perspective of social constructivism, individuals construct multiple understandings of certain phenomena because of how they perceive such experiences. In this particular study, teachers developed meaning related to collaborative professional development based on their context and interaction with this aspect of their learning. Moreover, the value they placed on the relevance of such learning resulted from the perception of its application to their individual and collective practice. As a result of the ontological nature of qualitative research, the investigator embraced the notion that multiple realities exist for different individuals. These multiple realities aided in the presentation of the study’s findings. By presenting the actual words of participants in this study, the researcher aimed to uncover participants’ differing perspectives on the same topic (Creswell, 2013).

As the researcher discerned how individuals constructed their understanding and interpretation of a given phenomenon, the investigator entered the context of the study’s participants. This idea speaks to the relevance of the researcher’s epistemological assumptions of social constructivism pertaining to a particular phenomenon. Related to the concept of collaborative teacher professional development, the research in this study examined the private faith-based secondary school context in which he works. By acquainting oneself with the study’s target context, the researcher attempted to “get as close as possible to the participants being studied” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20) in order to assemble evidence of how the phenomenon of collaborative teacher learning affected these educators’ assumptions and beliefs. This position in the field allows the researcher to engage actively with the participants as it related to this particular aspect of teacher learning. Guba and Lincoln (1988) suggest that minimizing the objective distance of the researcher from the participants’ reality allows for a first-hand account of how the participants live and interact with a phenomenon. In the case of collaborative teacher
learning, the researcher entered the participants’ specific context with the hopes of becoming an insider. This insider advantage allowed the researcher to analyze how educators made sense of this phenomenon pertaining to their lives and work.

As researchers attempt to become insiders of a particular context under study, they reveal their individual biases and values. As the constructivist paradigm promotes the importance of gaining multiple perspectives of a particular phenomenon, the researcher presented how he/she relates to the phenomenon as well. The researcher declared his/her axiological assumptions of social constructivism in order to “admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). By exposing the values of a study’s investigator, researchers acknowledge their own assumptions and connectedness with the work at hand. In the case of this study, the researcher declared his perceived importance of teacher collaborative professional development as a tool to enhance productivity and sustain collaboration over time. More importantly, such a declaration by this study’s author suggests that the evidence gathered and the findings presented represent the views of the participants and those of the researcher (Denzin, 1989; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

As researchers aim to present the point of view of their participants and themselves, the social constructivist research paradigm uses an inductive research process. Inductive research methods allow the researcher to acquire information about a particular phenomenon from a study’s participants in a manner that emerges through open-ended conversation. These conversations shape the scope of the study and enable the researcher to construct a portrait of words that relate the deeper meaning of the phenomenon to the interviewed participants (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, the researcher used an inductive ground-up approach to collecting,
analyzing, and presenting data in order to accurately represent the position of an individual under study. Nevertheless, social constructivist methodology must be flexible in order to adjust questions to better address the research problem and experiences of the participants. In the case of this study, the researcher demonstrated flexibility in questioning and research design strategy in order to address the participants’ needs and understanding of the phenomenon of collaborative teacher professional development. This study utilized an emerging design pattern to allow for researcher flexibility in order to capture participants’ sense making of this phenomenon.

**Research Design**

In order to address educators’ perception of collaborative professional development within the private faith-based secondary school context, the researcher utilized qualitative research methodology. The purpose of this research sought to understand how teachers make sense of collaborative professional development practices and its application to their practice. Therefore, the researcher’s desire to use qualitative methodology speaks to the social constructivist nature of such a phenomenon. This viewpoint underscores how teachers perceive the impact of this particular construct on their practice. Rubin and Rubin (2012) assert that individuals perceive differently the world they live in and the experiences they confront. Moreover, individuals construct particular realities based on such interpretations. In particular, as the researcher desired to explore participants’ sense making patterns and interpretations of their realities, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) offers this level of in-depth understanding. Interpretative phenomenological analysis focuses on a detailed examination of personal lived experiences and allows the researcher an opportunity to make sense of one’s experiences as related to the phenomenon under study (Smith, 2011).

**Research Tradition**
As this study sought to understand how teachers make sense of the ways in which collaborative professional learning impacts their practice, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research design addressed the central research question. Nevertheless, the researcher desired to provide an in depth understanding of the participants’ lived experiences related to the phenomenon under study. Therefore, the researcher hoped to understand how such participants made meaning of these lived experiences by generating rich descriptions of participants’ relationships to the phenomenon of collaborative professional development. This particular methodology allowed the researcher to examine how individuals in a particular context related to and made sense of a particular phenomenon.

Smith (1996) first presented the concept of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as one approach to study experimental qualitative psychology. This alternative methodological approach suggested by Smith’s (1996) seminal work indicates that researchers will capture the essence of both the qualitative and experimental dimensions of psychology while simultaneously maintaining a dialogue with mainstream traditional psychology and research. In order to sustain this belief, Smith (1996) drew on the theoretical ideas of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. By drawing on these theoretical concepts, Smith (1996) establishes the notion that IPA promotes an understanding of the lived experiences of research participants and how these participants interpret and make sense of these experiences. This approach draws on the essence of traditional phenomenology, which “is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). However, the additional consideration of how individuals make meaning of this phenomenon plays a critical role in IPA methodology. In confirmation of the ideas presented by Smith (1996), Shinebourne (2011) argues that IPA draws on these historical theoretical
approaches to qualitative inquiry. These historical underpinnings of inquiry inform both the epistemological framework and research procedures of this approach. Moreover, IPA as a qualitative research methodology offers practical and accessible guidelines for conducting qualitative research in other fields such as health science and education. When the researcher aims to understand how people construct meaning within their social and personal contexts, the IPA methodology achieves this goal (Smith, 2004).

The distinguishing characteristics of IPA draw on previous theoretical research traditions. Smith (2010) asserts that IPA anchors itself in the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology as presented by Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl suggests that the perspective of the research participant remains integral to understand one’s lived experiences. This element of descriptive phenomenology suggests that individuals’ conscious acts and mental interpretations create a fundamental source of knowledge for the researcher as it pertains to the understanding of the participants’ lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Dowling, 2007). Accordingly, researchers’ must bracket their preconceived understanding of a phenomenon in order to enter a study free of prejudice and personal experience (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Dowling, 2007; Shinebourne, 2011). Additionally, Heidegger (1889-1976) presents a hermeneutic view of phenomenology. He argues that the meaning of a person’s lived experiences results from one’s ability to interpret such experiences in order to create individual meaning (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). This ability of the individual to make sense of his/her experiences places the person within the context of his/her lived experiences. Subsequently, this rationale suggests that human consciousness is not separate from human existence (Dowling, 2007). Finally, idiography is central to IPA as it looks to examine one particular case or phenomenon in depth until the researcher and the participant reach a certain
degree of closure pertaining to the phenomenon under study (Smith, 2004). These philosophical principles act as the building blocks for Smith’s (1996) formation of IPA as a qualitative research methodology.

As Smith (1996, 2004, 2010) and Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) draw on the theoretical ideas of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, he establishes a framework to conduct IPA research. Such a framework seeks to examine critically participants’ perspectives through inductive questioning. This type of questioning constructs meaning that individuals assign to their own experiences. Participants offer the researcher their own expertise related to the explored phenomenon. Therefore, they often provide in-depth personal detail related to these experiences. As the participant makes meaning of such experiences, the researcher attempts to interpret the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon. This process refers to how the researcher engages in a double hermeneutic of understanding (Smith, 2011). Researchers’ interpretation of data finds support in their understanding of the information gathered and its plausibility to the participants and study’s audience (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Nevertheless, this research methodology greatly varies from other qualitative methodologies, such as grounded theory for example, as it does not seek to develop a theory from the evidence produced. Similarly, unlike ethnographic methodology, IPA does not seek to establish a particular group understanding or relationship to a phenomenon. Instead, IPA seeks an individual perspective in relation to the essence of the phenomenon. As Larkin et al. (2011) contend, IPA aims to understand the lived experiences of people in their own context and how these individuals come to make personal meaning of these experiences. The choice of this particular qualitative methodology allows the researcher in this study to understand how educators in the private faith-based secondary school context perceive the effect of collaborative
professional development on their practice.

**Participants**

The participants in this research study included teachers who work in a private Catholic secondary high school in eastern Massachusetts. The educators selected for this study have participated in each school’s professional development programing. However, no standardized or state-mandated professional learning is required at the site. Rather, these teachers participated in professional learning under the direction of the school’s Assistant Principal for Mission and Identity and the school’s Professional Learning Committee. The educators selected to participate in this study range in years of teaching experience from second year teachers to those who have worked in the school for more than twenty-five years. These teachers possessed a varied understanding of collaborative professional learning and offered their own understanding of this phenomenon and its effect on their practice.

In order to gain educators’ perspectives of collaborative professional development, the researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy. This particular sampling technique assured the researcher that those selected to partake in this study had a personal connection with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). More importantly, the individuals who participated in this study articulated their understanding of collaborative professional development and the meaning they made of it as it related to their individual and collective practice. The individuals in this sample ranged in exposure to collaborative professional learning based on what was obligatory versus what was self-selected at the school. For the purpose of this study, a purposeful sampling of three educators from different disciplines provided a diverse cross-section of individuals who participated in a range of collaborative professional development offerings at this school (Creswell, 2013). Although this sample size allowed for an in-depth analysis of educators who
participated in collaborative professional learning, the relatively small size may not represent all aspects of this phenomenon in private faith-based secondary schools. However, the researcher desired to explore how participants related to this phenomenon, so the smaller purposeful sample size allowed the investigator to delve deeply into the data collected in order to best represent the voice of the participants (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009; Creswell, 2012). Thus, this sample size allowed the researcher to adequately explore, in-depth, the personal understanding and meaning making the educators in this study expressed regarding this phenomenon.

**Recruitment and Access**

The site the researcher used is a private Catholic secondary school for young men on the Northshore of Massachusetts. This study’s researcher works as a full time faculty member in this school under study. This factor allowed the researcher easy access to the study’s participants as they physically work alongside the researcher on a daily basis. The principal of this school agreed to allow the researcher access to its faculty members, so the researcher presented a formal letter of intent to him explaining the purpose of this study. This letter explained the amount of time the researcher would be collecting data, the time required of the participants, and how the data would be used (Creswell, 2012). The researcher presented this information as a method to demonstrate concern for the potential intrusion on the human resources of this institution.

The researcher asked the school’s principal for a list of potential participants. This selection approach helped the researcher achieve a purposeful sampling of potential participants. Since the principal knows faculty that have participated in various collaborative professional development activities, this approach helped the researcher gather qualified individuals for the study. The researcher then shared the information regarding the purpose of the study with the selected faculty members with a formal letter of participation. As the selected faculty members
demonstrated an interest in the study, the researcher met with the potential participants and provided each with a letter of informed consent (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of this form underscored their voluntary participation in this study and its purpose. The researcher disclosed procedures, the right to withdraw, the right to ask questions, and the risks and benefits of the study to the participants. Their signature on the letter allowed the researcher to begin the data collection process.

The researcher considered how this study affected the participants and their standing at this institution. Weis and Fine (2000) contend that the researchers must consider the ethical issues surrounding their research so as to protect the interests and well being of the study’s participants. These considerations include (a) creating supportive relationships with participants, (b) disclosing all facts pertaining to the study, (c) maintaining confidentiality, and (d) allowing participants the opportunity to preview how their voices will be presented in the final study.

Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest that showing respect toward participants and minimize feelings of uncertainty they may have will further increase the protection of the study’s participants. Additionally, the researcher promised the confidentiality of all participants in this study. The researcher did not violate the trust of any participant thereby placing him/her at risk at the school. By maintaining secure files and protecting interview transcripts, the researcher secured the integrity of this project and his participants’ opinions about collaborative professional development. Together, these factors highlight the idea that the researcher needed to be sensitive to the population understudy and mitigate the possibility of placing participants at risk during the study (Hatch, 2002).

Further protection of human subjects in this study required approval from the Northeastern University Internal Review Board (IRB). Creswell (2012) suggests that the
researcher summarize the procedures of the study in order to prove that such methods will offer certain protections to participants. The research demonstrated protection of the participants in order to obtain their consent, maintained confidentiality, and addressed their right to privacy. Accordingly, the researcher provided the IRB with the informed consent letter to the study’s participants in order to demonstrate this level of individual respect. Next, the researcher demonstrated the beneficence of the study to the research community. The researcher of this study hoped to fill a gap in the existing literature concerning collaborative teacher professional learning in private faith-based secondary schools. Finally, the researcher delivered justice to all participants by showing the importance of their involvement in the study. In this study, the researcher demonstrated that these educators would contribute to the future direction of collaborative teacher development in this particular context. The researcher submitted this information to Northeastern University’s IRB for approval of this study’s procedures and human subject protection.

