The Lived Experiences of Principals in Urban Turnaround Schools: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study Examining Teacher Collective Efficacy

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Abstract

This study set out to explore how five principals experienced collective teacher efficacy in their schools. The uniqueness of this study was the context of collective teacher efficacy in urban turnaround schools. Each school in the study was once considered among the lowest performing schools in Massachusetts, with persistent low student achievement. These schools experienced accelerated student learning and reversed the trend of underperformance in a three-year period.

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provided the methodology to understand the complexity of teacher professional practice as experienced by the principals. The personal narratives of principals provided rich, detailed accounts for inductive analysis within the context of urban school turnaround environments.

This study reveals that principals launched systems and structures to build collective teacher efficacy. The four sources of collective efficacy—mastery experience, social persuasion, vicarious learning experience, and affective states—were present in these various systems and structures. Specifically, principals created collaborative structures that enabled teachers to build their collective capacity. Through social persuasion, which included feedback that supported persistence and resilience, principals were able to enlist teachers’ authentic participation in collaborative structures, such as common planning time or professional learning communities (PLCs). Findings also indicated that the collaborative structures created a social system within which teachers could exercise various forms of social, human, intellectual, and decisional capital. In turn, teachers built their collective capacity to improve student learning, as evidenced by student learning measures. As teachers exercised their professional capital, student learning increased and mastery experience was realized. Moreover, mastery experience contributed to a
future-oriented perspective that performance would continue to be proficient.

*Key words:* social cognitive theory, teacher efficacy, teacher collective efficacy, teacher collaboration, teacher networks, teacher social capital, principal leadership, and collective efficacy
Chapter 1: Introduction

Education is essential to break the cycle of poverty and increase future opportunity. Yet far too many students educated in urban centers are experiencing lower educational achievement overall (Eubanks, Parish & Smith, 1997; Parker, Kelly & Sanford, 1998). Further, far too many schools in urban districts are considered low performing. According to a United States Department of Education study, schools in urban areas are more likely to be deemed in need of improvement (USDOE, 2010, p. 73). In Massachusetts, the study indicated nearly one-fifth of the state’s Title I schools (those serving low-income students) were in need of improvement (p. 79). As required by state statute, in 2015 the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education identified 38 schools as chronically underperforming, all residing in urban districts (MADESE, 2015). Thus far, strategies for accelerated school improvement to “turnaround” low performing schools have centered on legislative mandates and technical reforms (Daly, 2010).

Some urban schools in Massachusetts have shed their chronically underperforming status and are recognized by state and local education officials as turnaround schools. The term “turnaround school” describes a school that reversed a history of persistent low student achievement through accelerated student learning over a three-year period. Educators within these particular schools transformed their professional practice, and student performance data shows student learning accelerated. Specifically, of the 65 schools designated as chronically underperforming by the MADESE, 25 schools have exited the status, meaning they have experienced a three-year state determined turnaround, reversing the trend of persistently low student achievement (MA Executive Office of Education, 2017).

Several studies have been conducted to identify practices for increased student learning in
underperforming schools (Portin et al., 2009; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). The research revealed that educators have a range of strategies from which to choose for school improvement. Although one could argue non-school factors influence student achievement, possibilities exist to level the playing field for urban students through school improvement (Portin et al., 2009). Shannon and Bylsma (2007) among others have identified many of these: teacher qualifications, curricula, parental involvement, economic resources, school leadership, expectation levels, standards, and policies. However, among school-related factors, teachers matter most when it comes to a student's academic performance. According to a study conducted by RAND, “when it comes to student performance on reading and math tests, a teacher is estimated to have two to three times the impact of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership” (RAND Education, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to explore collective teacher efficacy in a turnaround school through the lens of principals. Researchers have found positive associations between student achievement and teachers’ collective efficacy beliefs about the school (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000). According to Goddard et al. (2000), collective teacher efficacy is best defined as, “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (p. 480). Studying school turnaround through collective teacher efficacy can yield leadership practices that support the growth and development of teachers who work in a turnaround context.

**Problem of Practice**

Researching collective teacher efficacy in the context of school turnaround is an opportunity to understand how to leverage existing teacher professional capital within schools. Collective teacher efficacy is described in the research by several researchers (Bandura, 1977;
Goddard et al., 2000; Ross & Gray, 2006b). For the purposes of this study the definition of collective teacher efficacy is the effectiveness expectations of the agency. It is further an attribute of the synergistic dynamics of the group itself. Collective teacher efficacy is grounded in the perceptions of the group that their collective efforts have a positive outcome on students.

The No Child Left Behind law enacted in 2001 detailed four intervention models for the nation’s lowest achieving public schools: closure, restart, transformational, and turnaround. The use and definition of the term turnaround in the federal intervention model, which requires replacement of the principal and at least fifty percent of the staff, differs from the use of the word throughout this study. Daly (2010) used the term “technical reform” to define these types of legislatively mandated strategies that rely on accountability levers (p. 1). The school-improvement strategies within the four intervention models give little consideration to opportunities to improve student learning through the development of existing professional capital, described by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) as the combination of human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. Further, while there is existing research on collective teacher efficacy, as well as teacher collaboration, this is little evidence of how these two seemingly interrelated constructs support the transformation of professional practice within turnaround schools. Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, and Gray (2004) suggested teacher collaboration influenced collective teacher efficacy.

State and federal policy makers, school and district leaders, along with teachers and other practitioners have formed theories about transforming the nation’s lowest performing schools. These assumptions can result in the use of practices or interventions that have yet to be studied or investigated for their efficacy in a school turnaround context. By gaining insight to effective school turnaround practices, grounded in teacher professional practice, this research can provide
policymakers and practitioners with additional school improvement strategies that utilize and develop existing professional capital, leading to high-quality teaching and learning.

**Significance Statement**

When urban districts struggle to meet the needs of students, a cycle of low educational attainment, and a lifetime of low wage sector employment, haunts families and communities. As reported by the MADESE, all 65 schools designated as Level 4, the state’s lowest performing schools based on four-year trends of student performance data, are clustered in ten urban districts (MADESE, 2017). Another 280 schools are considered within the lowest 20% of all schools in the state, and these schools are overwhelmingly located in urban centers.

Beyond Massachusetts, schools in urban areas account for 25% of all public schools in the nation (USDOE, 2016). A comparison of student demographics between urban and non-urban districts yields an over representation of low income and minority populations (Blanchett, Mumford & Beachum, 2005). An estimated 64% of students in urban school districts are classified as minority, compared to 32% in suburban communities (USDOE, 2013). Further, the percent of students classified as limited English proficient is twice as high at 17%, and participation in free lunch programs is at 56% (Jacob, 2007).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results examined national trends in student achievement, providing consistent assessment data across states. Urban districts have made some progress with raising student achievement; however, large achievement gaps continue to exist among the aforementioned student subgroups (Haycock, 2013). Given the persistent achievement gaps among student subgroups, graduation rates remain low for minority groups and students from low-income homes. More than one-third of African American and Hispanic students do not graduate from high school (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce & Fox, 2013),
and students from low-income families drop out of high school at a rate of about five times greater than their non low-income peers (Chapman, Laird, Ifill & KewalRamani, 2011). Challenges continue beyond high-school graduation for minority and low-income students, as college attendance, persistence, and attainment rates differ along racial and economic lines (Haycock, 2013).

The significant disparity of achievement for students who are educated within urban districts (Balfanz et al., 2013; Chapman et al., 2011; Haycock, 2013) results in too many students lacking access to an education that prepares them for college and career success. Blanchett et al. (2005) discussed urban education in the context of a “post-Brown” state (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954) of urban schools. The authors position urban school districts within a “microcosm of this economic, political, and social phenomenon” (p. 72), referring to the deterioration of urban centers over time. In addition, the authors cite Alston (2002) summarizing, “[urban schools] must continuously deal with negative notions of city students, lack of funding and support, and a growing bureaucracy” (p. 72). Researchers from the National Center for Education Statistics (Lippman, Burns & McArthur, 1996) reviewed characteristics and school factors of urban and non-urban students. Students in urban schools are twice as likely to live in poverty, more likely to be exposed to health and safety risks, and “less likely to have family structure, economic security and stability most associated with desirable educational outcomes” (p. vii). Continued educational disparity, combined with technical reforms and legislative mandates that have done little to move the needle on student achievement, suggests a need to gain insight into teacher professional practice as a means to change the course for urban students.

The significance of this study goes beyond examining the impact of collective teacher efficacy within a turnaround school context. The study is significant also because of its
importance to the economic development of cities. Weiss (2004), an expert on community sustainability and economic development, suggested urban communities miss significant economic development opportunities because they are usually at a disadvantage competing for new job-creating businesses (p. 13). Weiss further posited that too often, urban communities are unable to offer quality-of-life benefits that better-situated communities can. A high-quality school system is one of the more important of these benefits. It can help create an educated work force for employers. Even more important, perhaps, is that a high-quality school system can attract new businesses because new businesses, in order to attract skilled workers, have found, more and more, that they must demonstrate that they are located in a community that supports education where new workers' children will receive a good education. Weiss (2004) stated, “Public schools are an important economic tool” (p. 13).

**Purpose Statement and Research Question**

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis research was to gain insight into the ways in which principals make sense of and explain collective teacher efficacy in an urban turnaround school. Shinebourne (2011) suggested study participants “have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration of the phenomena being studied” (p. 49). In order to engage in the detailed examination of the phenomenon, study participants included principals who have led an urban school out of chronic underperformance. The research question is designed to understand how principals make meaning—both intellectual and emotional—of collective teacher efficacy as a result of their experience with the phenomenon. The research question is as follows:

*How do principals make sense of and explain collective teacher efficacy in a turnaround school?*

The following section of this chapter will describe collective teacher efficacy forming the
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for investigating the problem of practice is grounded in social cognitive theory and draws on the theoretical tenet of collective teacher efficacy. In his seminal work, Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of self-efficacy within the principles of social cognitive theory in terms of how individuals feel, think, act, and motivate. He defined perceived self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of actions required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Moreover, Bandura (2005) expanded social cognitive theory to include “an agentic perspective to self-development, adaptation, and change. In this view, people are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them” (p. 9). In examining self-efficacy, Bandura (2005) determined collective efficacy was a separate theoretical tenet to describe agency at a group level: “I extended the conception of human agency to collective rooted in people’s shared belief in their joint capabilities to bring about changes in their lives by collective effort. This made the theory generalizable to collectivistically-oriented cultures and activities” (p. 27).

Collective teacher efficacy has emerged over the past thirty years as a genuine and effective construct to improve student outcomes (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard, Goddard, Kim & Miller, 2015; Goddard & Skrle, 2006; Ross, Hogaboam-Gray & Gray, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). According to Goddard et al. (2000), collective teacher efficacy is best defined as “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole
will have a positive effect on students” (p. 480). Bandura (1993) found a positive connection between collective teacher efficacy and student performance and demonstrated that where teachers believed in their collective instructional efficacy, schools heavily populated with minority students of low income performed at the highest percentiles based on national norms in language and mathematics. Similarly, Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) found that collective teacher efficacy was more important than socio-economic status in explaining student achievement. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) further studied the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement and found significant positive relationships.

**Sources of efficacy.** Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of self-efficacy in terms of how individuals feel, think, act, and motivate. He defined perceived self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of actions required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Bandura (1997) expanded his theory of self-efficacy to include four sources of self-efficacy information: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective states. Mastery experience is a powerful component of self-efficacy formulation. The perception that performance has been successful increases efficacy beliefs and contributes to a future-oriented perspective that performance will continue to be proficient in the future. A vicarious experience allows an individual to observe a skill performed by someone else. When the skill is performed well, the efficacy beliefs of the observer are enhanced. Social persuasion includes encouragement or feedback that support persistence and resilience. The affective state refers to anxiety or excitement and impacts an individual’s perception of capability or incompetence (Goddard et al., 2000).

Researchers have built upon Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy to further define teacher self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) described teachers' sense of efficacy as a
“judgment of his or her capability to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (p. 783). Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, and Gray (2004) defined teacher self-efficacy as “the extent to which teachers believe their efforts will have a positive effect on student achievement” (Ross, 1994, p. 3). Gibson and Dembo (1984) found that teachers who have a high sense of instructional efficacy devote more classroom time to academic learning, provide students with additional help in order to succeed, and provide positive feedback to students for accomplishments. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) reported that teachers with a strong sense of efficacy exhibit greater levels of persistence, enthusiasm, and commitment to student learning. The positive relationship between high levels of teacher efficacy and increased student achievement has been well documented (Bandura, 1993; Ross, 1994; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) proposed an integrated model of teacher efficacy. Although consistent with social cognitive theory, the integrated model considers teaching task and its context because teacher efficacy is context specific. Teachers feel efficacious for teaching particular subjects to certain students in specific settings, and they can be expected to feel more or less efficacious under different circumstances. Bandura’s four sources of efficacy are combined with the two dimensions of task analysis and teacher competence to create an integrated model of teacher efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) further proposed that teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs are related to the effort they invest in teaching, the goals they set, and their persistence and resilience to continue efforts in spite of setbacks.

**Collective teacher efficacy.** Whereas teacher self-efficacy refers to expectations about one’s own teaching ability (Bandura, 1993; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Ross, 1994; Ross & Gray, 2006b; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), collective teacher
efficacy refers to expectations of the effectiveness of the staff to which one belongs. Building on Bandura’s (2000) theory, collective teacher efficacy is further defined as an emergent group-level attribute, the product of the interactive dynamics of group members. Bandura (2000) stated, “perceived collective efficacy is not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individual members, rather it is an emergent group-level property” (p. 76). According to Goddard et al. (2000), collective teacher efficacy is best defined as “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (p. 480).

Bandura (1993) found a positive connection between collective teacher efficacy and student performance. Specifically, Bandura (1993) demonstrated that where teachers believed in their collective instructional efficacy, schools heavily populated with minority students of low income performed at the highest percentiles based on national norms in language and mathematics. Bandura (1993) and others (Goddard, 2001, 2002; Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard et al., 2004; Hoy et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) confirmed collective teacher efficacy had a stronger influence on student achievement than prior student achievement or socioeconomic status.

**Collective teacher efficacy and teacher collaboration.** Emerging research builds on the construct of collective teacher efficacy to further study the potential connection between collective teacher efficacy and teacher collaboration. Ross et al. (2004) suggested that teacher collaboration influenced collective teacher efficacy. Their definition of collective teacher efficacy highlights instructional teaming: “collective teacher efficacy refers to teacher perceptions that they constitute an effective instructional team, capable of bringing about learning in students” (p. 163). Specifically, they found that school conditions that promoted teacher ownership in school improvement efforts exerted an even stronger influence on
collective teacher efficacy than prior student achievement. Goddard et al. (2004) offered, “the more teachers have the opportunity to influence instructionally relevant school decisions, the more likely a school is to be characterized by a robust sense of collective efficacy” (p. 10). Moolenaar, Sleegers, and Daly (2012) conducted the first large-scale study to determine the connection between teacher collaboration networks, collective teacher efficacy, and student achievement. Teacher networks contributed to building collective capacity when teachers focused on building knowledge, exchanging knowledge and expertise, sharing experiences, and searching for collective solutions. Although the relationship between teacher collaboration and increased student achievement was found to be indirect, the researchers postulated collective teacher efficacy was the missing link. In other words, teacher collaboration contributed to collective teacher efficacy, which in turn increased student achievement. Teacher networks supported and nurtured a teacher’s confidence in a team’s ability to impact student learning. Moolenaar et al. (2012) concluded, “Although collective efficacy beliefs may not be the sole mechanism though which teacher’s networks affect student achievement, it is indeed a significant mechanism” (p. 259).

**Professional capital.** Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) postulated three types of capital—human, decisional, and social—as tenets of professional capital. Their use of the term professional capital captured the integrated nature of the three tenets as contributors to individual and collective capacity for instructional improvement and student learning. Human capital as described by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) reflects individual talent, skills, and knowledge. Researchers Pil and Leana (2009) defined human capital as “an individual’s cumulative abilities, knowledge, and skill developed through formal and informal experiences (p. 1103). Further, Daly, Moolenaar, Der-Martirosian, and Liou (2014) found teacher human capital had a
significant and positive predictive effect on student achievement. Decisional capital, a term unique to Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) and borrowed from the field of law, refers to the ability of teachers to make complex judgments about students. Teachers acquire decisional capital over time and with experience. Similarly, Daly, Der-Martirosian, Chrispeels, and Moolenaar (2011) combined social capital with human capital (a teacher’s experience and ability) to result in intellectual capital.

Whether describing intellectual capital or professional capital, researchers (Daly et al., 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Leana, 2011; Leana & Pil, 2006) point to context within social systems. The construct of social systems may be used to describe the influence of teacher social capital within schools. Social capital, within the context of schools, is defined as “the patterns of interactions among teachers” (Leana, 2011, p. ???). When social capital is strong (i.e., high trust and frequent interactions) it serves as a greater predictor of student achievement than teacher experience or ability (Leana, 2011; Leana & Pil, 2006).

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) framed social capital as collective capacity, stating, “Social capital strategies are one of the cornerstones for transforming the profession. Behaviour is shaped by groups much more than by individuals—for better or worse. If you want positive change, then get the group to do the positive things that will achieve it” (p. 91). Daly et al. (2011) stated, “the sharing, exchange and combination of knowledge that occurs in a socially bounded community leading to the creation of new intellectual resources and action is not possible by individual actors” (p. 11). Intellectual capital, and the “joint work” of teachers within the social system, impacts instructional practices leading to increased student achievement (Daly et al., 2011; Leana, 2011; Leana and Pil, 2006). Further, Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) suggest social systems within schools are affected by collective teacher efficacy as teachers
engage in joint problem solving. And Bandura (1997) suggested collective teacher efficacy could be strengthened through faculty collaboration as teachers developed their beliefs and social systems.

The role of the principal. School principals have opportunities to influence collective teacher efficacy via school structures and social systems. As building leaders, principals establish the master schedule, thereby determining opportunities for teacher collaboration. As mentioned previously, teacher collaboration occurs in social networks where teachers have the opportunity to exercise decisional capital; however, the principal must create the structures for collaboration and create opportunities to build decisional capital within teacher networks. As stated by Goddard et al. (2015), “Principals’ instructional leadership may support the degree to which teachers work together to improve instruction, and together leadership and teacher collaboration may contribute to school effectiveness by strengthening collective efficacy beliefs” (p. 501).

Ninković and Knežević Florić (2016) found that, in addition to establishing the structures for teacher collaboration, certain leadership practices are positive predictors of collective teacher efficacy. Specifically, they noted, “leadership practices of setting direction and developing people are positive predictors of collective agency of teachers” (p. 12). Therefore, a principal’s role extends beyond the development of structures for teachers to interact to build collective capacity. In order for collective capacity and agency to grow, principals have a role to play in terms of teachers’ development. As principals create opportunities for collaboration, opportunities exist to extend social and decisional capital. Further, as principals focus on teachers’ development, they are advancing human capital. These three areas—social, human, and decisional capital—align with the aforementioned tenet of professional capital as defined by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). Research suggests that the development of professional capital
supports the collective capacity of teachers to positively impact student achievement (Daly et al., 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Leana, 2011; Leana and Pil, 2006).

As detailed in the theoretical model below, joint problem solving occurs in school social systems (teacher networks) such as common planning time, grade level teams, professional development, and networks with a district-wide focus. Moolenaar et al. (2012) postulated that collective teacher efficacy could be a missing link when considering how teacher collaboration contributes to increased student achievement. Through these sources of joint problem solving and collaboration, teachers have opportunities to develop strong social, human, and decisional capital, yielding overall professional capital as described by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012). Research suggests that professional capital contributes to the refinement of instructional practices, building collective instructional capacity among teachers. In turn, the collective instructional capacity contributes to collective teacher efficacy, leading to increases in student learning and performance. The figure below represents the tenets of the theoretical framework for the problem of practice.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework for Problem of Practice
The theoretical framework described above outlines areas for study design to gain insight into the ways in which principals experience and make sense of collective teacher efficacy in an urban turnaround school. As outlined in Table 1, semi-structured interview questions for the interpretative phenomenological analysis focused on three areas: collective teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, and professional capital. Professional capital encompasses social capital, human capital, and decisional capital. Collective teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, and professional capital represent key concepts necessary for understanding principals’ experiences and sense-making. Further, Smith, Flower, and Larkin (2009) recommend researchers create an interview schedule as a guide with ten open-ended questions in order to obtain rich, first-person accounts of a phenomenon. The open-ended questions identified in Table 1 are adapted from current questionnaires that address professional capital, teacher collaboration, and collective teacher efficacy (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016; Woodland, Lee & Randall, 2013; Goddard, 2003).
### Table 1

**Key Concepts and Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Concept</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capital: <em>Human Capital</em></td>
<td>How do you facilitate teachers’ learning and development on the job? How do you support teachers to make professional decisions that improve student learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capital: <em>Social Capital</em></td>
<td>In what ways do teachers improve their professional expertise by working together? How do you get the right people on the right teams?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capital: <em>Decisional Capital</em></td>
<td>In what ways do you support teachers to make professional decisions that improve student learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Collaboration</td>
<td>How do you get the right people on the right teams? How do teacher teams make decisions to initiate, maintain, develop, or discontinue instructional practices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Collaboration</td>
<td>In what ways do teacher teams make decisions to initiate, maintain, develop, or discontinue instructional practices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Collaboration</td>
<td>Could you describe the topic(s) of the dialogue in teacher team meetings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Teacher Efficacy</td>
<td>How do teachers get through to the most difficult students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Teacher Efficacy</td>
<td>In what ways are teachers skilled in various instructional methods?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Teacher Efficacy</td>
<td>What happens when a student doesn’t learn something the first time around?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Teacher Efficacy</td>
<td>How are teachers able to motivate their students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Critics of Collective Teacher Efficacy Theory**

Klassen (2010) reviewed teacher self- and collective efficacy research, from 1998 to 2009 and noted four key research problems. First, studies have had a limited focus on the sources of collective efficacy. Moreover, researchers “uncritically defer to Bandura’s hypothesis that there are four sources that contribute to the formation of self- and collective efficacy beliefs” (Klassen, 2010, p. 39). Second, Klassen cautions against invalid measurement and urges researchers to use valid collective teacher efficacy measures such as those developed by Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004). Third, only a small percentage of studies (2.8%) have linked
student outcomes to collective teacher efficacy. And, fourth, “how can the cumulative body of research be made more relevant to practice?” (Klassen, 2010, p. 40). Klassen (2010) concluded the review of the research by offering the following: “research value would be enhanced through teacher-researcher collaborations in which teachers and researchers would work together to identify critical issues and to develop research questions, resulting in a more finely tuned understanding of how teacher efficacy influences day-to-day practice” (p. 40).

Given the potential of scholar-practitioner research to integrate theory and practice, it is important to understand the sources of collective efficacy in a social system, as teachers transform their instructional capacity to accelerate student learning in a school turnaround context. As noted by researchers through a review of the literature, this area is understudied and holds great promise for increasing student outcomes, particularly students who are educated in urban centers. A logical and future extension of the qualitative design would be a quantitative study to measure the impact on student outcomes.

Positionality Statement

As the former superintendent of schools in an urban district with three turnaround schools, I observed schools within the district in the midst of transformation toward high-quality teaching and learning. Student performance data from these schools indicated an acceleration of student learning. Local and state education officials now recognize as turnaround schools those once labeled as chronically underperforming. From my vantage point, it appears that within these particular settings, school leaders were creating and supporting structures for increased teacher collaboration. Moreover, the collaborative work appears to have supported collective teacher efficacy—the perception among teachers that their collective efforts will have a positive impact on student achievement.
In this positionality statement I discuss my roles and identities as superintendent, mother, teacher, and policy agent in the context of gaining insight into the ways in which collective efficacy accelerates student learning in turnaround schools in my former community. Specifically, I address my positional authority, ideological positions, work experience, and preference for urban settings as frames of reference that may influence my problem of practice (Ravitch & Riggan, 2011).

**Positional authority.** I was the superintendent of schools of a large urban district from 2009 to 2016. Currently, I am the superintendent of a smaller district with emerging urban tendencies. Creswell (2009) cited Glesne and Peshkin’s (1992) term *backyard research* to describe studies that occur in the researcher’s own organization (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). While I did not conduct research in a specific district, this term and the cautions Creswell (2009) cited were applicable to my study, since my problem of practice involved the study of principals I knew as a result statewide networks. Thus, Creswell (2009) also warns backyard researchers to be aware of the potential abuse of power with participants feeling coerced into a project. Specifically, principals report to superintendents for supervisory and evaluation purposes. While I did not interview principals who report to me, my perceived positional authority as a superintendent could have impacted the problem of practice.

**Ideological positioning.** Conducting research about school turnaround exposes assumptions and biases. I believe principals created conditions for teachers to transform their practice, and student outcomes improved as a result of the collective work of educators. While this bias is informed by student performance data, it is also informed by my position as observer, participant, and leader in the work of school improvement in the district. I saw firsthand the effort educators put into improving student learning. Therefore, I believe that teachers matter and
must be viewed as the unit of change when speaking of reform work within schools. While I hold great optimism in the individual and collective ability of teachers to meet the needs of all students, I have observed circumstances where teachers are unable to improve their practice in order to meet the needs of their students. In the end, despite opportunities for growth and development, there are teachers who struggle in content, pedagogy, and/or mindset.