**Data Collection**

A researcher’s interaction with a study’s participants is essential to the production of well-designed IPA methodology. Accordingly, IPA methodology calls for the researcher to utilize a semi-structured interview protocol. By using a semi-structured protocol, the investigator clearly entered the conversation with a study’s participants. Additionally, the researcher created a platform for the participant to shape the flow of questioning based on their responses (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). These interview questions explored the participants’ relationship with a particular phenomenon and the manner in which they interpreted their experiences related to the phenomenon. Since the researcher aimed to understand the in-depth detailed experiences of participants, the literature suggested the idea that large purposeful
samples do not necessarily yield better results. By maintaining a reasonable sample size, the researcher developed rich data descriptions in order to interpret the participants’ ability to make sense of a particular phenomenon (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

Data Storage

Once the researcher collected data from the various interviews, he stored this information in order to protect its integrity (Creswell, 2013). The author saved all interview transcripts recorded using an iPad in a digital folder within the recording application. The iPad has a password protection mechanism, and the researcher is the only person with access to these recordings other than a transcription service. The researcher protected the back-up recordings in a similar fashion (Davidson, 1996). In addition, the researcher used a laptop and iPad to take notes from the interview proceedings. These notes were stored in digital folders, and both devices were password protected in order to protect the identity of the study’s participants. The researcher secured paper-based notes in traditional files and in a locked cabinet. These measures maintained records of the research proceedings, secured the documents, and protected participants’ identity during the research process (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

A major goal of IPA is to interpret how participants’ make sense of their lived experiences. Accordingly, the researcher examined the data using this premise in order to interpret the experiences of the participants. Therefore, the researcher transcribed all one-on-one interviews verbatim in order to secure the participants’ exact responses to the semi-structured interview protocol (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Next, the researcher coded the data from these interviews in order to discern the similarities and differences among participants’
responses. After this initial round of coding, the researcher participated in a second round of coding so as to develop a set of emergent themes that connect the collected data (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; Smith, 2010). Once the researcher identified the major themes, he produced a systematic third-person description of the themes. Moreover, the researcher established superordinate themes to link each interview and its findings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This analysis followed the five-step procedure outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009 relating to IPA research procedures. Additionally, the researcher positioned this description in relation to the wider social and cultural context of the participants in order to create a critical commentary on their own meaning-making process (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Both steps of this analysis process determined how participants understood the phenomenon and what it meant for them. Finally, the researcher used this analysis to display participants’ sense making of the phenomenon in order to gain new insights on the topic.

**Trustworthiness**

In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research has received much criticism in the past from the scientific community because of its perceived inability to adhere to the rules of reliability, transferability, and validation (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Creswell, 2013). However, such standardized scientific investigation diminishes the voices of the participants as they attempt to make sense of a phenomenon under study. According to Eisner (1991), researchers enhance the credibility of qualitative investigation when they use non-standardized types of data-collecting methods in order to support the interpretation of a phenomenon. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews in order to address how educators made sense of collaborative professional learning. The researcher used consensual validation and
referential adequacy of the data in order to illuminate the perceptions and understandings of the research participants (Eisner, 1991).

Related to the credibility of qualitative research, a study’s authenticity promotes a greater understanding of a particular phenomenon through the voices of its participants. Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) contend that qualitative studies that present strong validation exhibit the researcher’s critical interpretation of the participants’ experiences related to the phenomenon at hand. Additionally, these writers state that a researcher’s ability to reflect on how their own biases affect the study strengthen the credibility of their work. Moreover, Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) infer that the authenticity of qualitative research hinges on (a) the balance of views presented, (b) the ability to raise the participants and audience’s awareness of a particular phenomenon, (c) and the desire to enact some type of change regarding the outcome of the research. In order to adhere to these understandings of qualitative authenticity, the researcher used the data collected from participants to represent their particular understanding of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, the researcher used his own understanding of this phenomenon to aid in the sense-making process of the study’s participants. The researcher’s ability to reflect critically while understanding his own relationship to the study will enhance its credibility and elevate the voices and experiences of the participants as they relate to collaborative professional development. In an attempt to present this balanced view of varying perspectives, the research engaged in in-depth conversations with participants. In these conversations, the researcher observed how participants come to understand the effects of this phenomenon on their professional life (Creswell, 2013).

As researchers address issues of authenticity in qualitative research, they must account for threats to the internal validity of a study. In an attempt to understand how the phenomenon
under study affects the participants’ practice, researchers must account for the subjects’ attitude toward the phenomenon (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In order to gain a well-rounded perspective on collaborative professional learning, researchers must understand that participants’ appreciation for a particular phenomenon will vary. Therefore, the researcher of this study explained how these attitudes affect the participants’ reaction to interview questions and eventually the sense making of the phenomenon. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest persistent interaction with participants in order to build trust with them and check for any researcher-participant misconceptions related to the study. In order to minimize this threat to internal validity, the researcher introduced the relevance of this study to its participants. By discussing the relevance of this work, the researcher revealed its potential to enhance collaborative professional learning in this particular context. Additionally, the researcher used a semi-defined in order to garner an open and honest reaction from the participants. The researcher in this study provided thick description of the participants’ reaction and answering of these interview questions. This description captured the true significance of how individuals make sense of the effects of collaborative professional development on their practice (Creswell, 2013). In order to enhance further the credibility of this study, the researcher engaged in member checking of the transcripts. This member checking allowed participants to make sure the researcher adequately represented their point of view (Creswell, 2013). These steps aided in the minimization of the threats to this study’s internal validity.
Chapter Four

Research Findings

This chapter provides an overview of the major research findings of this study. The detailed descriptions of participants’ understanding of the phenomenon of collaborative professional development shed light on their unique perspectives. Additionally, these perspectives demonstrated how the study’s participants made sense of this construct in relation to their practice. The stories of the participants relayed in this section detailed how they have perceived the role of collaborative professional learning on during their teaching career. Moreover, the researcher used these stories and experiences to highlight how the participants have interpreted the various aspects of professional learning and their effect on their practice. The research underscored the essence of each participant’s voice by sharing the uniqueness of each person’s experiences in order to exemplify this study’s problem of practice.

To begin this section, the researcher presents a profile of each participant in the study. These participant profiles provide a biographical sketch of each individual who participated in the study. In addition, the researcher presents the participants’ reactions to and associated feelings of the construct of collaborative professional development. Next, the researcher presents and analyzes the emerging themes across each participant’s interview. In an attempt to understand how each participant relates to and makes sense of the phenomenon under study, the researcher uses direct quotations from each participant so as to convey the precise meaning they wish to share. Finally, the researcher offers a summary of the major research findings from the three interviews.

Participant Profiles

Participant 1: Rose
An educator in the humanities, Rose has worked at this study’s research site for thirty years. She is an active member in the school’s extracurricular life and volunteers at many different events during the course of the school year. Rose has worked on many different academic and extracurricular committees during her time at the school. Over the last three decades, Rose has noticed a major shift in faculty professional development expectations. This shift in practice over time allowed Rose to share how her own appreciation and understanding of collaborative professional development has changed over time. Rose stated, “In the early days we were kind of on our own. We were kind of like a king and queen in our own little domain and I really appreciated that.” Rose suggested that a cultural shift has occurred over the years that has placed more emphasis on common practices and cooperative approaches to learning that were not always present. She added, “Then when they [administration] started to say ‘Okay, now we want to have more in common. We want to have common assessment’ and all that, I kind of balked at that, to be honest with you.” Rose spoke openly about her hesitation with this more public way of teaching. At first, she felt defensive to the idea that she was asked to consider enhanced participation in professional development. Rose commented, “My thought was always, I know what I’m doing.” Over time, Rose overcame the notion that enhancing her professional development was not because the administration thought poorly of her work. However, she suggested that she understood “where they’re [administration] going. I think they want us to be on the same page. We’ve definitely moved along in that regard.” Rose asserted her understanding of such a push for more cooperative professional learning, and she has garnered a deeper appreciation for it over the past years.

As a result of this shift in professional expectations within the school, Rose’s attitude toward collaborative professional development has evolved over time. Initially, Rose felt very
individualistic in terms of her professional learning and collaboration when she commented, 
“Learning over time? I think it’s gotten a lot better. When I first started here, there was a sense, 
and I really appreciated that too, that they [administration] trusted us to do our thing in the 
classroom. That was pretty much it. When there was a conference around, there would always 
be one or two people that would go.” Rose’s initial interaction with collaborated professional 
development at this school minimally impacted her daily work routine. She “appreciated” her 
authority in the classroom. However, Rose’s understanding of more recent professional 
development experiences have shifted when she commented, “In thirty years, I have attended 
way more professional development in the last ten than I did in the prior twenty.” Rose 
attributed such a change in attitude to the fact that “there’s definitely more of a push for that 
[professional development]. There’s so much out there, let’s see how it applies to us in a 
continual growth and encouragement for that, which I think I kind of like.” The “push” Rose 
referenced indicated that the school in general has emphasized the need for continued faculty 
professional growth and development. Additionally, Rose suggested that her renewed interest in 
her own professional development surfaced from feelings of “getting into ruts” and the need to 
“just stay fresh” over time. Rose stated, “Something works, so I use it all the time, but I’m 
finding that students are changing. Students in the 1980s and students now learn very 
differently. The technology has changed so much, and the way students process things is so 
different that I feel if I don’t keep up with it, then I’m missing something.” Rose’s 
understanding of the need to grow continually as an educator underscored her desire to want to 
learn more effective ways of enhancing her teaching repertoire and her students’ learning 
experience.
Consequently, Rose spoke candidly about her actual ability to participate actively in professional learning opportunities at the school. Summer professional development opportunities provided Rose “several days” in a row of dedicated time that gave her a “chance to kind of absorb things.” Such learning experiences proved pivotal for Rose as they afforded her the time to absorb information, process it, and then attempt to apply it to future lessons. Rose indicated that she felt “usually, really excited about applying what we’ve learned” to her classes and teaching methodology. In addition, Rose commented, “Once I figured that [concept] out, then I really felt excited about it, I know I can do this in the classroom.” For Rose, professional learning during a series of days in the summer proved relevant to her understanding of how to enhance her teaching practice over time. Rose offered a passionate example of how this particular structure of professional learning supported her use of the iPad at the onset of the school’s one-to-one initiative five year’s ago. Five year’s ago, Rose had very little use for or understanding of the iPad, and she stated, “I really had no sense of how this could enhance my students’ learning.” Rose felt that she had to make this tool work in her classroom and “wanted to incorporate it more” into her daily lessons. In order to accomplish this task, Rose took part in various three-day summer workshops on iPad integration over a three-year period. Poignantly, Rose shared her delight with her further understanding of the iPad when she commented, “I feel proud of that because that was a steep learning curve for me. I’m really please with my professional development. I’m really glad they’ve [administration] opened up things for me that I wouldn’t have normally tried on my own. I feel good about that.” Rose’s delight echoed her desire to enhance her own teaching methodology to meet her students’ needs. Moreover, Rose garnered this success through her participation in the school’s professional learning program.
To the contrary, Rose suggested the school’s use of the delayed Wednesday morning professional learning model has continued to cause her great “stress” and anxiety because of the hectic pace of the morning time at school. Rose said, “I felt like I was always thinking about what I had to do next. I felt that, we’re all together as a department, and it would be great to share, but there’s so many administrative things that have to happen first.” Rose demonstrated her frustration with this model of professional learning because once the school day had started, she felt “like a hamster in a wheel” trying to focus in on the daily tasks of her lessons and students’ needs. Moreover, the administrative tasks (planning, scheduling, etc.) that Rose referenced hampered her ability to collaborate on the teaching and learning aspects of her job that matter most to her.

Rose’s overall satisfaction with the school’s professional development program outweighed her feelings of apprehension toward the stressors that impact her ability to fully engage in these activities. For example, Rose felt ample support by the administration whenever she has asked to pursue professional development on or off of the campus. She indicated, “I think they’re wonderful. I really do… I think they understand [our needs], …and whatever support they can give us, I think they have given us.” Rose’s admiration for how the administration sought to support her personal professional development spoke to a sense of the value placed on teacher support at this school. In addition, Rose described that the administration has offered a “model of servant leadership” that she really has appreciated because of the support offered to her in pursuit of professional learning at the school. However, Rose addressed the need to have more collaborative professional development “where we could get together [with other disciplines] to figure out ways in which our curriculums overlap and ways in which we can actually take advantage of that.” For Rose, this concentrated time would
allow her the opportunity to give her students “that kind of interconnectedness” that would bring the curriculum they study to life. This lack of time represented the mitigating factor Rose perceived as a natural blocking agent to this type of interdepartmental collaboration. She suggested, “We don’t have that [interconnectedness] enough because we don’t have time, but I would love to be able to see more of that.” Rose spoke directly to the notion that in the current schedule system and professional learning program, there is no time for “anything beyond the basic” elements and expectations of the school day. More importantly, Rose stated that if she wanted to do anything more “elaborate” in her classroom or with her colleagues, she felt as if time was a constant element of “stress” for her. Overall, Rose felt “proud” of the professional development she has participated in over the last few years and the positive way it has enhanced her work.