Recently, my ideological positioning has been shaped by the research of Carol Dweck (2006) within the context of a fixed versus growth mindset. The concept of a growth mindset has reinforced my belief that teachers can develop their practice to accelerate learning for all students. Conversely, I have cause to question whether teachers can meet the needs of all students if they themselves hold a fixed mindset about student ability. Ultimately, perceiving some teachers as individuals with a fixed mindset regarding student learning could have created a bias.

I also hold the philosophical belief that time matters in terms of school turnaround work. In other words, extending the school day for all students, can create the necessary structures and time for teachers to work together to plan and create learning opportunities for students.

**State accountability status.** My former district was the subject of state oversight and monitoring from 2009 to 2014. The Commissioner of Education required the district in 2009 to enter a *recovery phase* as a last step prior to possible state receivership. The external forces represented by the MADESE ranged from soft technical assistance to Commissioner-mandated action steps taken by the School Committee. Daly (2010) described these types of moves as technical reforms. As a participant within the state’s accountability structure, I have developed strong feelings about how and when the state should intervene within struggling districts. Moreover, it has been my experience that while teaching and learning is highlighted as a reform
area within the state’s accountability structure, teacher collaboration for increased student learning is not yet viewed as a statewide reform strategy.

I also serve as chair of the Accountability and Assistance Advisory Council for the Massachusetts Board of Education, and I co-chaired the Massachusetts Urban Superintendents’ Network. In these state leadership roles I have observed that teachers are often part of the accountability equation (i.e., state regulations for new educator evaluation) but are not often considered for their collective ability to impact teaching and learning within a school. My former district is considered a turnaround district, a status achieved through external pressure and reform, as well as creating internal systems for teaching and learning.

**Work experience.** As an early career teacher, I worked in settings that were largely non-collaborative. For much of my teaching career, there were limited opportunities to formally plan with my teacher colleagues. Teacher planning was largely isolated individual preparation time. As a special education teacher, most of my opportunities to collaborate existed with related service providers such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists. I left the classroom to work on state policy for eight years at the MADESE, and eventually provided management and oversight to the workgroup responsible for designing and implementing teacher professional development when the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks were adopted. Through this endeavor I had the opportunity to work with groups of teachers throughout the Commonwealth and developed an appreciation for the collective will and ability of teachers to improve student learning. Connecting policy (i.e., new curriculum frameworks) with classroom implementation fostered my belief in teacher collaboration.

When I re-entered a school system in 2003 as a district administrator, I observed few opportunities where teachers could work together in structures such as common planning time or
professional development. However, over time, as professional development became more focused on curriculum content, content-specific pedagogy, and data analysis, school principals began to create opportunities in school schedules for teachers to begin to work together in these aforementioned areas. Observing and participating in an evolution of isolated teacher practice to an emerging collaborative practice has created a bias in terms of identifying working conditions for teachers that may contribute to increased student learning.

**Urban preference.** I have a preference for urban education settings, as both parent and educator. Others may prescribe “presumed social homogeneity” (Fennell & Arnot, 2008, p. 529) to urban districts, suggesting shared characteristics relative to race and class; however, the potential for urban characterization can be a disservice to complex identities and cultural belongings. As a mother of four sons, all who have either completed or are completing their K-12 education in urban public schools, I believe the range of diversity and experience in urban school settings is preferable to a hegemonic environment. My urban preference creates a complex positionality. On the one hand, I might have a privileged point of view given my position as superintendent, and on the other I live, work, and send my children to school in an urban setting, thereby creating the complexity of inclusive and exclusive othering (Briscoe, 2005).

I must also note that while I am white and middle class, my background and experiences are not typical of a middle-class upbringing. I lived in an urban center in the Midwest with a single parent who struggled with living wage employment and housing. I attended five different schools by the time I was in fifth grade, carried free and reduced lunch tickets, and had limited opportunities to form long-term friendships. While schooling and quality of life became more stable by early adolescence, in modern day terms I would have been characterized as a student
who was “falling through the cracks.” I became disengaged with traditional school and left after my junior year in high school. Although I left school early, I was fortunate to spend that junior year in a program where I volunteered daily in a second-grade classroom across the street from my high school. I knew from my personal and volunteer experience that I wanted to enter the field of education. Consequently, while I may be perceived as privileged, I consider my early experiences to be those of an “other.” Education, and getting it right for students, is deeply personal.

In conclusion, my intent to conduct research about a turnaround school exposes the need to thoroughly examine and explore my assumptions and biases. Specifically, the issue of my bias must be addressed through a variety of strategies, including “multiple strategies of validity to create reader confidence in the accuracy of the findings” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). Moreover, prior to engaging in research, I needed to review the literature thoroughly to ensure that all sides of my problem of practice were represented, not just those I believed to be true. A thorough review of the literature, combined with a theoretical framework grounded in research and the principles of collective teacher efficacy, created a foundation to further explore my problem of practice as I continually reflected on positionality through the research process.

The following chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature regarding collective teacher efficacy and examines collective teacher efficacy as a group construct, a group task, and group competence, including collective teacher efficacy as it relates to school culture. The next chapter also examines teacher collaboration and collective efficacy, teacher networks, and the effects of principal leadership on collective teacher efficacy.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this integrated phenomenological analysis qualitative research study was to develop an understanding of how principals in an urban turnaround school make sense of their roles in effecting change and how they perceive collective teacher efficacy. The proposed study explored the perceptions and lived experiences of principals against the backdrop of turnaround schools. The research question guiding this study is *How do principals make sense of and explain collective teacher efficacy in a turnaround school?*

This research question and the theoretical framework of collective teacher efficacy, situated within social cognitive theory, served as the impetus for this study. The literature review encompasses refereed journal articles, related research studies, dissertation abstracts, current publications, both in print and online, and research texts related to the theoretical framework of this study. Key words used to gather relevant literature included social cognitive theory, teacher efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, teacher networks, teacher collective capital, school leadership, teacher social capital, principal leadership, and collective efficacy.

Collective teacher efficacy is emerging as a genuine and effective construct to improve student outcomes (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard et al., 2015; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Ross et al., 2003; Tschanne-Moran & Barr, 2004). Within the context of education reform, schools are organizing at the group level to distribute leadership activities, create opportunities for teacher growth and development, and build structures for teacher collaboration. The purpose of this study was to explore the professional practice of teachers as experienced by principals. This research will provide policymakers and practitioners with additional school improvement strategies that utilize and develop existing professional capital, leading to high-quality teaching and learning.
This literature review examines collective teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, and the role of the principal within each. Collective teacher efficacy is presented with a discussion of the sub-topics of collective teacher efficacy as a group construct, group task and competence, and collective teacher efficacy and organizational context. Teacher collaboration and collective teacher efficacy are presented in the context of sources of collaboration: teacher teaming, teacher networks, and teacher social capital, as well as the role of the principal in teacher collaboration and collective teacher efficacy.

**Collective Teacher Efficacy**

Collective teacher efficacy has emerged as a relatively new field of research, building upon more than thirty years of research on individual teacher efficacy (Goddard & Skrla, 2006, p. 220). A review of the literature by Klassen, Tze, Betts, and Gordon (2011) suggests increased research attention on teachers’ collective efficacy is on the “verge of maturity” (p. 35), progressing from Goddard’s (2001) earlier description of it as a “neglected construct” (p. 467).

Researchers (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard et al., 2015; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Ross et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) have found significant and positive associations between student achievement and teachers’ collective efficacy beliefs about the school. According to Goddard et al. (2000), collective teacher efficacy is best defined as “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (p. 480). Collective teacher efficacy is also a group-level attribute, the product of the interactive dynamics of group members (Bandura, 2000, p. 75).

Bandura (1993, 1997) was among the first theorists to formalize collective efficacy, extending the concept of human agency to collective agency, detailing four sources of efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective state. In school-based
terms, Goddard, LoGerfo, and Hoy (2004) placed mastery experience in the following context: “Past school successes tend to raise a faculty’s belief in its collective capabilities, whereas past failures tend to undermine collective efficacy” (p. 406). Likewise, an example of vicarious experience is evident when a school replicates a practice or program that was successful in another school. Social persuasion can occur when a strong building principal convinces a faculty of their collective capabilities. And, finally the positive feelings a faculty may experience after a successful experience yields an affective state (Goddard et al., 2004).

Ross et al. (2004) found that school processes also influenced sources of collective teacher efficacy. School processes included providing teachers with opportunities, through social persuasion, to participate in vicarious learning experiences, and reinforced perceived collective efficacy through mastery experiences (p. 167). Goddard (2001) found that affective states may influence collective efficacy, specifically, “high levels of distress may debilitate the performance by diminishing confidence in group capability” (p. 469). Goddard (2001) adds that just as teachers enhance their self-efficacy though vicarious learning experiences, organizations (schools) also learn by observing the effective practices of other organizations.

Throughout the literature, mastery experience appeared to be one of the strongest components of influencing collective teacher efficacy. Goddard (2001) studied 91 elementary schools and found that mastery experience was a significant predictor of collective efficacy (p. 467). Strahan (2003) examined shared values and instructional norms and found that “Success builds momentum and fuels new efforts toward reform” (p. 143). Correspondingly, Mawhinney, Haas, and Wood (2005) confirmed mastery experience was significantly related to collective teacher efficacy (p. 29).

Bandura’s early (1997) definition of collective efficacy captured group shared beliefs,
goal attainment, and effort through collective agency: “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint
capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of
attainments” (p. 477). Later, he (2000) expanded upon his definition of collective efficacy to
incorporate collective agency within a social context:

people’s shared beliefs and their collective efficacy influence the types of futures they
seek to achieve through collective action, how well they use their resources, how much
effort they put into their group endeavor, their staying power when collective efforts
failed to produce quick results or meet forcible opposition, and their vulnerability to the
discouragement that can beset people taking on tough social problems. (p. 76)

Building upon his separate and expanded constructs of collective efficacy and teacher
efficacy, Bandura (2000) introduced a combined framework for collective teacher efficacy to
include the components from his research on individual teacher efficacy and collective efficacy.
As a result of Bandura’s framework, the construct of collective teacher efficacy is considered by
researchers (Goddard et al., 2000; Ross et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Goddard et
al., 2015; Goddard & Skrla, 2006) as a means to study the effect of collective agency within
school environments. Goddard and Goddard (2001) incorporated Bandura’s seminal research and
defined collective teacher efficacy as “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty as a
whole can organize and execute courses of action required to have a positive effect on students”
(p. 809).

**Collective teacher efficacy as a group construct.** Collective teacher efficacy is a
construct that may be used to understand the effect of group dynamics and collective agency
among teachers. While Bandura (2000) introduced collective teacher efficacy through the
constructs of teacher efficacy and collective efficacy, he pointed out that perceived collective
efficacy is “not the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individuals. Rather, it is an emergent group level property” (p. 76). Goddard (2001) determined that Bandura’s (1997) sources of efficacy—mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective states—all operated at the collective level, thereby supporting Bandura’s (1997) findings that collective efficacy is group level construct (p. 469). Moreover, researchers (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard et al., 2000) supported the application of theory at the group level because “groups are actively engaged in analyzing, responding to, and controlling their behaviors” (Goddard & Goddard, 2001, p. 815).

Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) also drew a distinction between individual teacher efficacy and collective teacher efficacy: “Teacher efficacy beliefs are based on perceptions of individual classroom performance whereas collective efficacy beliefs are social perceptions based on an assessment of the capability of the school faculty as a whole” (p. 191). Researchers Ross et al. (2004) operationalized the distinction, offering, “it is not hard to imagine a teacher who believes she would be more or less successful than her staff as a whole” (p. 165). Although teacher efficacy and collective efficacy are considered different constructs, one may indeed influence the other. Goddard and Goddard (2001) found collective teacher efficacy to be an important school contextual factor that is “systematically related to teacher efficacy” and is predictive of individual teacher efficacy (p. 816). Additionally, the study found that teacher efficacy and collective efficacy have a reciprocal relationship, “a change in one may lead to a change in the other” (Goddard & Goddard, 2001, p. 817).

**Group task and competence.** Given that collective teacher efficacy is viewed as a group level construct, researchers used group task and competence to identify influences on the construct. Bandura’s (1993) notion of the interdependencies within schools as organizations may
be used to frame the influences of group task and confidence. He proposed that attainment is
dependent upon the degree of interrelatedness within a group. When there is little reliance on
interdependence, the sum total of individual efforts contributes to attainment. However, when
interdependence increases, individuals must work collaboratively to achieve results. Bandura
(1993) used the example of early elementary grades to demonstrate teachers’ higher sense of
efficacy, largely due to limited academic demands within those grade levels. However, when
academic demands are increased as grade levels progress and students lose ground academically,
collective efficacy decreases (Bandura, 1993, p. 141). In this sense, the task (academic
complexities) and confidence (teachers’ perceptions of competence) interact to effect collective
teacher efficacy. Viewing collective teacher efficacy through the lens of perceived teacher
competence and task suggests a multidimensional context beyond Bandura’s (1993) four
components of collective teacher efficacy—mastery experience, vicarious experience, social
persuasion, and affective states. The extent to which teachers are competent in content and
pedagogy as well as the cognitive demand of the student task play an important role in predicting
student achievement.

Of particular note is the research conducted by Goddard et al. (2000), which explored
teachers’ perceptions of the teaching task and assessment of teaching competence and discovered
that the interrelationship between these two domains contributed to a perception of collective
efficacy (p. 501). Building upon this research, Goddard (2001) further delineated perceived
collective efficacy into two components: teachers’ judgments about the capabilities of the faculty
and teachers’ perceptions about the challenges and opportunities within the group task (p. 469).
Thus, Goddard (2001) expanded the definition of collective teacher efficacy to include “an
emergent organizational characteristic from the interaction of teacher perceptions about teaching
confidence and the difficulties inherent in the educational task facing the school, as well as the supports available in the setting” (p. 469). McCoach and Colbert (2010) supported the concept of group task and competence, finding that in order for collective teacher efficacy assessment scores to have practical value, measures of collective efficacy must include teaching confidence and teaching task analysis (p. 34). Their study demonstrates that “teachers can be high on task confidence, but low on competence, high on competence but low on task, high on both factors, or low on both factors” (McCoach & Colbert, 2010, p. 43). Research conducted by Goddard et al. (2000) confirmed that the collective perceptions held by teachers within competence and task domains can predict student achievement. Using a collective efficacy scale combining both domains, their study measured collective teacher efficacy among schools in a large Midwestern urban district, demonstrating the positive correlation between collective teacher efficacy and achievement in mathematics and reading (p. 483). Similarly, Goddard (2001) included group teaching competence and group task analysis in his research, while controlling for prior achievement and demographics, and determined that collective teacher efficacy is significantly and positively associated with student attainment.

**Collective teacher efficacy and student achievement.** Researchers (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard et al., 2015; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Ross et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) have studied collective teacher efficacy and student achievement, finding positive correlations between high collective teacher efficacy and the promotion of high levels of student achievement. Bandura was among the first researchers to study the effect of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement. His research demonstrated the positive correlation between collective teacher efficacy and the promotion of high levels of student achievement (Bandura 1993, p. 143). Goddard et al. (2000) also examined collective
teacher efficacy and found collective perceptions held by teachers can predict student achievement. Their research explained the positive association between high collective teacher efficacy and differences in student achievement that occur between schools (p. 501).

Incorporating student attributes, Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) studied teacher perception through a lens on low student achievement and described highly efficacious schools: “Teachers and schools with high collective efficacy do not view low student achievement as an inevitable byproduct of low socioeconomic status, lack of ability, or family background” (p. 192). Research conducted by Goddard and Skrla (2006) also found collective teacher efficacy was not correlated to students’ socioeconomic status (p. 231).

Given that collective teacher efficacy is a predictor of student achievement, it is important to note that research varies on the influence of the socioeconomic status (SES) of students and collective teacher efficacy. Researchers (Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Goddard et al., 2004; Bandura, 1993) have demonstrated that students’ socioeconomic status (SES) influences perceptions of collective teacher efficacy, and in turn, collective teacher efficacy predicts student achievement. However, Goddard et al. (2004) stated, “Perceived collective efficacy is not an artifact of SES. Rather, teachers’ beliefs about group capability are subject to multiple sources of influence, and they are malleable” (p. 422).

Ross et al. (2004) specifically examined the antecedents of collective teacher efficacy, focusing on prior student achievement and its relationship to collective teacher efficacy. Using data from 141 schools, they determined “there is a reciprocal relationship between the school’s collective efficacy and the achievement of its students” (p. 177). This research corresponds with Goddard’s (2001) conclusions, suggesting past school performance is related to teachers’ perceptions of collective efficacy (p. 474). However, Goddard (2001) still noted a significant
and positive correlation between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement when results were controlled for prior student achievement (p. 474). Recent research conducted by Belfi, Gielen, De Fraine, Verschueren, and Meredith (2015) contradicted Goddard’s (2001) earlier findings, suggesting collective teacher efficacy is more closely associated with school SES rather than past school performance (p. 42). In other words, teachers’ views of a school’s SES impact the degree to which teachers perceive their impact on the academic achievement of their students. However, Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, and Miller (2015) supported earlier research; controlling for SES and prior student achievement, the researchers confirmed collective teacher efficacy remains a strong predictor of student achievement (p. 525). Researchers Parker, Hannah, and Topping (2006) reported that neither socioeconomic status nor collective teacher efficacy independently account for student achievement: “Perhaps SES and CTE [collective teacher efficacy] are inextricably bound together in a recursive spiral of mutual influence, as the large significant correlation between them suggests” (p. 124).

While previous student achievement or students’ SES may influence collective teacher efficacy, numerous research studies have demonstrated that collective teacher efficacy does indeed impact student achievement. Goddard and Goddard (2001) collected data from 47 schools and determined the existence of a “nested association” between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement (p. 807). Goddard et al. (2004) controlled for student’s prior achievement, socio-economic status, gender and race, and determined that collective teacher efficacy had stronger effects on student achievement (p. 7). And Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) examined the significance of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement in 66 schools and found significant positive relationships (p. 197).

Goddard et al. (2004) suggested that the relationship between collective teacher efficacy
and student achievement occurs “because a robust sense of group capability establishes expectations and cultural norms for success that encourages members to work resiliently toward desired ends” (p. 8). This research corresponds with Bandura’s (1993): faculties who believe in their collective actions to educate students despite their backgrounds achieve the highest percentile in mathematical and language competencies in schools heavily populated with minority and low SES students (p. 143). Goddard and Goddard (2001) noted that when faculty think highly of their collective capability, they establish expectations for successful teaching and work to be successful. However, when collective efficacy is low, it is less likely that teachers will be expected by their peers to persevere with students (p. 816). In a summary of effective school characteristics, Hoy (2012) cites Goddard et al., (2004) stating, “[collective efficacy explained student achievement] regardless of minority student enrollment, urbanicity, SES, school size, and earlier achievement” (p. 84).

**Collective teacher efficacy and school culture.** A healthy school culture supports and contributes to teachers’ collective beliefs that they can positively impact student learning. Empirical findings (Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard et al., 2004; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993) suggest collective teacher efficacy might be used to characterize school culture. Goddard et al. (2000) suggested, “collective teacher efficacy is a way of conceptualizing the normative environment of the school and its influence on both personal and organizational behavior” (p. 502). Early research by Hoy and Woolfolk studied the influence of teacher belief systems and school climate in 37 elementary schools. Their findings indicated that a healthy school climate, with robust academic expectations, supported teachers’ beliefs that they can influence student learning (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993, p. 355). Later research (Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard et al., 2004) connected the earlier research on the influence of collective teacher belief systems to normative
behavior within schools. As a result of their research, Goddard et al. (2000) introduced a
description of collective teacher efficacy that correlates to normed behavior within schools:
“teachers’ beliefs about the faculty’s capabilities to successfully educate students constitutes a
norm that influences the actions and achievements of schools” (p. 496). Goddard et al. (2004)
later concluded, “perceived collective efficacy is a potent way of characterizing the strong
normative and behavioral influence of an organization’s culture” (p. 8).

Research conducted by Goddard et al. (2004) identified a probable link between
collective efficacy beliefs and group goal attainment, providing evidence that collective teacher
efficacy is a significant factor in the attainment of organizational goals within schools through
the communication of normative expectations for student achievement (p. 10). Tschannen-Moran
and Barr (2004) argued that once the collective efficacy of a school is established, either low or
high, it becomes part of the culture of the school and does not change easily (p. 191). This
research aligns with the results of a study by Strahan (2003), which indicated that schools
develop a cultural “stance” that communicates expectations to new teachers and students (p.
142). Strahan (2003) also demonstrated that instructional norms enhance student achievement,
and those organizational values lead to “communal attitude and posture” (p. 143).

Goddard and Skrla (2006) suggested that the higher the collective efficacy of faculty, the
greater likelihood that teachers will put forth the effort and persistence required to obtain desired
goals (p. 216). Goddard et al. (2004) summarized their research and stated, “From an
organizational perspective, the faculty’s sense of collective efficacy helps to explain the
differential effect that school cultures have on teachers and students” (p. 8). Goddard and
Goddard (2001) were among the first researchers to connect organizational culture to collective
teacher efficacy; evidence provided by Mawhinney et al. (2005) further connected the positive
relationship between collective efficacy and organizational context, highlighting positive school climate and teacher empowerment (p. 29). Ross et al. (2003) studied 2,170 teachers in 141 schools and found that teacher ownership in school directions wielded a stronger influence on collective teacher efficacy than prior student achievement (p. 2). Similarly, Goddard et al. (2004) determined that when teachers have opportunities to exercise organizational agency through instructionally relevant decisions, the school is more likely to be characterized with high collective teacher efficacy. Additionally, when teachers had the opportunity to influence decisions as a group, they held stronger beliefs in the overall capability of the faculty (p. 10).

Goddard (2001) suggested that faculties need the power to exercise collective agency in order to bolster their beliefs that their collective actions can make a difference (p. 474). Goddard et al. (2004) stated, “Schools organizations are agentive when we consider that schools act purposely in pursuit of their educational goals” (p. 483). Comparatively, Kurz and Knight (2004) found a relationship between collective teacher efficacy and goal consensus, underscoring the significance of organizational agency (p. 123). As teachers perceive high collective capability of the staff, an expectation of successful teaching is established, and effort is expended to increase student learning (Goddard et al., 2000). Goddard (2001) further suggested that past school successes should tend to raise a faculty’s belief in its collective capabilities (p. 469). This connects with Bandura’s concept of mastery experience within his collective efficacy framework.

The following section presents the literature as it relates to teacher collaboration and collective efficacy, more specifically, teacher teaming, teacher networking, and teacher social capital.
Teacher Collaboration and Collective Efficacy

A review of literature underscores the interrelatedness between teacher collaboration and collective teacher efficacy. Notably, studies indicate teacher collaboration influences collective teacher efficacy. Researchers (Bandura, 2000; Goddard et al., 2015; Mawhinney et al., 2005; Minckler, 2014; Ross et al., 2003; Strahan, 2003) determined when teachers collaborate on student learning and performance data, the result is higher expectations and a collective sense of efficacy. Bandura (2000) stated, “A group’s attainments are the product not only of shared knowledge and skills of its different members, but also of the interactive, coordinative, and synergistic dynamics of their transactions” (p. 75). Further, Ross et al. (2003) reported a reciprocal relationship between teacher ownership of instructional decisions and collective teacher efficacy, since teachers developed a sense of agency when they had the “discretion to act” (p. 23). The relationship between collective teacher efficacy and teacher collaboration is highlighted in Strahan’s (2003) research, where 51 original interviews were analyzed from a previous study of three elementary schools determining that collaborative cultures enabled teachers to coordinate their efforts to improve instruction, resulting in each school increasing the percentage of students performing at or above grade level in mathematics (p. 128). Mawhinney et al. (2005) discovered that teachers who characterize their school as collaborative also hold the belief that their colleagues can improve student learning (p. 28). Moreover, recent research by Goddard et al. (2015) found teacher collaboration “is a strong predictor of collective efficacy beliefs” (p. 525). Returning to Bandura’s (2000) earlier point, the interactive and coordinative efforts of teachers via teacher collaboration contribute to group attainment.

Teacher collaboration occurs formally through structured time within schools, as well as informally throughout the school day. Thus, teacher collaboration may be open to interpretation
and definition. Moolenaar (2012) stated, “A major challenge for research is that the concept has been interpreted in a very broad sense” (p. 8). It is possible to narrow the definition through a lens of instructional improvement. Goddard et al. (2015) defined teacher collaboration for instructional improvement as “a multidimensional construct that incorporates a focus on instructional policy, frequency of collaboration, and levels of formality characterizing the nature of teachers’ collaborative work” (p. 506).

Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) studied teacher collaboration as a means for instructional improvement and discovered an indirect relationship between teacher collaboration for instructional improvement and student achievement (p. 892). Their research studied 47 elementary schools with 452 teachers and found students had higher levels of achievement when their schools were characterized by “high levels of teacher collaboration on issues related to curriculum, instruction and professional development” (p. 878). Additionally, Takahashi (2011) discovered, “teachers co-construct their efficacy beliefs in shared practices” (p. 732). Hence, these studies suggest that collaborative cultures and opportunities contribute to student achievement.

As teachers engage in collaborative activities such as professional development and common planning time, collective teacher efficacy is influenced. As stated earlier, as teachers engage in collaboration that ultimately yields higher levels of student achievement, research suggests that higher levels of collective teacher efficacy would be established through mastery experience. However, it is important to delineate the difference between teacher collaboration for compliance as compared to collaboration for instructional improvement. Research conducted by Wood (2007) revealed a lack of connection between teachers’ collaborative work and student learning when more time was devoted to compliance activities than instructional improvement.
Moreover, researchers at the University of Chicago (Consortium on Chicago School Research) noted a similar delineation as they considered and explored the differences between **supportive** practice and **developmental** practice with regard to teacher collaboration. The researchers defined supportive practice as interactions through which teachers exchange information, advice, and approaches for addressing specific tasks, problems, or concerns (i.e., supporting routine classroom responsibilities.) Developmental practices, on the other hand, were interactions and activities through which teacher communities attempt to improve the collective instructional capacity of their members and change classroom practices. According to the Chicago study, the benefits of teacher collaboration are dependent on developmental practices. (University of Chicago, 2006, p. 7). This finding supported the research conducted by Ross et al. (2003) noting the reciprocal relationship between teacher ownership of instructional decisions and collective teacher efficacy.

**Teacher teaming.** In research conducted by Supovitz (2002), teachers in team-based schools felt more involved in school decisions and reported higher levels of collaboration with colleagues. However, there was little variance among instructional practices between team based and non-team based, and there was no statistical difference in student achievement between the two groups (p. 1591). However, research conducted by Moolenaar et al. (2012), indicated that teachers with confidence in the capability of their teams to influence student learning often had higher student achievement in language test scores than students whose teachers had less confidence in their team’s ability (p. 257). These findings by Moolenaar et al. (2012) suggested that teacher teams who felt they were able to motivate, challenge, and persevere with students were teaching in schools that supported higher student achievement (p. 259).

**Teacher networks.** Teacher collaboration may also be viewed in the context of teacher
networks. Moolenaar et al. (2012) stated, “Perceived collective efficacy is both associated with teacher collaboration and student achievement, as such collective efficacy may be a mechanism that can explain how configurations of teacher networks affected student achievement” (p. 252). Teacher networks provide the social context in which teachers share information, receive social support, and collaborate to achieve collective goals (Moolenaar et al., 2012, p. 253).

Moolenaar et al. (2012) studied teacher collaboration and determined that “well-connected teacher networks were associated with strong collective teacher efficacy which in turn supported student achievement” (p. 251). They further suggested the “denser” (the number of relationships and connections teachers have, both work-related and otherwise) the teacher network, the more likely teachers are to perceive that they are able to collectively impact student learning (Moolenaar et al., 2012, p. 257). Goddard et al. (2007) identified an indirect relationship between teacher collaboration for instructional improvement and student achievement, suggesting that the outcome of collaboration is teachers learning how to improve their instructional practice (p. 892). The researchers studied 47 elementary schools with 452 teachers and found students had higher levels of achievement when their schools were characterized by “high levels of teacher collaboration on issues related to curriculum, instruction and professional development” (Goddard et al., 2007, p. 878).

Social capital. The concept of social capital among teachers needs to be considered as a component of teacher collaboration and teacher networks. A growing body of research (Daly et al., 2014; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Leana, 2011; Minkler, 2014) on the significance of teacher social capital is emerging. Leana (2011) defined social capital to include patterns of interactions among teachers and demonstrated that social capital impacts student achievement in measurable ways. Leana’s (2011) seminal research studied teacher social capital in 130 schools
in New York City and concluded that teachers who reported higher social capital had a higher increase in mathematics scores. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) incorporated social capital within teacher professional capital, defined as the combination of human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. Minkler (2014) defined teacher social capital as “the resources available to and used by a teacher by virtue of membership of social network(s) to produce outcomes that are beneficial to the teacher, her students and ultimately to the school community as a whole” (p. 658). Studying 13 schools, Minkler that discovered high levels of teacher social capital strengthened collective teacher efficacy (p. 674).

As mentioned previously, collective teacher efficacy can be negatively related to students’ SES, thereby creating a context where collective teacher efficacy is decreased in low SES schools. Researchers have suggested teacher social capital serves as a means to mitigate the negative relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student SES. In their study, Belfi et al. (2015) determined that “lower collective teacher efficacy in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools is at least partly explained by the lower level of school based social capital” (p. 43).

**The Role of the Principal**

The second major section of this review relates to the role of the principal in establishing the necessary conditions for teacher collaborative and collective practice. A review of literature in this regard supports the interconnectedness between principal leadership and collaborative practice among teachers. In a recent study, Goddard et al. (2015) noted an absence of research aimed at understanding the relationship between principal leadership and teachers’ collective work. Rather, research efforts have addressed how principals “encourage” collaborative work. Recently, a number of researchers (Goddard et al., 2015; Versland & Erickson, 2017; Prelli, 2016a; Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2016) have explored the possible direct relationship
between principal leadership and collective teacher efficacy through collaborative practice.

Principals are responsible for establishing the conditions and structures for the joint work of teachers. Through the school’s master schedule, principals identify the frequency, purpose, and condition of the collective work of teachers. Principals provide opportunities for teachers to work together in structures such as common planning time, professional learning communities, grade level teams, or content teams. The aforementioned structures for the collaborative work of teachers influence collective teacher efficacy when an instructional focus is present. For example, Versland et al. (2017) discovered collective teacher efficacy increased when the capacity of teachers was built through instructional initiatives that were “purposeful and ongoing” (p. ??). Further, the researchers found the principal influenced collective teacher efficacy through instructional focus, teacher leadership development, and leading by example (p. 15). Importantly, the researchers noted teachers’ perceptions of the self-efficacy and actions of the principal contributed to the overall collective efficacy of the school (Versland et al., 2017, p. 1). In other words, the degree to which the principal attends to the instructional needs of the school influences teachers’ perceptions about the faculty’s ability to meet the needs of all students.

The leadership stance of the principal was highlighted in research conducted by Ninković and Knežević Florić (2016). The study used a framework developed by Leithwood and Sun (2012) to define four core leadership practices: setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional program. Two core practices—setting direction and developing people—were positive predictors of collective teacher efficacy. The concept of developing people was a recurring theme throughout examined literature. Researchers (Akan, 2013; Kurt, Duyar & Çalik, 2012; Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2016; Prelli, 2016b) often cited
transformational leadership as a construct to examine the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and principal leadership. Transformational leadership was described as “employing effective practice, rather than focusing on a single model of leadership” (Prelli, 2016b, p. 161). Moreover, Kurt et al. (2012) described transformational leadership as a focus on emotions and values, capacity development, and personal commitment (p. 75). Capacity development is also noted in Moolenaar et al. (2012) along with a focus on member commitment and engagement in meeting collective goals. Researchers used contrasting constructs to highlight other models of leadership. Transactional leadership, a stance that focuses on existing rules, procedures, and tasks, and laissez-faire leadership which provides little direction, have little impact on collective teacher efficacy (Akan, 2013; Kurt et al., 2012).

It is important to consider transformational leadership within the literature review as studies point to a connection to collective teacher efficacy. Through a random sample of 813 primary school teachers, Kurt et al. (2012) determined transformational leadership affects collective teacher efficacy. Similarly, Akan (2013) found a significant relationship between principal leadership and collective teacher efficacy, noting transformational leadership as a predictor of collective teacher efficacy. And in a study of 120 secondary teachers, Ninković and Knežević Florić (2016) found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and collective teacher efficacy. These studies among others suggest that principals are able to influence the group as a whole through a transformative leadership stance. As described above, transformational leadership practices such as vision setting, capacity building, and modeling norms for culture are group focused rather than individually focused, and have a direct influence on the collective agency of teachers.
Summary

This section summarizes the key points examined in this review of literature on how collective teacher efficacy—the collective belief among teachers that their actions will positively impact students—is associated with student achievement. Highly efficacious schools have higher student achievement. While collective teacher efficacy serves as a predictor of student achievement, collective teacher efficacy is also influenced by contextual factors such as socioeconomic status and prior student achievement. Moreover, the leadership stance of the principal influences the collective agency of teachers.

The formal social structures of teacher collaboration, including teacher teams and networks, combined with teacher social capital, support the development of collective teacher efficacy, thereby increasing student achievement. Hence, formal teacher collaboration that is focused on instructional improvement is positively associated with collective teacher efficacy. Additionally, principals with transformational leadership practices are able to influence the collective agency of teachers. Therefore, principal leadership is a positive predictor of collective teacher efficacy via principal influence on teacher collaboration (Goddard et al., 2015).

A survey of literature relative to collective teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, and principal leadership aligns with my thesis statement: Gaining insight to effective school turnaround practices, grounded in teacher professional practice, will provide policymakers and practitioners with additional school improvement strategies that utilize and develop existing professional capital, leading to high-quality teaching and learning. However, researchers (Goddard et al., 2004; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Klassen et al., 2011) noted few studies on specifically how collective teacher efficacy is developed within schools, as well as its corresponding influence on organization performance. Klassen et al. (2011) completed a review
of collective teacher efficacy research from 1998 to 2009 and noted, “Research attention has increased but what we know about teachers’ collective efficacy is not very substantial, with almost nothing known about how collective efficacy beliefs are formed in school settings.” (p. 35). They also indicated scant qualitative or longitudinal studies (2011, p. 35). Further, while Goddard et al. (2015) noted a lack of research on the relationship of principal leadership to the collective work of teachers, they emphasized the importance of connections between leadership and teacher collaborative practice. Therefore, an integrated phenomenological analysis qualitative study on the professional practice of teachers through the lens of principals would contribute to understanding how collective efficacy is developed in practice and influenced by principals in a school turnaround context.

Goddard et al. (2004) called for “new research that examines more closely how perceived collective efficacy is developed and how it may be strengthened in school organizations” (p. 423). And Klassen et al. (2011) determined through their ten-year review of the literature, “Insufficient attention has been paid to the sources of teachers’ self-and collective efficacy, and progress in teacher efficacy research has suffered as a result” (p. 31). Therefore, limited research exists in order to contribute to our understanding of how teachers build, and how principals influence, collective efficacy. Mawhinney et al. (2005) called for qualitative case studies to further examine sources of collective efficacy embedded in teacher collaboration (p. 31). Given that researchers (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard et al., 2015; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Ross et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) have determined a positive association between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement, it is critical that practitioners have access to ways in which collective efficacy can be nurtured and developed in schools, particularly in schools that are challenged with low SES. As research has confirmed (Belfi et al.,
2015), teachers who work in low-SES schools have decreased collective efficacy, and as a result lower expectations for student achievement. Thus, it is critical to identify ways in which teachers may build their collective efficacy.

Because the purpose of my research was to gain insight into the ways in which principals experience and make sense of collective teacher efficacy in urban turnaround schools, it is important to also consider research in the area of teacher collaboration for instructional improvement. While there is research to suggest teacher collaboration influences and contributes to collective teacher efficacy, the missing link in the literature is in the specific ways teachers collaborate. Since principals create structures for collaboration and often monitor the collective work of teachers, it is important to gain insight into principal perspectives. Similarly, studies of social capital and its connection to teacher collaboration and contribution to collective teacher efficacy are only beginning to emerge. Moreover, the context of turnaround schools is absent in the literature as a study site for teacher collaboration and collective teacher efficacy. A review of the literature in databases such as EBSCO, ProQuest, and Educator’s Reference Complete yielded no studies on teacher collaboration or collective teacher efficacy in the context of a turnaround school.

In a review of teacher self- and collective efficacy research from 1998 to 2009, four key research problems were noted (Klassen, 2010). First, studies have had a limited focus on the sources of collective efficacy. Further, researchers “uncritically defer to Bandura’s hypothesis that there are four sources that contribute to the formation of self- and collective efficacy beliefs” (Klassen, 2010, p. 39). Second, Klassen cautions against invalid measurement and urges researchers to use valid measures such as those developed by Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004). Third, only a small percentage of studies (2.8%) have linked student outcomes to collective
teacher efficacy. And fourth, “how can the cumulative body of research be made more relevant to practice?” (Klassen, 2010, p. 40). Klassen concluded a review of the research, offering the following suggestion: “research value would be enhanced through teacher-researcher collaborations in which teachers and researchers would work together to identify critical issues and to develop research questions, resulting in a more finely tuned understanding of how teacher efficacy influences day-to-day practice” (2010, p. 40). Moreover, a contradictory study exists regarding the influence of principals on collective teacher efficacy. Fancera and Bliss (2011) found principal leadership does not influence collective teacher efficacy (p. 367). While the study did not consider transformational leadership, but rather the 10 leadership functions within the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, the researchers found little relationship between instructional leadership and collective teacher efficacy (Fancera & Bliss, 2011, p. 367).