**Participant 2: Samantha**

Samantha has been a member of the school community for the past twelve years, and she teaches a discipline in the humanities. In addition to her classroom work, Samantha serves and has served on a number of committees related to the academic affairs of this school. Important to note, Samantha has served on the Professional Learning Committee that oversees the professional development program at this school. Samantha not only attends different types of professional development sessions both on and off campus, but she periodically leads such sessions for her colleagues on the campus during the school year and the summer months.

Samantha described in detail her pursuit of collaborative professional development initiatives at the school. Over the years, Samantha stated that she has participated in “many different professional development experiences,” and these experiences varied in topic and presentation style. She commented, “The first few I did, which was probably in my third or
fourth year, were conducted by experts from off campus.” Samantha indicated her interest in learning from a “respected expert” in a particular field rather than someone “who is not necessarily an expert in the subject but is just there to facilitate a conversation.” Samantha offered an example of this sentiment when she spoke about her participation in a brain-based learning seminar conducted by a neuropsychologist and expert in the field. Although the types of learning activities seemed “more like training sessions,” Samantha suggested “having someone there who has a career in a particular topic makes a big difference for me.” Samantha’s desire to learn from experts in a particular field spoke to her commitment to understand a particular subject matter to its fullest potential in order to apply such learning to her daily work.

In addition to Samantha’s participation in collaborative professional development conducted by outside experts at the research site, Samantha spoke about her involvement in professional learning conducted by her peers at the school. These sessions have taken place during the summer months in a three-day workshop format as well as during the school year’s Wednesday morning delayed opening schedule. Overall, Samantha enjoyed participating in these types of learning sessions because they were facilitated by other faculty and staff members “who knew the campus and we all knew each other more, [and] I would say were able to speak more specifically to the school, specific issues, or experiences.” Samantha offered an example of the various technology workshops she has participated in with the school’s different technology integration specialists. Additionally, she spoke of her participation in a workshop led by a school administrator on teaching students with difficult parents. These two examples offered by Samantha spoke to her satisfaction of participating in professional learning from individuals who possessed “expertise” in a particular field and who had “knowledge” of the inner functions of this particular school.
In connection with Samantha’s participation in professional development at this school, she spoke candidly about her perception of how the school executed and followed through on such initiatives. For Samantha, her largest disappointment with collaborative professional development at this school has been “the follow up meetings and discussion” after the conclusion of the learning sessions. Samantha commented that initially many of the summer three-day seminars she participated in had “follow-up meetings throughout the year that the group had to meet [during the school year] to discuss our processes and how we were implementing that.” Samantha indicated that much of the school year follow-up on these summer learning seminars suddenly ceased. She stated, “At that point, we’d stop having the formal follow-up meeting, so the follow-up meeting that we had was a 45-minute conversation over lunch that really wasn’t particularly … [hesitation] it was just checking a box and didn’t really lead to anything.” Samantha’s hesitation to conclude this thought spoke to her disappointment with the lack follow through on these particular learning sessions and its impact on her ability to learn from her peers. Samantha seemed interested in speaking with her colleagues to learn from their trial and errors and share her own work in order to improve her teaching practices. Moreover, Samantha asserted that the only formal follow-up activity to these professional development sessions at this point was a reflection paper that she wrote in order to receive credit hours for pay increases. She commented, “Because the reflection process is just me putting down on paper what I’ve been thinking about, … I don’t know where the paper goes, I don’t know who reads it…But since I’m processing it on my own and I’m weaving it into my lesson plans, the actual act of transcribing in on paper does nothing for me.” Therefore, Samantha’s comment suggested that much of her professional learning has taken place in isolation from other colleagues. She feels as if she has lacked a “platform to share” her work and findings with colleagues and administrators at the
school. Samantha concluded her comments on professional development follow-up by stating, “I definitely have not found that collaboration has extended beyond those days [in the summer] even if we have found common ground that we’d like to explore. It doesn’t ever extend beyond that.” Samantha’s disappoint with the follow through on her professional development experiences at the school underscored her sense of working in isolation after acquiring new tools for teaching. This isolation resulted from the lack of a common platform to share her work and learn from her colleagues on a regular basis.

Samantha suggested that a lack of follow thorough concerning professional learning at the school was related to a dismissive attitude toward the importance of teacher growth and development. Samantha indicated that she sensed a number of factors have inhibited people from sharing her passion for professional development. She said, “I think that the main reason is scheduling and people are just too busy. I also think that there is a culture at the school that does not believe that professional development is an essential part of teaching.” The chaotic pace of the school’s schedule combined with a general feeling of the unimportance of professional learning has characterized Samantha’s discontent with the school’s current program. Additionally, Samantha said some of her colleagues’ dismissive attitude toward professional learning demonstrated the notion that such development “doesn’t necessarily imbue their [her colleagues] experience and they think it’s a nice little add-on but it’s not an essential aspect of teaching.” These factors upset Samantha because she perceived that continued professional learning speaks to her understanding of the idea that education represents and evolving world with ever better ways to affect student experiences.

Samantha continued to speak openly about many of her colleagues’ attitude toward professional development. She commented, “I think the fact that people sign up for sessions in
the summer that they are unable to complete, that it’s common that people sign up for sessions and they end up having other things that take them away. That, to me, suggests a certain level of not really thinking it’s terribly important.” For Samantha, the fact that people have failed to complete professional development sessions intrigued her. Moreover, she correlated this behavior to a lack of interest in in professional learning. In addition, Samantha felt that people “speak dismissively of the professional development sessions … [and] speak about them as if they are a nuisance and an inconvenience and that it’s something that they just have to go to without approaching them as something that could be more valuable.” This line of thinking troubled Samantha as she has seen professional learning as a way to enhance her skills as an educator and collaboration with her peers. This dismissive attitude that many of her peers have maintained about collaborative professional learning over the years has allowed Samantha to feel “beaten down a little bit… I think it’s become a cultural phenomenon.” Although Samantha has viewed her professional development experiences as instrumental in her own teaching practices, she shared a vastly different perspective held by many of her colleagues. This overall picture of professional learning at the school spoke to Samantha’s “disappointment” with the current design of learning initiatives.

When Samantha spoke about her understanding of the culture of collaborative professional learning at the school, she emphasized a negative perspective on the part of senior male faculty members. Samantha said, “I would also say that, if anecdotally, being dismissive of professional development is more a male thing than a female thing on campus.” Samantha felt that more women seem to be interested in professional learning simply because more female faculty are physically present at these seminars and workshops. She commented, “Well, I guess, I’m just thinking about the sessions I’ve been to, and I would say that, generally speaking, more
women attended than male…” Samantha’s understanding of a lack of male participation in non-obligatory learning sessions comes as a result of a dominant male culture at the school. She suggested, “This is total speculation, we’re in an all boys school. I think there’s still a little bit of an old boy’s network here.” Samantha cited the fact that the majority of the senior teachers at the school are male. Accordingly, she felt that many think they do not need to participate in professional learning because “they might mistake their rapport [with students] like that as being a good substitute for professional development.” This perception of professional learning spoke to her understanding of the challenges of maintaining and effective program and her personal dissatisfaction with current learning initiatives.

In addition to Samantha’s description of the challenges she has faced regarding professional development, she shared her desired vision of professional learning at the school. Samantha spoke about her ideal learning scenario in which “everyone sees the value in it and wants to be there and is willing to share and take risks and listen to others without judging or evaluating.” This type of learning atmosphere intrigued Samantha and characterized her continued desire for collegial professional learning at the school. Samantha described that a multiple day model of professional development would support her desired learning outcomes. She stated, “I think having several days in a summer, given teachers’ busy schedules, and then following it up [during the year]…I’d also like the idea of having more frequent two to three hour sessions spaced out throughout the year.” Samantha indicated that these models of professional development would enhance teacher learning as long as “at the end there is a result and there is, at the beginning there’s a goal and at the end there’s a result, and there’s some expectation that what we learn will be applied to our classroom teaching.” Samantha provided
this result-oriented model as part of her vision of the ideal professional learning program at the school.

Samantha’s overall satisfaction with collaborative professional learning at the school at the time of this interview was that of “frustration.” She stated, “I am frustrated…that we seem to have stagnated…I feel like, right now, what I feel is lacking on campus I’m able to fill with off campus offerings. That’s a little bit how I’ve turned recently…I haven’t attended much.” Although Samantha stated “that the school’s administration has been extremely supportive of my professional development,” Samantha’s frustration has moved her away from seeking out professional development offerings at the school. In addition, Samantha felt that “no mechanism to share” new ideas has existed at the school and at times “no real goal” was made clear about the purpose of such professional development sessions. Samantha’s overall frustration with her professional learning at the school has skewed her desire to participate in current offerings.

Participant 3: Connie

Connie has worked at this study’s research site for the past seven years. During those years, Connie has taught courses in the humanities. In addition to her work in the classroom, Connie has served on various academic committees at the school. Over the past seven years at this school, Connie has participated in various professional learning offerings. Connie has found these offerings valuable to her work at this school. In addition to the various learning opportunities Connie has participated in on campus, she has sought additional experiences off campus on a regular basis. Connie has displayed her desire for continued professional growth and development as a leader of various professional development opportunities on campus and off campus. Connie particularly has enjoyed learning opportunities that provide “concrete” tools to enhance her teaching repertoire and help her “become a better teacher.”
Connie has noticed a shift in her rationale as to the purpose of participating in collaborative professional learning. As a novice teacher, Connie attended different workshops and seminars in order “to soak up as much information as possible from people that I see to be like master teachers and try to mimic that in the classroom and figure out how to become better at my craft.” Connie noted that she looked to her colleagues and experts in the field as a source of inspiration in an attempt to develop different teaching methodologies. However, as she has progressed through her career, Connie added, “now that I’ve become a more seasoned teacher, not that I am an expert at all…it’s really to keep growing in the profession and teaching.”

Connie’s sentiment toward her more recent involvement in collaborative professional development spoke to her understanding of her own proficiency as a teacher today. Moreover, Connie asserted that “teaching is constantly evolving and the kids we’re working with are constantly evolving,” so the professional learning in which Connie has elected to participate in has allowed her to meet these ever-changing demands. In addition, Connie spoke about her passion for helping her colleagues grow as educators. She commented, “…as much as I feel confident in my teaching ability, as much as I want to soak up information from others, I also want to help bring information to others now. Now I feel like I have something to contribute…” Connie’s hope to share this passion with her colleagues demonstrated the high value she has placed on the role of professional learning during her career. Connie’s passion and enthusiasm showed her willingness to participate in professional learning and her desire to lead her peers in these activities.

Connie spoke in depth about the kind of professional learning activities that have enhanced her ability as an educator. Over the years, Connie has participated in the school’s professional learning program. As a member of the school’s Professional Learning Committee
and as a participant and leader of such learning on campus, Connie suggested that she has been “drawn to professional development that I feel like, gives me concrete information, techniques, [and] strategies that I can bring back to the classroom.” Connie’s strong feelings toward this type of effective learning spoke to her passion of participating in professional development, as she stated, “that is going to make me a better teacher and colleague.” Connie referenced one such experience of a neuropsychologist who came to campus to conduct a three-day summer learning session on adolescent development. She commented, “I walked away and I had a better understanding of how my students feel when they’re sitting in my class…He spoke to us and broke it down with charts, and pictures, and graphs, really the science behind the brain…” Connie’s elaboration on this particular activity highlighted the “super-concrete” nature of professional learning that has impacted her own ability to apply this development to her classroom practices. In addition, she was able to focus on improving the craft of teaching and improving the ability to better relate to my students.” Connie’s satisfaction with this type of professional learning ignited her passion to continue to be an efficient compassionate educator.

As Connie spoke about the structure of professional learning that has interested her, she also referenced learning activities that have not appealed to her interests. Connie indicated that one of the largest challenges to effective professional development at this school is the lack of choice. Connie stated, “I think the biggest thing that stands out to me is choice. The one’s [workshops] I’ve done outside of school, I’ve had way more options…that I feel highlight areas of my improvement. Weaknesses I see in my own teaching that I can work on versus in-school professional learning, they’re prescribed and is kind of, how do we appeal to the masses.” Connie’s disappoint with the current state of professional learning at this school addressed her notion that teachers who have looked to improve upon their weaknesses, have felt stagnate in
their quest for more appropriate learning options. Additionally, Connie voiced her dissatisfaction with professional learning days at the school since they felt more like information sharing days instead of professional development experiences. Connie asserted, “Those [days] I don’t find to be as effective because it seems more sometimes as an information dissemination than giving me, ‘hey, this is what’s out there,” versus, ‘I’ve utilized this in my classroom and this is how I can see it as a benefit.”’ Connie made clear that her ideal professional learning scenario would allow her to walk away from these sessions with “concrete” examples and experiences in order to enhance her ability as an educator.

As Connie pondered the importance of leaving a professional development experience with concrete take-aways, she spoke candidly about recognizing her vulnerability concerning collaborative professional development. Connie felt that her best learning experiences have been those where she and her colleagues were honest about their strengths and weaknesses surrounding their practice. She commented, “it’s been great when someone comes into a professional learning experience and they talk and they’re honest and vulnerable…I feel like, it would be okay to be vulnerable and say, ‘I tried this and it didn’t work out well.’” Connie suggested that her most positive learning experiences resulted from “me being honest with myself as to what’s my area of growth and seeking out people who are good, who are masters of their craft in that area.” Connie then indicated that her preferred way to share ideas and moments of vulnerability with her colleagues was to participate in peer observation. Connie stated, “I feel like a really great professional development experience is witnessing great teaching in action…learning from people who do well what I’d like to do better, I think, and it’s the least sought out way of professional development from teachers.” Connie reported that she has utilized peer observation as a way to observe both novice and seasoned educators in order to seek
ways to improve her approach to teaching. However, Connie stated, “Even though oftentimes in
teachers, there is a reluctance to go into each other’s classrooms and see what is happening,” this
method of collaborative development has allowed her to investigate different strategies with the
possibility of improving her own work. Since Connie has enjoyed sharing her vulnerability with
her peers regarding her work, she has found this activity “super-valuable.”

In addition to sharing the elements of collaborative professional learning that have
excited Connie, she spoke about the impediments that hinder her ongoing participation. At this
school, Connie indicated that time and scheduling has been a consistent issue. Connie stated,
“We’re limited in our schedule, we’re limited in the number of days that we can commit to
professional learning, the number of hours within a school week that colleagues can collaborate
with each other to take a professional learning experience and then carry it out and continue to
work with each other.” This statement demonstrated Connie’s frustration with the current
schedule because it has hampered teachers’ ability to share common time in order to think, plan,
and execute collaborative learning initiatives. Connie suggested that much of the work that she
and her colleagues have executed over the years has been in “isolation” and not very
collaborative in nature because of time restriction and scheduling concerns. Moreover, Connie
attributed some of the issues of professional development execution to a lack of follow through
on the actual learning process. She said, “Even something as informal as like a coffee” would
initiate the conversation needed to allow individuals to reflect on their work together. Although
Connie mentioned the fact that the Wednesday-morning delayed start time would allow for this
type of interaction, she suggested “so much happens in the school and so much information
needs to get out to teachers that oftentimes that time is taken away and it becomes department
logistics, it becomes people come to school late because they don’t see the value in going…”
Connie’s concern illustrated her frustration with the current state of the school’s professional development program because certain structures that have been established hinder her ability to collaborate effectively with her peers.

Finally, Connie addressed her feeling toward the mindset that has existed at her school regarding the essence of professional learning. From her personal relationship to professional learning, Connie indicated that a common sentiment among some teachers has existed and stated, “I think my biggest frustration with our professional learning at school is just not enough people take advantage of it…How do we help teachers follow through on that [professional learning] when they say ‘I’m teaching 10-15-20 years. I’m pretty good at what I do’?” Connie has openly sought advice and feedback about her teaching, and she has struggled to understand how certain individuals maintain the mentality of “why fix what isn’t broken.” Connie spoke of a certain “comfort level” mindset that has existed among some faculty members at the school. This mindset has impacted her ability to engage fully in the collaborative learning process. Moreover, Connie suggested that her current level of satisfaction with professional learning at the school was less than desirable. She commented, “I’m not satisfied because I haven’t yet found something that I feel like is really going to concretely make more efficient at my job and more thoughtful at my job.” Connie’s overall feeling of frustration demonstrated her sense of dissatisfaction with the school’s current learning model. Moreover, she has not felt that the current structure “makes her think about my practice as a teacher” in the most efficient way possible.

**Participants’ Collective Understanding of Collaborative Professional Development**

Throughout the course of the three interviews conducted with each of this study’s participants, these educators shared their unique stories and experiences related to collaborative professional
development at this school. From their stories, the researcher has acquired a better understanding of how this phenomenon affects their individual teaching practice and their ability to collaborate with their colleagues in an attempt to enhance their work. The following section offers a thematic cross-analysis of how the participants in this study made sense of collaborative professional development at the study’s research site. The emerging themes from the three interviews revealed the collective understanding of educators’ perceptions of collaborative professional development at this institution.

**Theme 1: An Adequate Time Frame: The length of the development experience affects the teachers’ learning outcome and its practical application to their practice.**

Each participant spoke about the ideal length of a professional development experience for both in-house and off campus learning opportunities. From these interviews, the participants concluded that a multi-day, workshop style professional learning experience best optimized their time and ability to acquire new information and ideas. The majority of these workshops and learning experiences have taken place over the summer months and periodically during the school year. In each interview, the participants felt that learning over a period of multiple days allowed them to absorb new theories about teaching and learning as well as time to create lessons using these ideas. In addition to this time to learn and create, they felt comfortable with the time allotted to collaborate with their peers during the learning sessions. This combination of the theoretical and practical aspects of professional learning enabled each participant to understand relevant teaching pedagogies and methodologies.

The participants shared their thoughts on the importance of professional learning over a series of days. Rose enjoyed professional learning opportunities that have provided her the time to think and reflect on what she learned. She stated, “What I like about the workshops we have
here is it’s over several days and it gives you a chance to kind of absorb things…I like the fact that they’re three days in a row. They’ll usually present something on the first day and talk about these different things, and then the second and third days, we actually sit down and we work on them together…” This model of professional development resonated with Rose because she has enjoyed listening to experts in the field or her peers discuss ideas and be “together” during these workshops to help one another achieve something new. Rose used these workshops not only as an opportunity to learn from others, but she also used the time to design a product that she could “create together” with her colleagues.

Similarly, Connie concurred that this multi-day workshop style functioned best for her learning. She spoke about her participation in both on campus and off campus multi-day workshops and her ability to learn, practice, and collaborate with her peers. Connie asserted she has attended “multi-day professional learning …[and] there is a ton of different sessions that you can go to… Each day, it’s broken down into one-hour seminars on different topics and you set your own agenda.” Connie spoke about this style of seminar as ideal in length because she has left those experiences with “concrete information” that she “could bring back to the classroom” in order to make her “a more effective teacher” as well as “more effective for my students that struggle.” Connie spoke of her ability to leave these multi-day learning experiences with hands-on examples and direct take-aways that have enhanced her teaching. Similar to Rose, Connie understood the need to participate in multi-day workshops because of the typical balance between the presentations, discussion, and collaboration of ideas that took place.

Finally, in a similar manner to that of Rose and Connie, Samantha spoke to notion that multi-day workshops have created the ideal professional learning experience. In order to maximize time on learning new theories and their relation to practice, Samantha suggested, “I
think there’s always something else to distract you, there’s always another class to plan or another test to write or another family thing to do, so having two and a half days of just being able to dive into something and focusing and that’s great.” Samantha focused on her need to engage fully with new ideas and concepts she wanted to learn in a way that she was not distracted by the typical daily schedule of the school year. Moreover, for Samantha, such multi-day learning opportunities have afforded her the time needed to center herself around one particular aspect of her work in order to “hear other perspectives and talk about teaching and learning” with her colleagues in order to generate new ideas practical to her classroom. Like Rose and Connie, Samantha’s willingness to clear her personal schedule to immerse herself completely in her own professional growth spoke to her desire “to hear other perspectives and to have the time set aside to really focus on a particular topic.” Samantha and the other participants in this study revealed the importance of a multi-day workshop platform in order to optimize time while producing concrete learning outcomes applicable to their classrooms.

Theme 2: An Effective Use of Time?: The Wednesday morning professional learning model impedes professional growth and collaboration.

During the course of each interview, the participants spoke about the delayed Wednesday morning professional learning platform that has taken place at the school. Each participant mentioned this weekly model of professional learning would allow teachers to collaborate more often, on a mostly weekly basis, in order to share ideas and concerns about their classes and students. This model has included department meetings, self-selected meetings on different learning topics, and school-wide matters. Each of the participants suggested that the intent of the Wednesday morning meeting time initially interested them. However, they have since concluded
that this time has carried other obligations and priorities that do not parallel their professional development needs.

Rose spoke specifically about her outlook on the Wednesday morning collaborative time each week. When speaking about her ideal model of professional learning and the need to collaborate with colleagues, Rose indicated, “once the school year starts, Wednesday mornings aren’t for that. They’re kind of for other things. We’re so busy during the school year that it’s really hard for us to share ideas.” This business that Rose mentioned spoke to the hectic pace of the typical school day and her need to prepare for classes and offer extra help to her students. In addition, Rose mentioned that although Wednesday mornings initially had to do with professional leaning around technology and time to collaborate with peers, she stated, “I felt that, we’re all together as a department, and it would be great if we could share things, but there’s so many administrative things that have to happen first. I felt like in past years, Wednesday mornings were not used the way I wanted them to be used.” Rose suggested that school-wide directives, issues of scheduling, and other administrative matters have come to dominate Wednesday morning meeting time. Subsequently, Rose acknowledged the need to discuss such issues, but she would rather work alongside colleagues in order to learn new methodologies or plan lessons together.

Like Rose, Connie presented a similar argument supporting the ineffective nature of Wednesday morning meeting time. Since Connie has valued collaboration with her peers, she has found that most often such time does not exist during the Wednesday meeting model. She stated, “It was hard because I felt like we thought if we added an hour to the week, if we had it in that 8-9 time on Wednesday morning for professional development work with colleagues, … we’ve built in time into the curriculum now for us to meet weekly.” However, Connie quickly
concluded that other administrative tasks and obligation hampered her ability to interact with her colleagues. She asserted, “But so much happens in the school and so much information has to get out to teachers that oftentimes that time is taken away and it becomes department logistics, [and] people don’t see the value in going to those…” Like Rose, Connie spoke about the need for the school to disseminate information to departments or the entire faculty, so the fallback mechanism to spread such information has become these Wednesday morning hours. Moreover, Connie indicated that in order for her to “buy in” to the concept of Wednesday morning development time, she should be made to feel that “this is a valuable use of time” that would create a model of “professional cohorts” that demonstrate and “effective use of their [teachers’] time.” The notion that these Wednesday morning sessions should reflect more teacher-centered learning and collaboration spoke to Connie’s disappointment with this time.

In addition to Rose and Connie, Samantha has concluded that Wednesday morning learning time has not improved her overall professional learning or peer collaboration. Because of her involvement on the Professional Learning Committee in the past, Samantha spoke about the committee’s plan to offer several two-Wednesday in a row learning opportunities on various topics. However, Samantha felt that the people who did attend these seminars had “no mechanism to share” what they learned with the faculty in general. In addition, because of her involvement on the committee, Samantha found that “there was no real goal in mind for the end result of these sessions” and “it was unclear what the purpose was, other than to just get together as a faulty and talk about things.” Similar to Connie’s understanding of the Wednesday morning program, Samantha felt that she and her colleagues did not “buy in” to these sessions because they lacked “appeal” and “interest” to a large portion of the faculty.
Theme 3: Learning from One Another: Collaborative professional development conducted by outside experts and faculty colleagues at the school creates a beneficial learning environment for teachers.

The three interview participants spoke about the importance of acquiring knowledge and skills from both experts in a particular field of study and colleagues from the school. By participating in collaborative professional learning initiatives led by experts in the field, the participants noted an in depth presentation of knowledge and ideas. Moreover, when colleagues participated in learning opportunities presented by their peers at the school, the participants described their ability to address school-specific issue of professional development. The participants, in general, indicated a greater appreciation for these types of learning opportunities because they were able to discuss the particular nuances of professional learning most pertinent to their practice. However, some concern arose from these participants about the qualifications of their peers at the school and their ability to conduct adequately certain professional learning experiences.

Rose spoke about the need to balance perspectives between outside experts and her peers as she has pursued professional learning initiatives over the years. When speaking about a conference Rose attended led by an expert in the field, she suggested, “…it was in New York, a few years back, and it was about how to get students to speak in the classroom. I was really concerned about that in my bigger classes in particular. It was a college-level teacher and she showed us what she does in the classroom…” Rose indicated that the outside experience of this trained professional in the field allowed her an opportunity that the school could not currently provide her in terms of content-specific professional development. For Rose, this more “practical application” of outside expert knowledge spoke to her interest of developing her
discipline-specific teaching methodology. In addition, Rose commented on the importance of “being exposed to more things [learning initiatives] here at school,” and she commented on her participation in technology workshops conducted by her school colleagues. Rose stated that her on campus colleagues “have opened me up to things [insights] that I would have done otherwise.” In particular, Rose offered this insight in relation to the various technological initiatives at the school and her colleagues’ familiarity with technology integration. Rose indicated that her colleagues at the research site could directly assist her develop a toolbox of activities pertinent to her day-to-day practice regarding technology, for example. For Rose, a combination of external and internal facilitators has enhanced her overall learning experiences.