Given the potential of scholar-practitioner research to integrate theory and practice, collective teacher efficacy remains a viable theoretical framework to understand how the joint work of teachers contributes to their belief that they can have a positive impact on students. Specifically I aim to gain an understanding of the sources of collective efficacy in a social system (i.e., teacher collaboration) as teachers transform their collective instructional capacity to accelerate student learning in a school turnaround context. As noted by researchers through a review of the literature, this area is understudied and holds great promise for improving student outcomes, particularly students who are educated in urban centers. A logical and future extension of the qualitative design would be a quantitative study to measure the impact on student outcomes. The following chapter describes the methodology used in this study as well as the population, methods, and means of analysis of the data.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Researching collective teacher efficacy in the context of schools experiencing a turnaround from persistently low student achievement to an acceleration of student learning is an opportunity to explore the phenomenon from a unique context. The focus of inquiry was to examine the lived experiences of principals involved in a school turnaround to understand how they view collective teacher efficacy. Researchers have found positive associations between student achievement and teachers’ collective efficacy beliefs about the school (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Ross et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) and have suggested that teacher collaboration influences collective teacher efficacy (Ross et al., 2004). Furthermore, researchers have established a connection between principal leadership, teacher collaboration, and collective teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand how principals make sense of teacher collaboration, collective efficacy, and instructional leadership practices.

Methodology

Exploring teacher professional practice in turnaround schools through the lens of collaborative work among teachers and collective teacher efficacy—their belief that their efforts will have a positive impact on student achievement—can lead to the identification of transformative practices for increased student learning. This study employed a qualitative research design. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provided the methodology to understand the complexity of teacher professional practice as experienced by the principal. According to Smith and Osborn (2008), “IPA is especially useful when one is concerned with complexity, process, or novelty” (p. 55). IPA allowed for a participant view to examine how principals experience and make sense of collective teacher efficacy. The personal narratives of
principals provided rich detailed accounts for inductive analysis, leading to the development of themes within the context of collective teacher efficacy in an urban school turnaround environment. Research to date has primarily focused on the outcome of collective teacher efficacy, with few studies detailing how educators experience collective teacher efficacy, particularly in a school turnaround context.

**Research Question**

The purpose of this qualitative IPA research was to gain insight into the ways in which principals experience collective teacher efficacy in an urban turnaround school. Shinebourne (2011) suggested that study participants should “have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration of the phenomena being studied” (p. 49). In order to engage in the detailed examination of the phenomenon, study participants represented principals who have led urban schools out of persistently low student achievement through accelerated student learning. As stated by Smith and Osborn (2008), “research questions in IPA projects are usually framed broadly and openly. There is no attempt to test a predetermined hypothesis of the researcher; rather the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern” (p. 55). The research question for this study was designed to understand how principals make meaning—both intellectual and emotional—of collective teacher efficacy as a result of their experience with the phenomenon. The research question is as follows:

*How do principals make sense of and explain collective teacher efficacy in turnaround schools?*

**Research Tradition**

For the purpose of this study a social constructivism paradigm was utilized. Within this paradigm the goal of the research was to rely on participants’ views. According to Creswell
(2013), “the questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons” (p. 25). Importantly, researchers using this paradigm recognize that their own personal experiences shape interpretation, and “position” themselves within the process as they “make sense of the meaning others have about the world” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25).

An IPA provided the methodology for this study. Defined as a qualitative approach informed by theoretical frameworks within phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, IPA is a method that “allows participants to think, speak, and be heard” (Reid, Flower & Larkin, 2005, p. 22). While IPA first emerged within the field of health psychology, IPA studies are noted in applied social and clinical psychology (Reid et al., 2005). Recently, IPA has expanded within the applied psychologies to include counseling, educational, and occupational fields (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). The following sections will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

**Phenomenology.** John Smith conceptualized IPA in the mid-1990s, with seminal roots and theoretical underpinnings grounded in phenomenology (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Edmund Husserl, considered the founder of phenomenology, and later Martin Heidegger, conceptualized an approach to focus on the lived experiences of participants. However, Husserl and Heidegger differed in their expectations regarding the role of the researcher. A Husserlian approach brackets, or sets aside, assumptions and theories for true exploration and data collection. In contrast, Heidegger believed researchers could identify their understanding of the phenomenon, allowing for adjustments as data emerged (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Despite the slight differences in these approaches, phenomenology generally seeks to uncover the meaning of an individual’s experience by focusing on a detailed account of a lived experience. Additionally,
phenomenology acknowledges that lived experience is context specific and takes into account social, historical, and cultural perspectives (Shinebourne, 2011). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) articulate the definition of phenomenology: “Phenomenological studies will thus focus on how people perceive and talk about objects and events, rather than describing phenomena according to a predetermined categorical system, conceptual and scientific criteria” (p. 362).

**Hermeneutics.** Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, is another theoretical underpinning of IPA. Three seminal philosophers—Heidegger, Schleiermacher, and Gadamar—were instrumental in identifying the role of interpretation (Shinebourne, 2011; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Heidegger considered hermeneutics as a prerequisite to phenomenology, and as noted by Shinebourne (2011), “the task of interpreting is therefore to engage in the dynamic of conceal/reveal, making manifest what may lie hidden” (p. 47). Importantly, Heidegger noted that interpretation must prioritize the participant’s lived experiences rather than the researchers’ preconceptions. Smith and Osborn (2007) define this dynamic interchange between researcher conceptions and participant experiences as double hermeneutic: “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (p. 53). Smith and Osborn (2007) summarize the connection between phenomenology and hermeneutics as follows:

IPA has a theoretical commitment to the person as a cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people’s talk and their thinking and emotional state. At the same time, IPA researchers realize this chain of connection is complicated—people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling, there may be reasons why they do not wish to self disclose, the researcher has to interpret people’s mental and emotional state from what they say. (p. 54)
Idiography. The third theoretical underpinning of IPA, idiography, is described as a study of specifics, rather than a study of things-in-general. Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) define research at the idiographic level stating, “idiographic studies concentrate on specific individuals as they deal with specific situations or events in their lives” (p. 103). Further, according to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), “the fundamental principle behind the idiographic approach is to explore every single case, before producing any general statements” (p. 363). The idiographic lens in IPA affords the researcher the opportunity to study and analyze one single case at a time. For multiple cases, the researcher attempts to study one case in depth before moving on to the next, while bracketing (setting aside) the previous case. This process allows for the generation of themes via individual narratives, since the researcher conducts a cross-case analysis after individual analysis.

Site and Participants

The Massachusetts school and district accountability system identifies schools performing in the lowest 20% of schools within the state. Additionally, the Commissioner of Education has the authority to further identify a subset of schools with persistent low student achievement. These Commissioner-designated schools are known as Level 4 schools. Since 2010, the Commissioner of Education has designated 65 schools as Level 4. Of the 65 schools, 25 schools have exited Level 4 status, meaning they have experienced a three-year state-determined turnaround, reversing the trend of persistently low student achievement (MA Executive Office of Education, 2017). As this research study explored principals’ lived experiences of collective teacher efficacy in a school turnaround context, the 25 identified schools represented a pool of potential principal participants.
Recruitment

Participants were identified through public information available on the website of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education. The list of “exited” Level 4 schools published were cross referenced with information on the website of MADESE to determine each school principal’s contact information, including an email address. Further, an additional cross reference was conducted using the school’s Massachusetts School Report Card Overview available on the MADESE website to confirm the name of the principal during the year of exit from Level 4 status. In order to confirm principal contact information, an email was sent to MADESE. A recruitment letter was emailed to each potential participant. Additionally, a follow up email was sent to participants who did not respond.

The initial recruitment process yielded three participants from the finite pool of twenty-five potential participants. Additional potential participants using inclusion criteria were contacted from Level 3 schools with an initial percentile ranking of 5% or below which increased to at or above 20% within a three-year period. The recruitment process yielded an additional two participants.

The recruitment approach yielded a purposeful homogenous sampling of four to six principals. According to Smith (2011), IPA researchers need to recruit participants because they can offer a meaningful perspective on the phenomenon of interest. Additionally, Larkin (2013) suggested, “the idea is that participants are chosen because they offer you insights from a position of shared experience”. Further, Larkin (2013) suggested three to six participants, noting that the purpose of the sample size is the richness and depth of the data, rather than the quantity of participants.
Data Collection

The preferred method for data collection within IPA is the semi-structured interview, which creates a rich, detailed first-person account (Reid et al., 2005; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012; Shinebourne, 2011). This type of data collection is consistent with the idiographic nature of IPA—a focus on a single case study or studies in a small group of cases. Further, obtaining rich, detailed accounts aligns with the phenomenological approach to gain an insider’s perspective within a phenomenon. The semi-structured interview schedule provides a framework of questions and probes. The flexible format of the interview schedule gives the researcher the flexibility to invite participants to offer a rich, detailed first-person account. As described by Smith and Osborn (2008), the semi-structured interview “facilitates rapport/empathy, allows greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data” (p. 59). Interview participants are typically homogeneous and are recruited “because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration of the phenomena being studied” (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 49). And, as underscored by Heffron and Gil-Rodriguez (2011), “less is more” in terms of the number of participants interviewed: “fewer participants examined at a greater depth is always preferable to a broader, shallow and simply descriptive analysis of many” (p. 756).

For purposes of this qualitative IPA, participants were asked to voluntarily take part in a semi-structured interview of 60 to 90 minutes. Smith et al. (2009) suggest researchers create an interview schedule as a guide, with a broad opening question that allows a participant to recount a descriptive experience, followed by ten open ended questions.

The participants for this research study were limited to current or former principals of turnaround schools in Massachusetts, in order to gain their perceptions, personal feelings, and
insights into collective teacher efficacy as a school improvement strategy. The semi-structured interview questions drew from existing questionnaires of collective teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, and principal leadership. To the extent feasible, the semi-structured interviews took place at the school site of the principal at a location conducive to interviewing and recording. If the principal was no longer at their original turnaround school site, then a mutually agreed upon site conducive to interviewing and recording was selected. The researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews with individual principals in a face-to-face format. The researcher took notes and audio-recorded the interviews. Interviews were professionally transcribed and participants had access to questions and responses after the interview for member checking purposes.

**Data Storage**

Data is stored on the researcher’s password-protected computer and on a flash-drive device in possession of the researcher in a locked file cabinet. The only other person with access to data was a professional transcriber. Signed copies of informed consent by each participant will be maintained in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home for three years following the completion of the study. Any other materials, including but not limited to field notes, audiotapes, printed transcripts, and drafts of all data collected, will be maintained in a locked file and will be destroyed after three years.

**Data Analysis**

IPA data analysis is inductive and iterative (Reid et al., 2005). Further, Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) suggested, “it may be more appropriate to understand IPA as a ‘stance’ or perspective from which to approach the task of qualitative data analysis, rather than a distinct method” (p. 104). Shinebourne (2011) offered a two-stage analytic approach involving an initial
stage of reading the interview transcript multiple times, while recording observations, reflections, notes, and comments on the transcript. During the second stage, researchers transform their initial notes to emerging themes, looking for patterns and conceptual similarities. A final stage of analysis includes generating a table of themes with corresponding narrative quotes. This process is completed for each case, concluding in a cross-case analysis that yields a table of themes. The two-step process is identified throughout the literature (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2003) and aligns with the concepts of double hermeneutic analysis discussed earlier in this chapter.