Similar to Rose, Connie has enjoyed a blended professional learning experience conducted by outside experts and her direct colleagues. Connie spoke about a conference she attended regarding ADD and ADHD. She stated, “I had experts from all different fields coming in. I just felt like I got a lot of concrete information that I could bring back into the classroom…” For Connie, this specific area of professional development represented a leaning need that outside experts in the field provided her. Related to that experience, Connie mentioned how her participation in an on campus seminar with an outside neuropsychologist similarly improved her understanding of adolescent development and learning styles. In addition, Connie suggested positive take-aways from her time spent in professional learning sessions conducted by her colleagues on campus. These Colleagues, like Connie, have taken a special interest in a particular area of teaching and learning through which Connie can collaborate with and learn from them. She stated, “I’ve had a few where I really walked away and I feel like I brought something to my classroom and it’s been a really positive, uplifting experience…I know who I can go to for support.” Connie shared that some of these colleague-led professional learning
experiences have been rewarding for her. However, she stated that not all of these colleague-led experiences have been fruitful because of the individuals leading such seminars. She said, “The negative experiences that I’ve had I didn’t feel like who was leading the professional learning workshop or seminar was qualified to be doing so.” Connie suggested that although some of her colleague-led experiences were positive, others were not as useful or well presented because of a lack of skilled knowledge on the part of the individual. Moreover, Connie shared the fact that as a former member of the Professional Learning Committee, she knew how many of these individuals were selected. She stated, “I kind of knew how they were put together…In some cases we just couldn’t find anyone else [a skilled facilitator].” Connie’s familiarity with the construction of some of the colleague-led experiences diverted her attention from further participation in these types of learning experiences. Nevertheless, Connie’s satisfaction in her professional learning, similar to that of Rose, has come from a combination of experiences led by experts and on campus colleagues.

Compared to Rose and Connie, Samantha also spoke about her participation in collaborative professional learning led by off campus experts and on campus colleagues. She discussed her appreciation regarding the precise knowledge of outside experts who had education and experience in a particular field. She also commented that some of those particular experiences “felt more like training seminars with a wealth of information provided” that could then be used in her practice. However, Connie stated these proved useful because a “respected expert” facilitated the presentation of material and conducted the multiple conversations around her learning. Similar to Connie and Rose, Samantha spoke about the more intimate experiences of learning from her colleagues on campus that “knew the campus and we all knew each other more.” This advantage for Samantha allowed her to apply newly acquired knowledge to specific
scenarios and leaning instances at this school. However, like Connie, Samantha expressed concerned when she attended sessions led by colleagues on campus. She has attended various colleague-led seminars of the years where the facilitator had incomplete knowledge or the inability to relate to the group as a whole. Samantha stated, “I think I would prefer that sort of scenario [expert presenter] rather than a conversation that is facilitated by someone who is not necessarily an expert in the subject but is just there to facilitate a conversation.” Like Connie, these experiences have detracted Samantha from further participation in these types of learning experiences. Like Rose and Connie, Samantha has appreciated a balance between collaborative professional learning experiences led by experts and colleagues alike because such opportunities have enhanced their overall learning. Subsequently, similar to Connie, Samantha addressed disappointment with the lack of skilled knowledge demonstrated by some colleagues who have conducted professional learning seminars.

Theme 4: Staying Fresh: Participation in collaborative professional development allows teachers to stay current in their practice.

The participants confirmed that participation in collaborative professional development allowed them to stay “fresh” in their daily practice. Each individual suggested that attending seminars and workshops both on and off the campus helped them understand different “trends” and “pedagogies” that have informed their work. Rose commented that she has participated in professional learning activities “just to stay fresh” in her field and in her understanding of her evolving students. Rose has understood that as technology at this school has become a more integral part of her work, and she has felt the “need to keep up” with those around her and has not wanted to “miss anything” in terms of being a better educator. Similar to Rose, Connie asserted, “Teaching is constantly evolving and the kids that we’re working with are constantly
evolving. I feel the need to be prepared for that almost to stay in front of it so that I can now, now feel confident in my teaching ability…” Connie’s desire for continued growth resonated with that of Rose as both have sought to improve their teaching methodologies and pedagogies to stay current in their field. Additionally, Connie spoke to the idea that students constantly evolve, and she has felt the need to address this evolution in order to focus “on improving the craft of teaching and improving the ability to better relate to my students.” Connie directed her response toward the dual need of bettering her own skills so as to meet the needs of her ever-changing students. Similar to Rose and Connie, Samantha indicated that her participation in professional development has focused on improving her practice. She stated, “I think, because I just want to get better and I want to know more about teaching.” Samantha’s response identified a common trend among all three interview participants as she too has sought out professional learning in order to improve her skills and understanding of the profession. In addition to her desire to improve her own work, she has looked for opportunities to consult with her colleagues in order “to hear other perspectives” as they relate to teaching styles and addressing student needs. Like Rose and Connie, Samantha’s participation in professional development has enhanced her ability to help her students achieve through her improved practice. The participants concluded that their desire to participate in collaborative professional development was a direct result of their desire to improve their teaching skills.

Theme 5: A Lack of Time: Insufficient time exists for participants to engage collaboratively in the processing of professional learning experiences, which leads to teacher isolation and frustration.

During each interview, the participants spoke about their ability to initiate, develop, and maintain conversation around newly acquired topics of collaborative professional development.
Consistently, the participants spoke about their ability to initiate conversation around new ideas or initiatives during their workshop or seminar experiences. This ability to converse on these matters resulted from their physical time together and the time provided at the workshop or seminar. More importantly, these opportunities gathered like-minded individuals together in order to discuss pertinent ideas or problems relevant to their daily practice. However, the participants described their inability to continue the conversation initiated during these workshops or seminars as the school year began and progressed. This inability to develop further these conversations forced the participants to attempt new ideas and strategies in isolation of one another. Moreover, this isolation hindered collaboration among colleagues in an attempt to execute acquired skills and methodologies gained during the learning experiences.

Rose spoke about her desire to work collaboratively with colleagues in her department and interdepartmentally. When Rose has participated in workshops or seminars with her colleagues in and out of the department, she has felt good that “at some point during the workshop we’re able to sit together and figure out how this [strategy] applies to the classroom.” However, Rose further indicated that she felt that this conversation was challenging to maintain during the course of the year. She stated, “Once the school year starts … it’s really hard for us to share ideas. I think that’s the most valuable thing for me.” Rose’s frustration here addressed the notion that little time during the school year was allotted for continued collaboration on summer time professional work. In addition, while working collaboratively with folks in her department during workshops or seminars, Rose commented that her many ideas rarely have come to fruition because of a lack of time. She said, “I felt that, we’re all together as a department, and it would be great if we could share things, … we don’t do that because we don’t have enough time.” Rose demonstrated her frustration on a department level with her inability to collaborate with
here direct colleagues as a result of her perception of insufficient time. Similarly, Rose expressed this same concern with professional learning workshops or seminars she has participated in with colleagues from across campus. She felt as if she were unable to continue the conversations initiated during these learning experiences because of a perceived time crunch. Rose stated she would like to continue the conversation begun at previous workshops during the school year and suggested, “I would also love some type of collaborative, where we could get together …to figure out ways in which our curriculums overlap and ways we can actually take advantage of that. We don’t have the time for that…” Rose’s inability to connect with all colleagues upon the conclusion of professional learning experiences has frustrated her. In addition, such a lack of interaction because of time constraints has forced Rose to work independently with her new ideas and techniques. Rose has struggled finding a “balance between planning for classes” and continuing conversations with colleagues from previous workshops. Rose asserted, “I would love to be able to find more opportunities to work together to do collaborative teaching, collaborative learning…[but] I think I get in a little bubble. I just feel like there’s no time of anything but the basics.” Rose’s struggled finding the time to work collaboratively has been exacerbated by the daily routine and task of her curriculum and students’ needs. Rose’s frustration with the lack of sustained collaboration has resulted from her perception of insufficient time dedicated to sustain professional learning conversations.

Similar to Rose’s understanding of insufficient time to collaborate on professional learning initiatives, Connie has struggled to find a way to collaborate with colleagues after these learning experiences. For Connie, the current structure of the professional learning program has utilized specific days during the summer or the school year to begin a conversation around a certain topic. However, as the weeks progressed, Connie noted “we’re limited in the number of hours
within a school week that colleagues can collaborate with each other to take a professional learning experience and carry it through and continue to work with each other.” Connie inferred that the current schedule has impacted her ability to foster meaningful conversations she and her colleagues have begun on a previous occasion. Moreover, Connie stated that, “Finding time in school day to have colleagues connect with one another in that capacity is very difficult.” Connie acknowledged the difficulty in finding the time necessary to elaborate on previous conversation with colleagues in order to enact ideas and strategies effectively. Nevertheless, Connie’s frustration with her inability to connect with her colleagues formally has impeded her collaborative efforts. This impediment has resulted in her feelings of professional isolation. Like Rose, Connie felt that much of the professional development work she has participated in on campus has not been processed in a collaborative manner. She said, “I think you get a lot of great information and I think it can be really useful but it’s only going to be useful executed if you can then go with colleagues and you schedule in time …to talk about it.” Connie spoke about the need for planned time to reinforce ideas and assist one another develop such ideas together. However, like Rose, Connie noted that time was “scarce” to allow for this type of activity during the school year. Therefore, Connie indicated that much of the consideration she has given to her professional learning has been on her own time. She indicated that because of time restraints, much of her professional learning “has not gone beyond that [the initial sessions].” Such a lack of interaction has forced Connie to work individually at mastering the skills and ideas presented in the different workshops and seminars sand has left her feeling isolated from her peers who may have been doing similar work.

Similar to the perceptions of time allotted to collaborative professional learning at this school presented by Rose and Connie, Samantha shared a similar perspective. Samantha
commented that most of the learning experiences have not allowed her to engage fully with her colleagues after the workshop or seminar. She commented, “Unfortunately, I think a lot of it goes down to the scheduling and trying to find the time and we’re all busy people…Time should be set aside and the expectation should be that everyone is there…to be able to share their valuable experiences.” Samantha suggested that the lack of scheduled time has inhibited her from engaging fully with her peers in these professional learning opportunities over the years. Moreover, Samantha felt that scheduling the initial professional learning experience and the dates of the collaboration time to take place in the future would enhance her ability to engage with her peers. She said, “I’d also like the idea of having more frequent two-to-three hour sessions spaced out throughout the year. I think that would be really valuable for me. I think the most important thing is that there not done in a bubble in the summer time…” Samantha’s frustration with the current reality of the school’s professional learning has left her feeling somewhat “frustrated.” Her frustration emanates from the standpoint that much of the work she has done with her professional development has taken place in “isolation” of her peers. This isolation has existed because of a lack of common scheduled time to collaborate on these matters with her colleagues. Samantha asserted, “Well, I’m disappointed… I feel like I have learned a lot of valuable things…I’ve been able to process it in my own way and I really do think that talking to other people extends that processing and augments it…and challenges me and helps me see things from a different perspective.” Samantha has enjoyed the collegial interaction during her professional learning experiences, but the isolation of processing this information results from a lack of scheduled time to collaborate with colleagues. Samantha stated, “The fact that so often what is piqued during the summer, it doesn’t extend beyond what I do with it in my own little vacuum, it’s disappointing to me.” Samantha’s perception of the lack of time allotted to
continue her collaboration with her colleagues spoke to her frustration with the current structure of the school’s professional learning program. Like Rose and Connie, Samantha understands the importance of participating in collaborative learning initiative, but she too finds disappointment in the structure of the school’s execution of such programs.

**Theme 6: A Cultural Concern:** A negative attitude toward the culture of professional learning exists at this school.

Throughout the course of these three interviews, each participant noted their concern with the overall attitude toward collaborative professional learning at the research site. In their evaluation of the current professional learning program, the participants noted that sharp contrasts existed in the value teachers placed on the role of professional development. Of major concern to each participant was the perception held by their colleagues as to the extent to which these learning experiences have enhanced individual and collective practices at the school. Moreover, the participants spoke about how this attitude toward professional learning at this school exemplified a cultural concern that they felt has hindered teacher improvement.