Data analysis for this study utilized the two-stage process offered by Shinebourne (2011). As mentioned in an earlier section, semi-structured interviews were audio recorded by the researcher and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. During the first stage, the researcher read each transcript multiple times, recording observations, reflections, notes, and comments directly on the transcript. During the second stage (thematic coding), the researcher transformed the initial observations, reflections, notes, and comments of each transcript to represent emerging themes, looking for patterns and conceptual similarities within the individual transcript. This process was completed for each transcript, creating a table of themes/patterns with quotes and line-number references associated with each theme. Then a second round of analysis considered themes in a cross-case analysis, allowing for new themes and patterns to emerge. The cross-case analysis provided the opportunity to reveal major themes and subthemes. A table of major themes and subthemes with corresponding narratives was constructed. The resulting narrative “consists of the interplay between the participants’ account and the interpretative activity of the researcher” (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 21).
Presentation of the Findings

Smith and Osborn (2008) detail two possible presentation strategies available to IPA researchers. First, researchers may write a results section with thematic analysis and a subsequent separate discussion section linking relevant literature. Alternatively, IPA researchers could combine results and discussion by generating links to the literature with each superordinate theme (p. 76). Regardless of the structure of the section(s) that present the findings, the authors suggest that analysis will be expanded during the writing phase. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) suggested taking the themes in the final table and writing them up. Specifically, the authors stated, “each [theme] needs to be described and exemplified with extracts from the interview(s), followed by analytic comments from the author” (p. 368). Shinebourne (2011) summarizes the presentation of the findings as follows:

In the final section, the discussion shifts the focus towards a wider context of a dialogue with existing literature, complementing, illuminating or problematizing other perspectives in the literature. The reader is then able to engage in the process of considering the study in relation to the professional and personal experience, as well as relevant literature. (p. 59)

Trustworthiness

Baxter and Jack (2008) offered strategies for achieving trustworthiness. These strategies included a clearly written research question, purposeful sampling, systematic data collection and management, and fidelity to data analysis. Further, the authors suggested member checking, maintenance of field notes, and analytic memos (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 556). Creswell (2013), who suggested researchers engage in at least two validation strategies, included member checking and rich, thick description as potential procedures (p. 253).
In consideration of this research study, strategies offered by Baxter and Jack (2008), as well as Creswell (2013) were employed. First, a clearly written research question was proposed (i.e., *How do principals make sense of and explain collective teacher efficacy in turnaround schools?*). Second, purposeful sampling of principals from twenty-five turnaround schools was planned. Third, data was systematically collected and managed, with fidelity to the two-stage approach detailed by Shinebourne (2011). Further, study participants will engage in member checking. Creswell (2013) described member checking as “taking data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (p. 252). Finally, IPA as method insists upon rich, thick descriptions.

**Researcher Bias and Familiarity**

As a former superintendent of three turnaround schools, I observed principals creating conditions for teachers to transform their practice, and I believe student outcomes improved as a result of the collective work of educators. While this bias is informed by student performance data, it is also informed by my role as observer, participant, and leader in the work of school improvement in the district. The literature review was conducted with the goal of saturation to ensure that all sides of the problem of practice were represented. A thorough review of the literature, combined with a theoretical framework grounded in research and the principles of collective teacher efficacy, created a foundation for me to further explore the problem of practice, while continually reflecting on positionality throughout the research process.

**Conclusion**

IPA offers a qualitative methodology that provided me with an opportunity to study collective teacher efficacy in depth through the lived experiences of principals within an urban school turnaround context. The inclusion of a double hermeneutic interpretative approach
allowed for sense-making and is the strength of IPA. I sought to understand the lived experiences of principals through an intense analysis of a detailed first-person account. Then I strove to make sense of the participant’s sense-making through reflective interpretation. The analytic processes lead to new insights about effective school turnaround practices, providing policymakers and practitioners with additional school improvement strategies that utilize and develop existing professional capital, leading to high-quality teaching and learning.
Chapter 4: Research Results

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the research results of an interpretative phenomenological study, which examined the lived experiences of five urban school principals. This study specifically examined the principals’ sense of teacher collective efficacy in the context of school turnaround, a term used by state officials to identify schools that significantly improved student outcomes over a three-year period. The participants in this study provided rich, detailed, first-person accounts of their experience with teacher collective efficacy.

Research Question

This qualitative IPA study was designed to explore following question:

*How do principals make sense of and explain teacher collective efficacy in an urban turnaround school?*

Data Collection and Participants

Five school principals, representing three different urban districts in Massachusetts, participated in this study. All participants led their schools, within a three-year period, out of a state-determined status of underperformance. All participants had been asked by their district superintendent to transfer to the designated underperforming school in order to lead a turnaround effort. Each participant is female, and at the time of transfer to their underperforming schools, their school leadership experience ranged from first-year principal to veterans of 10 years or more. While school leadership experience varied, all participants had spent most, if not all, of their professional careers within their districts. Furthermore, all were once classroom teachers. The participants are briefly described below and have been assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.
Principal Profiles

**Ana.** Ana has spent her entire career in education. Prior to her appointment as a principal of an underperforming school, Ana had been a classroom teacher and building-based administrator. She had never been a school principal. Ana was asked by her district superintendent to transfer to the school of 500 students to take on the role of school principal. The school had a long history of persistently low student achievement. Ana described her entry to the school:

> It was my first principalship. And, I’m going into an underperforming school. The staff really pushed back; they were veterans. They had been there a lot longer than I was and they thought they were going to wear us down. Who are we to know better? And it’s not that we knew better, it’s just that we knew it wasn’t working. (Ana, p. 12)

Just when Ana began her role as school leader, the state department of education officially declared the school underperforming, warranting district intervention and state technical assistance. During Ana’s tenure as principal of the school, the Commissioner of Education released the school from its status of underperformance, due to improved student outcomes in a three-year period.

**Jen.** At the time of her appointment, Jen was a principal elsewhere in her district. During the spring, principals in the district were aware that the superintendent would be identifying two of them to transfer to two Commissioner-designated underperforming schools. Jen described the process:

> All principals in the district were anxious about who was she going to ask…and so me being a…I’ve always been a proactive, forward thinker…I’m always thinking what’s happening next, and if that happens what will I do? So that’s kind of how I process, so
when all the principals were nervous…well who’s she going to choose because we had
two schools where the principals were being removed…I already was mentally
preparing…she’s going to call…I just know she’s going to call…and if she calls, what
am I going to say? Am I going to take it? (Jen, p. 3)

Jen received the call from her superintendent to transfer. While the superintendent expressed her
desire to transfer Jen to a particular school, Jen negotiated a transfer to the other
underperforming school in the district.

Jen was familiar with the school and with many of the staff, and had worked there in
prior years. During her career, Jen had been a classroom teacher, teacher leader, building
administrator, and principal. During Jen’s tenure, the Commissioner of Education released the
school from its status of underperformance, due to improved student outcomes in a three-year
period.

Kate. As a long-time educator, Kate had been contemplating retirement when her
superintendent asked her to take over a struggling school, considered to be “in crisis” by many in
the community. Student academic performance was extremely low; student behavior was leading
to many suspensions, and the state department of education was expressing concern—all factors
warranting district intervention. Kate had served in a variety of roles during her tenure in the
district, including classroom teacher, building principal, and central office member. The
principal of the school was removed in the spring, and Kate immediately took over. Kate shared
her observations at the time: “the first thing that happened when we went in was that we knew
that we had to work on climate and culture…there was no accountability…everyone had their
own idea of what [teaching] looked like” (Kate, p. 3).

When Kate began her appointment as principal, the school was among the lowest
performing schools in the state. In a period of three years, the school received a commendation from the Commissioner of Education for high progress.

**Rita.** Rita has spent her career in the same district, beginning as a substitute teacher, becoming a classroom teacher, and moving into a building administrator role. Her superintendent then appointed her as a first-year principal to lead a struggling school. Rita described her early days in the school:

> Our first meeting was, tell me what you think is wrong, what can we do to fix it, what's going on? And the response, very clearly from many of my teachers, was “it's the students.” I got a lot of push-back. Parents went to teachers, teachers went to parents behind my back, it was a lot of that. So I had to kind of put that on the shelf because the kids' education had to come first. (Rita, p. 3)

The school was among the lowest performing schools in the state, ranking within the fifth percentile. After two years of Rita’s tenure, the school rose to the 31st percentile.

**Valerie.** Prior to her appointment, Valerie had served in her district as a teacher, building administrator, and principal. She was in her eleventh year as a school principal when her superintendent asked her to transfer to an underperforming school in her district. Valerie accepted the transfer under the condition she would have the superintendent’s support to make the necessary changes within the school. Valerie described the conversation with her superintendent:

> When I got asked to take over the school, the superintendent said to me that ‘you know it will be difficult,’ because I had my [current] school running very smoothly. So I said to her, I really would like to talk to the staff that is there, because if I’m taking it over, and I’m going to do what I need to do, status quo is over. (Valerie, p. 2)
When Valerie began her leadership at the school, the Commissioner of Education had deemed the school underperforming, warranting district intervention and state technical assistance. Within a three-year period, under Valerie’s tenure, the Commissioner of Education released the school from its status of underperformance, due to improved student outcomes.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Participants participated in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. The semi-structured interview questions drew from existing questionnaires of collective teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, and principal leadership. Interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Once the transcriptions were received, data analysis began.

Data analysis for this study utilized the two-stage process offered by Shinebourne (2011). During the first stage of analysis, each transcript was read multiple times, recording observations, reflections, notes, and comments directly on the transcript. During the second stage, the initial observations, reflections, notes, and comments of each transcript were transformed to represent emerging themes, looking for patterns and conceptual similarities within the individual transcript, resulting in thematic coding. This process was completed for each transcript, and narratives were repeatedly reviewed, in order to create a table of themes and patterns with narrative quotes associated with each theme. Then a second round of analysis considered themes in a cross-case analysis, allowing for new themes and patterns to emerge. Narratives, again, were repeatedly reviewed, and audiotapes were listened to repeatedly in order to consider tone and inference. The cross-case analysis provided the opportunity to reveal major themes and subthemes. A table of major themes and subthemes with corresponding narratives was constructed.
The analysis of the data revealed four major themes and eleven subthemes associated with the participants’ lived experiences. The four major themes, and their corresponding subthemes, are described below.

1. **Culture of learning** addresses how participants perceived the school culture developing into a learning organization with expectations focused on building capacity for teaching and learning. Sub-themes include *high expectations for students* and *everyone is expected to learn*.

2. **Collaborative structures** addresses how participants experienced teacher engagement and participation in formal networks within the school. Sub-themes include *professional development*, *common planning time/professional learning communities*, and *teacher decision-making*.

3. **Learner-focused** addresses how participants perceived teachers planning and adjusting their practice to support the individual learning needs of students. Sub-themes include *reaching all students*, *student ownership of Learning*, and *academic and social-emotional learning*.

4. **Joint problem-solving** addresses how participants experienced teachers engaging in collective efforts to identify solutions for complex school improvement work. Sub-themes include *ownership of turnaround*, *timely adjustments to practice*, and *collaborative inquiry*.

The following sections contain the analysis of the data, and the resulting themes and subthemes of the study. Each section is organized by major theme and corresponding sub-themes, along with a narrative presentation of interview data, and a summary. Tables have been included in each section to provide an orientation to the major theme and sub-themes via participant
narratives. The tables are not inclusive of all narratives in the area, but are intended to provide a brief overview prior to a detailed discussion of each theme and sub-theme.

**Major Theme 1: Culture of Learning**

As participants entered their new assignments as principals of underperforming schools, they each described a need to establish expectations for a learning culture. Participants portrayed their new schools in the context of disruptive student behavior and a lack of time for teachers to work together. These two areas were perceived as obstacles to creating a learning organization focused on teaching and learning. The five principals immediately embarked on work with teachers to establish a new vision for their schools. Two areas arose as a result of their early work with teachers: (1) high expectations for students, both behaviorally and academically, and (2) an expectation that everyone was learning, including administrators, teachers, and students. Table 1 highlights some of their perceptions and experiences in each area.

**Table 1**

**Perceptions and Experiences Related to Culture of Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Expectations for Students</th>
<th>Everyone is Expected to Learn</th>
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<td>When we commit ourselves that we believed that all kids could learn with the right resources and we created that vision, then that became part of our everyday work. (Ana, p. 25)</td>
<td>What we were looking for were people who wanted to learn with us, because we had to learn how to put everything into place. (Kate, p. 3)</td>
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<td>There’s no reason these kids can’t learn. There’s no reason we should be this low. (Jen, p. 20)</td>
<td>We created a professional adult learning community. We became a team. (Ana, p. 7)</td>
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<td>After I did a few months of just looking and watching and seeing what we had to change, I thought this school can definitely go up, no doubt our kids can do it. (Rita, p. 3)</td>
<td>It’s okay to say something didn’t work, or that you don’t feel good about how you’re doing that lesson, it’s okay, that tells me you’re reflective. That tells me you want to learn. (Jen, p. 20)</td>
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**High expectations for students.** As the principals entered their new roles, each took
time to meet with staff to gain the perceptions of teachers. These formal and informal conversations revealed school cultures where learning was not the priority. Two participants described the culture in ways that highlighted a lack of order, with disruptions to the learning environment through student behavior. The three remaining participants described a culture with an overall lack of high expectations for student learning. Valerie’s comments illustrated her sense of the school environment;

When I first came, the behaviors in this building were crazy. It was like they were inmates running the asylum, and I know that’s an awful saying, but the teachers that were here and those that left said, “you’re going to hate it here.” How do you hate going to school? I’ve been in education almost 30 years, I love going to work. (Valerie, p. 8)

Kate had a similar observation upon her entry to the role: “the behaviors in the building were so out of control there was really no other word for it. They [teachers] were having a hard time managing their classrooms” (Kate, p. 2). Jen described her early observations of the school culture: “There was a good core of teachers that were in their classrooms, keeping things going, but outside of classrooms it was definitely a feeling that the culture was totally broken down” (Jen, p. 3).