Although Rose has spoken positively about her more recent professional learning experiences at the school, she also mentioned negative viewpoints held by her and her colleagues. Rose’s skepticism regarding the intent of the school’s professional learning program spoke to the perception of a negative cultural outlook at the school. Rose stated, “In the early days, we were kind of on our own. We were kind of like a king and a queen in our own little domain and I really appreciated it.” Rose’s candid statement referenced her initial attitude toward the implementation of a more demanding model of professional learning at the school. She mentioned that people felt “threatened” by the idea of making assessment and curriculum more in common with colleagues. In particular, Rose asserted, “Then when they
administration] started to say ‘Okay, now we want you to have more in common…’ and all that, I kind of balked at that, to be honest with you.” This perception maintained by Rose addressed her feeling of a potential loss of autonomy. Rose mentioned how she and her colleagues felt about this sudden jolt to their daily practice when she indicated, “It was easy to close the door and do what we wanted and not look outside and see what else was going on.” Rose described how she and her colleagues have viewed the “recent push” in professional development as somewhat of a threat to their autonomy and loss of their previous sense of professional freedom at the school.

Like Rose, Connie addressed about the negative perceptions of professional learning at the school. She spoke about the “mindset” that has dominated the professional development program at the school. She commented, “Again, like people’s mindset on what their expectations are, some people come in with the pre-described notion of what that professional learning workshop is going to be, and they only get out of it what they want to get out of it.” Connie indicated that this mindset has infiltrated the understanding of the professional learning program at this school. Moreover, Connie suggested that many educators at the school have refused to expose their “weaknesses and vulnerabilities” with their colleagues during these professional learning experiences. Connie felt that this lack of vulnerability on the part of her colleagues has impacted her ability “to effectively collaborate” with them in order to enhance her practice. This outlook presented by Connie has contributed to the negative perception on professional development at this school. Connie felt that “people get comfortable” in their roles as educators at this school, and because of that perceived comfort, “they have not sough out professional learning experiences in many years.” The lack of self-selection in professional learning at this school has allowed Connie to attribute this comfort level with her notion that some colleagues
have not felt they need “to fix what isn’t broken.” Additionally, Connie said, “I think my biggest frustration with our professional learning at school is just not enough people take advantage of it…There is faculty on our staff that haven’t had a professional learning experience outside of the ones that have been forced on them…” Connie’s disenchantment with some of her colleagues’ insufficient interest in professional learning spoke to entrenchment of the lack of relevance of collaborative professional development at the school. Connie’s negative assessment of the current professional learning program came as a direct result of her understanding of her colleagues’ attitudes toward these learning experiences.

Similar to Connie, Samantha spoke about the negative cultural perception that has existed at the school. Samantha made mention also to the negative mindset that has existed among some of the faculty at the school regarding their own professional learning. She suggested, “I also think that there is a culture at the school that does not believe professional development is an essential part of teaching.” Samantha felt that this pervasive attitude has dominated the professional learning scene at his school and has affected her ability to collaborate more effectively with her colleagues. In addition, Samantha stated, “I know very few people on campus that seem to prioritize it [professional development], and I think for those of us who do think it’s really important, I think we’ve been beaten down a bit.” Her reference to the feeling of having “been beaten down” spoke to the idea that a cultural mindset has existed at the school that has placed less importance on professional development. Moreover, Samantha spoke about the difficulty of talking to her peers about aspects of pedagogy if people “don’t really even know the vocabulary of things.” For Samantha, her inability to use the language of teacher professional learning has appeared non-existent because many people lack a common knowledge vocabulary in order to address these issues. Like Rose and Connie, Samantha felt that this lack of
understanding has come from the “attitude that if you’ve been a good teacher for a long time, you’re still a good teacher, and there’s something about the mumbo-jumbo of newfangled vocabulary and not everyone feels that they need to better themselves or learn these terms.”

Samantha’s perceptions of her colleagues’ attitude toward professional development spoke to her belief that a dismissive culture toward collaborative professional development has existed at the school. Like Rose and Connie, Samantha has concluded that some of her colleagues find the entire professional development program less than effective because of their preconceived notion of ongoing learning and collaboration.

Theme 7: The Administration’s Role: Administrative support of individual teacher collaborative professional development is present at this school, but overall administrative initiation and follow-through on learning opportunities is minimal.

All three participants in this study praised the individual support they have received over the years from the school’s administration in pursuit of professional learning. The participants commented that the school has generously provided funding for on and off campus learning experiences, transportation and lodging when applicable, and the necessary time off from school to participate in such learning endeavors. However, when focusing on the professional development program as a whole, the interview participants suggested that the administration’s initiation and follow-through on of such learning experiences is minimal. The participants asserted that the administration fully encourages teachers to partake in collaborative professional develop opportunities. Subsequently, often times they do not provide a platform for these individuals to share their experiences with the larger faculty.

Rose spoke highly of the school administration’s support of her professional learning over the years. She commented, “I think they’re wonderful. I really do. All the years that I’ve
been here, they’ve been really good…and whatever support they can give us, I think they have given us.” Rose’s admiration for the support she has received over the years has inspired her individual pursuit for knowledge as a professional in a constantly evolving field. In addition to Rose’s satisfaction for the administration’s support of her own learning, she referenced a deficiency in their follow-through check-ins during the school year. Rose stated, “We’re so busy once the school year starts…with administrative things and just with what’s going on…it’s really hard for us to share ideas. I think that’s the most valuable thing for me…Non stressful time spent together and administrative feedback would be ideal.” Rose’s comment allowed her to express how the administrative happenings and daily occurrences during the school year have hampered her ability to collaborate. In addition, Rose suggested that the administration’s follow-through on her professional learning has been scarce since much time and energy has been allotted to issues pertaining to the flow of daily school life. Rose’s overall satisfaction with the administration’s support of her professional development has continued to motivate her participation in such experiences.

Similar to Rose, Connie spoke highly of the administration’s support for her professional development at the school. She asserted, “I think the school is always really supportive. They’ve always asked me what can we do for you, what do you want to do, how can we help. I think anytime I’ve ever asked to go to something or I’ve come up with an idea, I’ve never been turned down.” Connie’s expression of satisfaction regarding her pursuit of professional development resonated with Rose’s feelings of support for her desire to enhance her practice. However, Connie said that it has been mainly the teachers that have presented their ideas to administration for approval to attend such workshops and seminars. Connie thought administrative support in identifying these experiences for teachers would foster even more
support for teacher development. She stated, “I think one of the ways we can grow as a school in terms of administrative support is to present teachers more opportunities for professional development and say ‘Here’s something that we think would really benefit you and our school.’” Connie insinuated that a more hands-on administrative approach would encourage faculty members to pursue professional learning experiences if they had some assistance in identifying solid development opportunities. In addition, Connie suggested that the administration’s lack of focus on identifying professional learning opportunities for all its teachers has had to do with the constant barrage of issues that affect the daily life of the school’s leadership. She commented, “We have had so many changes in the past few years that the administration is just trying to deal with those right now.” As a result of these daily issues and administrative matters, Connie concluded that a lack of initiation and follow-up on professional learning initiatives has been a major priority for the administrative team. Although Connie spoke of the administration’s tremendous support of her pursuit of collaborative professional development, she shared her frustration with the administration’s inability to offer more direct support for teacher learning.

As with Rose and Connie, Samantha too has found great support for her individual pursuit of collaborative professional development. With great enthusiasm, Samantha said, “I would say that the school’s administration has been extremely supportive of my pursuing professional development. They have allowed me to take time off during the school year, they have paid for conferences…Never have I felt that the school has thought that my, especially going to conferences, is not worth my while.” Samantha has felt constant support of her interest in professional growth during her tenure at the school. Subsequently, Samantha indicated her frustration with the administration’s support of school-wide professional learning. She said, “I would say that most of the administration gives it [professional development] lip service from
the outside. I’ve never been discouraged to participate in it, but I don’t think I have ever been in a session where an administrator has participated fully in that session. You get the impression that this is something just for the faculty and not for the entire school community.” Samantha’s candid explanation of her understanding of administrative participation in the school’s professional learning program suggested a high level of frustration with their espoused values and actual practice. Moreover, Samantha spoke about a lack of administrative follow-up on individual and school-wide professional learning activities. In particular, Samantha focused on follow-up involving feedback about workshops or seminars and their affect on learning practices. She commented, “There was no evaluative process of the value of these sessions: is this type of session useful?, was the structure of it useful?, to give feedback to facilitators to say ‘wow I feel like this was a waste of time,’ or to say, ‘I thought this was great.’” Samantha asserted that this lack of evaluation on the usefulness of the school’s professional learning experiences has hampered the administration from effective follow-up in order to adjust workshop and seminar structures. Like Connie, Samantha perceived administrative follow-through on professional development as a factor in her frustration with the school’s current learning program.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the major findings from the research participants in this study. The first section of this chapter presented participant profiles where the researcher highlighted the major views each individual held in regard to their understanding and perception of the phenomenon of collaborative professional development. Through personal examples of their learning experiences on and off the school’s campus, the researcher gave voice to each person as an individual who has experienced this construct. In the second portion of the chapter, the researcher presented a cross-analysis of the major themes that came from each individual
interview. The researcher described the major themes and further exemplified them with relevant quotations from the participant interviews. The themes summarized the perception of collaborative professional development held by these three research participants at this institution.
Chapter Five

Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this research was to understand participants’ sense making of the phenomenon of collaborative teacher professional development in a private secondary faith-based school. The participants in this study represented a purposeful sample of educators within this particular context. These participants have experienced various types of collaborative professional learning as members of the faculty at this research site. Therefore, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with these participants utilizing an interview protocol designed in conjunction with the literature on teacher professional development and the theoretical frameworks of Garet et al. (2001) and Wegner (1998). This protocol allowed the researcher to engage the participants in order for them to reflect on their perception of professional development and how it affects their work in this particular context. Additionally, the interviews took place at a mutually agreeable time for both the researcher and the participants and in a location of the participants’ choice. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to capture the essence of the participants’ understanding of collaborative teacher professional development. The researcher used these interviews as a way to garner a better understanding of this study’s central research question: How do faculty members in private faith-based secondary schools perceive collaborative teacher professional development?

The primary goal of this research was to gather educators’ understanding and perception of collaborative professional development. Accordingly, the participants in this study have engaged with various types, forms, and styles of professional learning both in and out of the work place. The varied viewpoints offered by these participants provided the researcher with vast amounts of data and personal stories that exemplified the phenomenon of collaborative
teacher professional development in the private faith-based secondary school context. In order to achieve the best results from the study’s participants, the research assured these educators that he would maintain confidentiality so that their identities were not compromised during and after the interview process. This reassurance allowed participants to share their personal insights, thoughts, and understanding of the phenomenon. As the primary focus of this study was to express participants’ viewpoints, the researcher used direct quotations from each interview. More importantly, this open sharing and use of participants’ exact words truly allowed the researcher to engage in interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data.

This chapter provides a discussion of the major research findings in this study. Accordingly, the researcher discusses the study’s findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks and the literature review on collaborative professional development in order to provide an interpretation of their significance. The researcher then provides a reexamination of his positionality as a result of his interpretation of the study’s findings. In addition, the researcher discusses the practitioner and scholarly significance of the findings. The researcher concludes with recommendations for potential changes in educational practice concerned with this study’s problem of practice. Finally, the researcher presents suggestions for future research on the collaborative teacher professional development within the context of this study.

**Extracting Meaning from Participants’ Responses**

**The Ideal Length of Collaborative Professional Learning in this Context**

The participants in this study consistently mentioned their understanding of the importance of continued exposure to a particular professional learning topic over an extended period of time. Multi-day, workshop or seminar-style learning opportunities best optimized their time on learning and their ability to develop practical applications of their work. This particular
finding resonated with the work of Liberman (1995), which suggested that many typical learning experiences occur as a multiple day event over many hours. At this research site, these multiple day events usually have had some type of follow-up during the school year when teachers met to discuss their work (Kazemi & Hubbard, 2008). Additionally, these participants spoke about the collaborative style of these experiences and their ability to discuss and to create in conjunction with workshop facilitators and colleagues. This finding concurred with work presented by Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) who described that these more traditional forms of teacher professional development have tended to involve outside experts or school leaders. This study’s participants suggested they enjoyed learning from outside experts or colleagues who could help them relate the particular topic of a professional learning experience to their own daily practice. Moreover, the information provided by this study’s participants supported one aspect of the Garet et al. (2001) framework used to discuss effective teacher professional development. These authors implied that learning activities that have taken place over an extended period of time allowed for in-depth discussion of teaching and learning strategies. Similarly, the participants in this study supported this finding presented by Garet et al. (2001). The participants agreed that their ability to discuss theory and design lessons over multiple days provided the necessary time to collaborate with colleagues during the learning experience in order to implement new ideas in their work.

**Collaborative Professional Development Devoid of Growth and Learning**

Contrary to the perception of the importance of a multi-day style of professional development offered at this school, the delayed Wednesday development platform has done little to improve teaching and collaboration over time. Accordingly, the participants addressed their perception of the chaotic pace and disjointed nature of these Wednesday morning sessions and
their inability to foster meaningful conversation (Liberman, 1995; Mullen & Huntiger, 2008). The fragmented nature of these particular learning experiences described by the participants illuminated the findings presented by Kazemi and Hubbard (2008) and Garet et al. (2001), which suggest that this style of development has not proven sufficient to sustain meaningful teacher learning. These authors suggested that minimal professional growth has taken place during these learning experiences that lack continuity and follow-through. As the participants in this study described, the nature of the Wednesday morning meetings have provided roughly fifty minutes of discussion on a particular topic per session. Multiple sessions on these Wednesday’s have been offered, and teachers have selected sessions to attend on a rotating basis by topic. Moreover, in conjunction with the Garet et al. (2001) framework used in to support this study, the findings addressed the lack of continuity in the content focus of the Wednesday morning professional learning experiences. Such a lack in content coherence has complicated teacher implementation of new ideas because of insufficient time to process such learning activities (Buttler et al., 2004). Consequently, the professional learning conducted at this site during the Wednesday morning time frame has lacked teacher focus needed to support and sustain effective collaboration and learning. This finding concurred with one of the core value aspects of the Garet et al. (2001) framework, which stated that effective teacher development has provided particular focus on one aspect of teacher learning over time that has enhanced practice. The participants in this study supported this point and suggested that Wednesday morning learning sessions have not indicated a direct correlation to improved practice.

Learning From Experts and Colleagues Alike

During the course of the interviews conducted for this study, the participants addressed their desire to learn from respected experts in a particular field and their own
colleagues. Participants felt that outside experts have offered precise information and specific knowledge about particular disciplines or topics in education. Furthermore, the participants have enjoyed their time working with colleagues at this school who have possessed more intimate understanding of teacher and student needs. These findings corroborated the notion presented by Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008), which suggested that teachers have learned from experts and colleagues alike because of their willingness to share their work, reflect on their practice, and their desire to take risks. Additionally, such participation in professional development with a multitude of individuals with different backgrounds has built collegial trust and mutual support (Gilles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010). This trust and support has allowed colleagues and experts to merge ideas and experiences in order to change individual behavior and practice over time (Doppenberg, den Brok, & Bakx, 2012). Subsequently, the participants mentioned that some school colleagues who have led professional learning experiences have lacked the proper experience or credentials. This finding concurred with information presented by Lucilio (2009) and Mayotte, Wei, Lamphier, and Doyle (2013), which suggested private and Catholic schools often times have provided insufficiently trained personnel to conduct professional development. Nevertheless, the importance of learning from experts in a particular field or well-versed colleagues at the school underscored a major tenet of Wenger’s (1990) theoretical framework that supported the development of this study. Wenger (1990) postulated that communities of practice in the workplace have formed as a result of like-minded individuals getting together in order to develop a mutual understanding around a common topic of learning. This aspect of Wenger’s (1990) framework of communities of practice helped to understand the sentiments expressed by this study’s participants in terms of their desire to learn from a myriad of individuals with differing types of expertise.
Staying Current in an Ever-changing Field

The participants in this study commented that their participation in collaborative professional learning at this school has resulted from their desire to remain current in their teaching practice. Accordingly, their self-selection into different workshops and seminars both at the school and at outside learning opportunities has allowed them to study different topics pertinent to their specific disciplines and education in general. Previous research conducted by Darling-Hammond (1995) and Burke, Marx, and Berry (2011) supported this finding as practitioners who constantly have sought collaborative learning opportunities have enhanced their teaching repertoire and improved their practice over time. Similarly, work done by Estepp, Roberts, and Carter (2012) confirmed the relevance of this particular research finding. As teachers commented on their willingness to participate in professional learning experiences, they allowed themselves to study and learn from colleagues practicing the latest teaching methodologies. Improvement through these learning initiatives has allowed educators to remain on par with the newest educational ideas and trends. Additionally, this particular research finding resonated with this study’s theoretical framework as presented by Wegner (1990). The participants in this study have gathered in workshops and seminars because of their mutual interest in professional growth. Therefore, this finding supported Wegner’s (1990) understanding of how mutual engagement in learning experiences has gathered like-minded individuals to support one another in pursuit of a common goal. In the case of collaborative professional development, this study’s participants have gathered together to stay fresh in their practice and help one another achieve this goal.

Insufficient Follow-up on Collaborative Professional Development
During each interview, the participants indicated that there was not insufficient time allotted during the school year to follow-up on professional development workshops. In particular, the participants commented that formal follow-up sessions on the summer-time professional learning initiatives failed to take place most of the time. However, if these sessions took place, they were not credited with teacher improvement. This finding confirmed research presented by Schwarz McCotter (2001), Burbank and Kauchak (2003), Kazemi and Hubbard (2008), and Estepp, Roberts, and Carter (2012), which suggested that collaborative teacher professional development required intentional and deliberate reflective inquiry into practice over time. The lack of allotted time and the subsequent inefficient follow-through on workshops and seminars at this school indicated that more structured time was needed to implement effectively new knowledge and ideas acquired during these learning experiences. Accordingly, this research finding supported the framework presented by Garet et al. (2001) in regard to effective teacher professional development. A major tenet of this framework suggested that teachers must have professional learning opportunities designed to perpetuate the learning conversation over time. However, the participants in this study asserted that the time designated to sustain these conversations in a constructive manner had not been constantly intentional and meaningful. This perception presented by the participants resulted from their frustration and inability to make total sense out of the work they had engaged in during these workshops and seminars. This sentiment resonated with research conducted by Mizell (2012) as educators desired time over the course of the school year in order to articulate ideas acquired and developed during professional learning opportunities. The overall desire to improve practice has been hampered by a lack of allotted quality time for colleagues to engage in reflective inquiry on their work.

A Negative Culture Toward Collaborative Professional Development
In each interview, the participants spoke of their understanding of a negative attitude that has existed at this school concerning the perception of the importance of teacher development. The participants noted the vast array of opinions that their colleagues have held regarding the effect of collaboration and professional learning activities as a mechanism to improve their work. Therefore, the participants perceived that many of their colleagues have shied away from voluntary participation in non-obligatory professional learning initiatives. As a result of this attitude, the participants suggested that a cultural concern surrounding collaborative professional development has existed at this school. This finding related to research conducted on teacher professional learning pertaining to its overall ability to influence teacher participation (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Burke, 2013). This research stated the extent to which such learning has been carried out in schools depended on the overall cultural perception of the value granted to teacher development and its impact on teacher improvement. Nevertheless, the understanding of the perceived relevance of professional development at the school suggested that an overall negative attitude toward collaboration and teacher learning has existed. This result indicated that by large, teachers here have felt little perceived relevance of learning activities on their actual practice. Accordingly, this negative attitude highlighted the importance of implementing this study’s combined theoretical framework to improve teacher perception of the relevance of collaborative professional development in their work. In particular, the framework presented by Garet et al. (2001) suggested that collective participation in professional development has enhanced teacher effectiveness over time because of like-minded people working together. Moreover, Wegner’s (1990) community of practice framework has indicated that individuals who work together over time have developed a shared repertoire of tools and resources. More importantly, these tools
and resources have improved their individual and collective work. Taken together, these models have suggested that mutual interest and dedication to a particular topic have developed among members of similar groups. The results of this study confirmed that the incorporation of these frameworks have lacked sufficient development and implementation at this school in an attempt to improve the culture of collaboration and professional development over time.

**Administrative Support and Follow-up on Teacher Learning Initiatives**

The participants in this study mentioned the support of the school’s administration in an attempt to sustain teacher learning initiatives. The participants praised the school’s leadership for its support of their individual pursuit of workshops, seminars, and courses in order to enhance their own work. However, the participants presented the notion that the overall administrative initiation, support, and follow-through on school-wide professional learning initiatives have lacked in effectiveness. In particular, the participants commented that most often the school has not provided a platform or mechanism for teachers to share information they have acquired from their individual and collective professional learning experiences in a collaborative fashion. Research conducted by Mullen and Hutinger (2008) and Hewson (2013) suggested that school leaders needed to model positive learning behaviors for all faculty to emulate in order to increase interest in professional learning. Moreover, these researchers indicated teacher collaboration and the development of a system of shared values and beliefs generated directly from the time allotted, guidance given, and motivation provided by those in positions of leadership. Therefore, effective leadership has had the power to act as a catalyst to garner teacher participation in collaborative learning activities. Subsequently, this particular research finding spoke to the importance of the Garet et al. (2001) framework for effective teacher professional development. According to the framework, effective teacher development has
resulted from collective participation by all members of the school community. Nevertheless, school leadership that followed-up on teacher learning initiatives, offered relevant feedback to teachers on their work, and provided the space necessary to share acquired knowledge has worked to create a stronger professional culture. This particular finding also resonated with Wegner’s (1990) community of practice framework. In conjunction with this framework, school leaders who have worked to develop a collective purpose and mission regarding teacher learning have solidified a common identity among a group of individuals. The frameworks presented in support of this study have provided a model for this school’s leadership to consider when designing and following-up on teacher professional development.

Understanding the Significance of Collaborative Professional Development

The findings presented in this study have highlighted teachers’ perceptions of the role of collaborative professional development in the context of private secondary faith-based education. The researcher addressed this problem of practice with a purposeful sample of educators who participated in this study represented a cross-section of individuals who regularly have participated in professional learning both at the school and off the campus. Research has indicated that teachers who participate in professional learning not only improve their own practice but also improve communication with colleagues over time (Liberman, 1995; Drago-Severson, 2009). Accordingly, this study has provided insight into the problem of practice examined and its ability to influence how leaders and teachers develop and execute collaborative professional development programs within the context of private secondary faith-based schools.

The unique nature of this study’s context has provided an opportunity to examine how school leaders and teachers develop a strong professional learning platform. Since private faith-based schools have lacked consistency in the design and implementation of collaborative
professional learning programs across many schools, this study has helped school leaders within this context. The study has demonstrated to this school’s leaders the need to foster collective participation in teacher professional learning by providing the designated time built into the schedule of the school (Mullen & Hunt, 2008). Accordingly, school leaders have understood that teachers who collaborate over time and feel the support of their leadership have built collegial and trustful relationships with all members of the school community (Estepp, Roberts, & Carter, 2012). By providing the necessary materials, resources, time, and constructive feedback for teacher professional development, school leaders will begin to see the emergence of strong communities of practice. These communities of practice have helped to gather like-minded individuals together in an attempt to improve their craft (Wegner, 1990). In addition, school leaders have learned that a change to the chaotic pace and lack of follow-through on professional development should be addressed in order to improve practice. Subsequently, school leaders have learned that teachers seek a well-balanced professional development experience. As a result, they have felt the need to explore off campus offering to fulfill this need. School administrators have been able to use this finding to plan more diverse learning experiences for teachers. Moreover, the utilization of this study’s combined theoretical framework has allowed school leaders to understand how certain structural elements of professional learning and the formation of communities of practice have combined to address the coherence of teacher development.

In addition to this study’s significance for its school’s leadership, this study provided an understanding of how collaborative professional development has affected teacher learning. The researcher used the stories and experiences of the participants in order to underscore their perception about this phenomenon. Accordingly, the teachers interviewed offered a wide range
of experiences regarding their exposure to collaborative professional learning. The participants agreed that their learning was enhanced through ongoing discussion, reflection, and inquiry into newly acquired knowledge over time (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). In addition, the teachers interviewed in this study shared their perceptions of the kind and type of professional learning offerings experienced at this school. Nevertheless, the teachers spoke about their need to find a balance between internal and external learning opportunities in an attempt to round out their learning. This finding has assisted practitioners as it suggested that the school has been a good source of initial professional learning activities, but teachers have had to explore outside resources to fill gaps in their own development. Overall, this study’s practitioners spoke to the need to enhance their individual professional learning by gathering with like-minded individuals who share similar learning interests (Wegner, 1990). This study has provided educators within this context the information needed to diversify their learning experiences in a similar fashion to the participants in this study.

The micro-level significance of this study has directly affected the role of collaborative professional development at this research site. The teachers in this study openly voiced their ideas about the manner in which professional learning has been executed. In addition, the findings shared by the research participants demonstrated an immediate need for school officials to continue working on the positive aspects of its learning platform that aid in teacher learning. However, the study’s findings have suggested an overhaul of certain aspects of the current teacher development program that have not resonated with educators at the school. The ideas shared by the study’s participants discussed the tools and structures of teacher professional development that augment collegial inquiry and collaboration on practice. Therefore, this study has had the potential for leaders and teachers to transform the culture of professional learning at
this school by addressing directly the needs of its teachers within this context. This micro-level significance served as a major catalyst of change for certain aspects of the current learning program in order to increase teacher buy-in to the activities so as to work toward improving their individual and collective practice. This approach has also provided an avenue for teachers’ voices to be heard while creating a shared sense of leadership in terms of the development of collaborative learning platforms (Spillane, 2006).

In addition to the micro-level significance of this study, the larger private secondary faith-based school community has benefited from its findings. Since research has suggested a dissonance in the roll-out of professional learning programs within this particular context, private secondary school leaders have benefited from hearing teachers’ perceptions of such learning (Drago-Severson, 2012). Accordingly, leaders in other schools within a similar context could explore the effect of this study’s framework in conjunction with teachers’ understanding of collaborative learning. The examination of this framework along with teachers’ perception could offer leaders in these similar schools a model to design effective educator development programs.

Re-evaluating the Researcher’s Positionality to the Study’s Problem of Practice

From the outset of his study, I have found the construct of collaborative teacher professional development of great interest. I have concluded that my own educational experiences and my drive as a change agent in the field of education have made this particular phenomenon an important aspect of my practice. However, over the course of my professional and academic experiences, I have come to understand that not all individuals have appreciated this construct in the same manner that I have enjoyed it during my career. Therefore, I have become sensitized to the fact that my level of understanding of this topic varies dramatically
because of my post-graduate academic opportunities as well as my work on this doctoral dissertation project.

During the course of this project and my work with research participants, I have come to realize why some of my colleagues and I have developed differences in opinion on this topic. Having enjoyed collegial discussion and debate of different, I have continued to place professional development at the forefront of my formation as an educator. My vulnerability in sharing the successes and failures of my practice has made me a stronger teacher. Subsequently, this research has further developed my understanding of how my colleagues process a similar sense of vulnerability as it related to their willingness to participate in these discussions and debates. Not everyone has shared my willingness to convey openly certain feeling about this topic for fear of potential repercussions. Not all colleagues see the exact value in professional development and constant collaboration as I have come to understand. These differing viewpoints allowed me to examine this problem of practice through a different lens, and this modified lens has expanded my interpretation of this problem of practice from a variety of angels. This doctoral research project has afforded me the opportunity to understand that my colleagues and I have similar yet subtly different appreciations for the value of professional learning.

Over the course of this doctoral research project, I have developed a new awareness to the variety of perspectives that exist surrounding this study’s problem of practice. Throughout the time I have spent living the problem in my work context, reviewing the literature on collaborative professional development, and the time spent with interview participants, I have developed a greater desire to continue the conversation on this topic with many people. These vast differences in personal experiences that my colleagues have brought to this conversation
have provided me with a variety of perspectives that I could use for future and continued research possibilities. More informally, these varied perspectives I have gained on my topic of study have provided fruitful catalysts for conversation involving all aspects of teacher learning. Not only have I come to understand my colleagues’ perspectives on this topic, but I have also adapted my own practice and philosophy of professional learning in order to improve my practice. As a scholar practitioner, I must continue to be aware of how these different perspectives influence my actions and those of my colleagues. These perspectives ultimately inform our actions, and I have come to appreciate the diversity of thoughts that inform other people’s practice over time.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to answer the question of how teachers in private secondary faith-based schools perceived collaborative professional development. In particular, the researcher engaged the study’s participants in interviews where they shared their unique perspectives and experiences in relation to this phenomenon. Through the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis, the researcher interpreted the experiences of each participant in an attempt to gain deeper insight into how teachers made sense of their understanding of professional learning. In addition to the researcher’s interpreting the meaning of this construct for each research participant, this study gave a voice to the individual experiences and positionality of each participant at the research site. Moreover, the key findings presented in this study shed light on how teachers within this particular context participated in and made sense of their experience of collaborative teacher development. The research presented seven major findings that speak to the perceptions and understanding that each research participant conveyed in their relation to this
topic of study. The researcher provided recommendations for future practice and research possibilities.

The research findings demonstrated the unique experiences of each participant as well as a connection to the literature within the field of teacher professional development. Finding number one spoke to the teachers’ understanding of the need to expand their learning over a series of multi-day workshops and seminars. This finding illuminated the need for teachers to acquire new knowledge, process the knowledge, and attempt to connect it to their practice (Liberman, 1995). The teachers in this study explained that their participation in a multi-day learning experience allowed them the time to process new ideas and collaborate with their peers. These findings resonated with previous research that stated that learning over time allowed teachers to synthesize new information both individually and with colleagues alike (Wegner, 1990; Garet et al., 2001). This opportunity allowed for modifications in individual and collective practice. A recommendation for future practice would include designing more professional development workshops both during the school year and the summer months utilizing a multi-day format. This format would provide teachers the opportunity to study, process, and reflect on newly acquired knowledge while collaborating with their peers.

Finding number two addressed the idea that Wednesday morning professional learning time has not improved teacher collaborative professional development. The teachers’ perceived the hectic pace of the Wednesday morning meeting time as more of a distraction to their growth as educators because of the pressing needs of the daily schedule. Accordingly, this finding resonated with previous work done by Kazemi and Hubbard (2008) and Garet et al. (2001), which suggests that this particular style of professional development has not been able to sustain meaningful teacher learning. Therefore, the teachers interviewed have felt that this current
platform wasted time while not enhancing their learning experiences. A recommendation for future practice would include the restructuring of the Wednesday morning platform. Since this platform currently appears ineffective for teachers, schools leaders could look to expand the Wednesday morning platform to meet the demand for a more multi-day workshop or seminar experience. This restructuring would allot more time in order to allow teachers the preferred amount of time to process what they have learned.

Finding number three revealed teachers’ perception of the importance of learning from both experts in the field and colleagues who have had training in a particular methodology. This finding suggested that teachers enjoyed their time with both respected experts in a particular field and their colleagues who possessed more intimate knowledge of particular subject matter and the school in general. In addition, this finding resonated with previous research conducted by Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008), which suggested that teachers have learned from experts and colleagues alike because of their willingness to share their work, reflect on their practice, and their desire to take risks. This finding revealed that professional learning at this school should be designed in a manner that takes both style of workshops or seminars into consideration. Therefore, a recommendation for future practice would include the design of professional development opportunities that would bring in relevant experts from the outside to help teachers learn about topics germane to their practice. These experts would speak to the needs of the teachers in both their specific content and general education. In addition, future practice would also include professional development opportunities led by qualified in-house faculty members who not only have a knowledge of a particular subject matter, but who also have a solid understanding of the school environment. Moreover, allowing outside experts to co-facilitate workshops with knowledgeable in-house faculty members will enhance this learning
platform to further meet participants’ desires to learn from experts and their colleagues. This practical possibility will coordinate learning efforts to maximize the knowledge of experts and colleagues for teacher development.

Finding number four revealed that the teachers in this study participated in collaborative professional development in order to stay current in their field. This finding spoke to these individuals’ desires to understand the evolving methodologies and changing trends in the education field. This idea reflected research completed by Darling-Hammond (1995) and Burke, Marx, and Berry (2011) and stated that practitioners who constantly have sought collaborative learning opportunities have enhanced their teaching repertoire and improved their practice over time. In addition, this finding correlated to Wegner’s (1990) community of practice model of professional development as like-minded practitioners have sought constant opportunities to collaborate in order to enhance their practice to improve student outcomes. A recommendation for future practice at this site would encourage school leaders to consider providing teachers with constant opportunities to participate in professional learning opportunities that would enhance their practice. School leaders could make teachers aware of such opportunities while working with them in order to implement newly gained knowledge into the school’s professional learning program. In addition, school leaders could inquire as to how teachers have utilized new knowledge in their individual and collective teaching practices at the school.

Finding number five spoke to the lack of allocated time for teachers to follow-up with colleagues on workshops and seminars in which they have previously participated. This finding spoke to the chaotic pace and busy daily schedule of teachers at this school. In addition, the teachers perceived a loss in momentum related to these professional experiences because no time existed in the daily schedule during the school year for the processing of such learning
experiences. This finding confirmed previous research conducted by Schwarz McCotter (2001), Garet et al. (2001), Burbank and Kauchak (2003), Kazemi and Hubbard (2008), and Estepp, Roberts, and Carter (2012), which suggested that collaborative teacher professional development required intentional and deliberate reflective inquiry into practice by teachers over time. A recommendation for future practice should include an adjustment to the school’s schedule to include this intentionally planned time for educators to collaborate and develop work begun in previous workshops.

Finding number six indicated that a negative culture surrounding the importance of professional development has existed at this site. Accordingly, the teachers reported a negative cultural disposition surrounding the importance of professional learning because of its perceived lack of importance in direct relation to the improvement of their practice. This finding supported previous research concluded by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), Garet et al. (2001), and Burke (2013), which stated the extent to which such learning has been carried out in schools depended on the overall cultural perception of the importance granted to teacher development and its impact on teacher improvement. These teachers concluded that since many held this belief, the collaboration and overall voluntary participation in professional development lacked at the school. A recommendation for future practice in this area would allow school leaders to design workshops and seminars specific to the content and pedagogical needs of the teachers so as to enhance teacher buy-in to voluntary professional development. In addition, school leaders would work to develop a professional learning portfolio through which they could help customize the learning experience of each teacher.

Finding number seven addressed teacher perception of inadequate administrative support for school-wide professional learning. Although the teachers spoke highly of the individual
support they received for their personal professional development, they discussed a lack of this support across the school’s overall learning program. Previous work done by Mullen and Hutinger (2008) and Hewson (2013) supported this finding, which suggested that school leaders needed to model positive learning behaviors for all faculty to emulate in order to increase interest in professional learning and buy-in. The participants felt that administration did not model the actions of following-up on faculty participation in professional learning and its impact on their individual or collective practice. A recommendation for future practice at this school would include a formal written policy explaining the role administrators should take in participating in and monitoring the professional development habits of the teachers. This active involvement would encourage teachers to take a more active role in their own learning if they knew they would receive feedback and advice.

The interviews conducted with these participants and the findings presented in this chapter have allowed the research to suggest future topics of research regarding collaborative professional development within this study’s context. Since this study examined teacher perception of collaborative professional development, future research should examine how veteran and novice teachers specifically understand this construct. In addition, researchers should consider how the establishment of an individual professional development portfolio would affect teacher collaboration and professional learning over time. Finally, future research should discuss the factors that contribute to the creation of a collaborative learning culture within the specific context of private secondary faith-based schools.

The implications for the above mentioned future research could enhance the overall cultural view and effectiveness of teacher professional development at this school. School leadership and individuals who work with the professional learning program at this school
should consider the implementation of a new teacher learning platform. Such a learning platform should address collaborative teacher professional development as a joint venture between colleagues and school leaders. This joint venture would hold one another accountable for teacher professional growth school-wide. Such accountability measures would allow for ongoing sharing and collaboration between teachers and school leaders as well as among teachers. Since the participants of this study perceived collaborative teacher professional development as lacking this dialogue, school leaders could reshape the culture of professional development into one that would be sustained over time. Such a plan to initiate a change in the current teacher learning program speaks to the need for teacher collaboration to be meaningful and to be conducted over an extended time period. Accordingly, such a plan would achieve this goal through the creation of a professional development portfolio that would allow teachers and school leaders to share their work while holding each other accountable for their individual and collective growth. The implications of such a portfolio initiative could permit a renewed understanding of how collaborative professional development would enhance teacher learning.

The data presented in this study speaks to the unique context that this school site has provided. This research site, a private faith-based secondary school, has not had to subscribe to any district, state, or federal teacher development programs or platforms. Accordingly, the professional development programs and initiatives this research site has undertaken over the years have resembled a variety of educational trends, adolescent development, and technological initiatives. Such learning has spoken to the ever-growing needs of students and educators alike. However, the outcome of such teacher development has not been assessed in terms of its effectiveness related to teacher practice. Therefore, the data presented from this research site has addressed teachers’ perceptions of how a lack of evaluation of the practicality and usefulness of
professional development directly affected their capacity to improve. The data spoke specifically about teachers’ needs at this particular school. Moreover, such findings have the potential to redesign professional learning so as to enhance teacher buy-in about their professional growth in a way that holds both the teacher and schools leaders responsible for such development.

The unique context of this study has provided a strong opportunity to improve the teacher professional learning program at this school. As a private independent school, educators and leaders have had the ability to craft individual and collective teacher development that could address the needs and desires of each colleague. Accordingly, such a unique opportunity should promote a reflective dialogue among teachers and leaders that would seek to develop individualized teacher professional learning and its effect on the collective growth of the school faculty. The ability to create policy as an institution without constantly worrying about the need to meet the mandates of public education has characterized this school’s ability to help all educators learn at a comfortable pace and appropriate to their own needs. Such a personalized approach to teacher development at this school would allow teachers to create a learning platform that would speak to their professional goals. Moreover, this unique approach to professional development at this site would have the potential to renew educator interest in their own growth as individuals and as a collective faculty. Professional development change at this site would not require the same level of standardization that the public sector usually entails. Therefore, teachers and school leaders would be able to work proactively to design and implement professional learning that could directly enhance teacher growth in their own particular areas of interest.
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