In order to shift school culture from one of disorder and disruption to one where student learning was prioritized, participants worked with teachers to set the tone for high expectations. Ana felt certain that a new vision would lay the groundwork for collective effort and accountability. She said, “We created that vision together so we held one another accountable for it, but they [teachers] knew that in order for us to shift that culture of the building, it needed to be about teaching and learning” (Ana, p. 18). Jen shared her strong feelings about high expectations for teachers and students, “I’ve been a principal for 11 years and I have always supported my
teachers, but I expect them to do the work. They know that I have high expectations; it’s about the kids and their learning” (Jen, p. 11). Upon refection, both participants acknowledged the culture shifted toward one of high expectations. Jen’s comment illustrated this sense: “We never lowered our expectations, never. We probably had higher expectations for our kids than some of the schools [in the district]. We never said our kids can’t do it” (Jen, p. 20). Ana underscored participants’ unwavering focus on an environment of high expectations, thus yielding a change in culture: “The [new] culture of the school sent the message that they [students] could be anything they wanted to be. We created opportunities, we celebrated their successes” (Ana, p. 25).

Valerie expressed her commitment to an environment of high expectations for students: “Teachers knew that, you know…we’re not settling, we are not giving in to the behaviors; this building is turning around and the first thing that it’s turning around in is from a behavioral building to an educational setting” (Valerie, p. 9). Teachers at Valerie’s school worked together at their first summer retreat to write a school pledge. Valerie explained their work:

The daily school pledge…we say it every morning…just like the pledge of allegiance. It is the plan for the building. These are the rules the kids have to follow everyday and they know what they are. They repeat them every morning. We wrote them as a group, the kids have them…it’s just part of the day. (Valerie, p. 6–7)

All five participants worked toward establishing high expectations for learning, and perceived a new culture as an important component to school turnaround. Two of the participants viewed their school with disruptive student behavior, and three of the participants viewed their schools as environments where adults had low expectations for student learning. Regardless of the cause, participants expressed an immediate need to reset the culture of their schools to one where teaching and learning was the priority.
Everyone is expected to learn. Within a culture of learning, all participants noted that learning was not reserved for students only. A culture of learning meant that adults and students within the school were learning. Learning for students took place within classrooms; however, learning for adults took place in a variety of forms. Participants held firm to the belief that within a culture of learning everyone was engaged in learning, whether it was academic content for students or new professional knowledge for teachers. However, participants noted a lack of time for teachers to meet in teams or as a professional learning community. Jen described an early meeting with the faculty: “We came up with that idea as a school, we needed time for teachers to work together, to talk through the curriculum and the standards” (Jen, p. 7). Similarly, Rita identified the need to work with teachers: “I needed to meet with my teachers, and I needed to figure out how. It's more than just going in their classrooms—we needed to meet” (Rita, p. 6). Kate echoed the need to find time for teachers to work together: “We were looking at the schedule to provide time for teachers, we needed time for teachers to meet as grade level teams” (Kate, p. 4).

Kate described engagement of adults in professional learning: “At that point, I’m going off to professional development…everyone's going to professional development. The whole school is going to professional development every Wednesday for 100 minutes” (Kate, p. 9). The investment in professional learning served as a model for students, and was best articulated by Ana: “We decided that we were going to model for our kids what a love for learning was…we decided to engage in a book study each year as a staff, and we focused on professional development” (Ana, p. 7).

Participants felt that an important part of a whole school learning environment, where everyone was expected to learn, was feedback for growth. It is important to note the feedback
was provided in the spirit of learning, rather than in a traditional mode of feedback for evaluative purposes. Rita explained the context of feedback with her teachers:

Nobody drives up and says, “How do I mess up kids at [school] this year?” You're not doing that. You don't know what you don't know. It's my job to figure out what you don't know to help you to be a better teacher, to be better for our students. (Rita, p. 13)

Other participants noted the importance of creating a feedback cycle that built upon effective teacher practice. Ana felt that just as in student learning, she needed to understand the abilities of teachers:

I wanted to respect and honor teachers’ expertise while continuing to build on it, as opposed to saying oh no, everything you’ve done up until now…no, we didn’t change everything. No, our job is to honor what they’ve done but to say so…how do we make that better? How do we build on it? (Ana, p. 17)

Valerie described feedback to teachers in a gradual release model, where teachers first watched, then tried with feedback, and ultimately established a new practice:

I was the queen [I do, we do, you do] that first year into the second, and then we became not just I Do—it was We Do…all of us…and now it’s You Do, and the teachers are doing a lot of the work—it’s gone from the three different levels and now it’s really a shared leadership model. (Valerie, p. 5)

Each of the participants incorporated feedback into an expectation of professional learning. As the five principals were creating an expectation that teachers were learning, as well as students, they made a strategic effort to incorporate feedback. A cycle of feedback within a learning environment for teachers ensured that new instructional strategies received attention.

**Summary: Culture of learning.** Participants identified a common need to establish a
culture of learning as a first step when they entered the underperforming schools as principals. Each observed a lack of emphasis on learning—for students and teachers. Primary obstacles to learning included a lack of time for teachers to work and learn together, a disruption to the learning environment by student behaviors, and lowered expectations for student learning. Integral to establishing a culture of learning was establishing high expectations for students, promoting an environment where everyone is expected to learn, and creating opportunities for feedback for growth.

Three of the participants were able to address their observations regarding student behavior and time for teachers to meet during mandatory summer retreats. The retreats provided an opportunity to re-imagine with teachers a new vision for their schools. The remaining two principals engaged in similar visioning work with teachers through faculty meetings during the course of the school year. This collective visioning work was the entry point to establish a new culture for the schools—a culture that prioritized learning for all.

**Major Theme 2: Collaborative Structures**

The second major theme revealed by participants was collaborative structures. These structures were formal networks where teachers engaged in collaborative activities where they learned with and through one another, engaged in planning for curriculum and instruction, and made decisions in the arena of teaching and learning. Once participants identified they needed to establish a culture where everyone was expected to learn, as discussed in the previous section, they set about creating the structures in order to provide time for teachers to collaborate. For some participants, time was made available as a result of the school’s underperformance. For example, in some cases the state educational agency required the district to hold negotiations with the local teachers’ union in order to create the conditions necessary for additional
professional development and teacher planning. In other cases, principals worked within current parameters and creatively used staffing schedules or restructured the master schedule to allow for collaborative structures to exist. Table 2 highlights the some of the participant’s experiences in each area.

**Table 2**

**Perceptions and Experiences Related to Collaborative Cultures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Common Planning Time/PLC</th>
<th>Teacher Decision Making</th>
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<td><em>We did so much incredible work in building [teacher] expertise.</em> <em>(Ana, p. 20)</em></td>
<td><em>The culture of these meetings has been very sacred; it is about the teachers.</em> <em>(Jen, p. 10)</em></td>
<td><em>It means that every member is a contributing member. And so that eventually, you really don't need one person. You need the team to make all the decisions.</em> <em>(Kate, p. 9)</em></td>
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<td><em>Every decision we made was thinking about sustainability—professional development, no one is going to take that knowledge away from you.</em> <em>(Jen, p. 5)</em></td>
<td><em>We did it by team building at the very beginning and learning how to collaborate.</em> <em>(Valerie, p. 3)</em></td>
<td><em>I could see that they were interacting with each other and they didn’t really need me to be doing that, so we would take our steps back.</em> <em>(Valerie, p. 18)</em></td>
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<td><em>They would share how they were strategically diagnosing; they would teach each other how to do it and then that would become professional development.</em> <em>(Kate, p. 15)</em></td>
<td><em>People weren’t afraid to share what was working and what wasn’t working or they were struggling with some things.</em> <em>(Ana, p. 14)</em></td>
<td><em>I never forget that the teachers, the educators that are in front of those kids, are the ones you have to tap into.</em> <em>(Jen, p. 17)</em></td>
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**Professional development.** Participants formed collaborative structures in order to provide time for teachers to learn new instructional practices or gain new professional knowledge. Furthermore, all participants described the need to build the capacity of teachers to better meet the individual learning needs of students. Three of the participants used their summer retreats with teachers—which were mandatory—as a mechanism to launch professional development. If internal capacity to deliver professional development was not yet built, or if the
content of the professional development was highly specialized, participants noted the need to bring in outside consultants. Valerie described the need to use time during the staff retreat to provide professional development to teachers: “The state gave us a money for re-design [work] and so we did summers for professional development. We paid contractors to come in and work with us to spend a week every summer and teach us” (Valerie, p. 11).

Jen described her first retreat with faculty. She wanted to provide professional development that was relevant to all staff. More importantly, she wanted to define an area that would be built upon year after year. She shared her own experiences with professional development as a way to engage teachers in new learning:

Although we focused in on comprehension initially, on the academic piece, there was a bigger purpose for it. It wasn’t just about comprehension, it was about hooking them, do you know what I mean? Everybody has to know how to teach reading at the elementary level and I would argue at every level. So that was kind of the hook, was let me hook you in with…we’re going to look at reading comprehension and we’re going to make it really engaging and interesting and fun, then it went into lesson planning, it went into how do we assess it? It went into how do we monitor it? It’s every step…every year it built to another level. (Jen, p. 6)

As previously described, Kate had entered her school observing teachers’ inability to teach due to student behaviors. She decided to engage teachers at their first retreat with professional development that would target areas most concerning to teachers. All teachers spent a week in the summer learning a school-wide approach to developing positive learning environments. Similar to Jen, who wanted to “hook” teachers as they engaged in new learning, Kate shared her experience:
Teachers had taught for 15 years…the majority of them. So it wasn't a very young staff at that point. But I think that they were also interested in learning something new. I don't think that they had that opportunity, and they also knew that classroom management was going to be key for teaching. They couldn't teach. (Kate, p. 5)

All participants noted that initial professional development was grounded in a new instructional practice for all members of the faculty. Moreover, four participants noted that in a short time, professional development became differentiated based on the needs of teachers. Teachers started to be considered “school-based experts” and began delivering professional development to their colleagues. Ana described the evolution to an in-house building-based model:

I think that as we grew and built capacity, we involved the staff and we started doing some differentiated professional development. What we tried to do was create experts in different areas so that we could have this internal system where we could say, “okay, so-and-so is really strong in this; they’re going to lead the work and we’re going to bring kids into her classroom,” or vice versa, they’re going to lead and work with teachers.

(Ana, p. 20)

While not specific about the content of professional development, three of the participants noted a by-product of the collaborative structure—teachers came to know one another and camaraderie developed. Specifically, of the three participants that had summer retreats, all noted the opportunity to get to know one another. Valerie explained her perception:

The retreat was literally to bring in the reading program, and a lot of it was just team building. It was learning each other, it was meeting each other, it was trying to get to know each other, and what our differences were, and what our lives were, so that when we got together with teams and got our grade levels in, we would start working in
September together. All background things that you do when you don’t know anybody, and a lot them did know each other, but hadn’t worked together and they all kind of came together as a group. (Valerie, p. 6)

The retreats, occurring in the summer before students arrived for the school year, appeared to be an opportunity for teachers to get to know one another in a different setting. The retreat structure created an alternate environment where teachers could work together without the urgency of rushing back to their classrooms. This sustained, week-long, professional development seemed to help set the stage for relationship-building. Kate, whose staff had worked together previously, experienced each other in new ways:

Those summer sessions really let everybody know one another. They didn't really know one another. So I think that they discovered that people had, I mean it was just a funny thing. We discovered that one of the teachers was a bookbinder. Another of the teachers who was very soon to retire was a kayaker. I mean, things that you would have never thought. So it was a real community building. (Kate, p. 5)

In many respects the retreats launched a specific professional development for the year. While four of the participants were able to have a retreat that first year, Rita found time within the school day to provide professional development to teachers. However, Rita’s interview did not reference any relationship-building among teachers. Three of the participants continued summer professional development in years two and three of their turnaround. Importantly, collaborative structures created by the participants permitted sustained momentum of professional development throughout the school year. All of the participants found ways to provide ongoing and sustained professional development through the school year. The professional development included specialized training from outside experts and training from
in-house building experts, and four of the experts had job-embedded coaching in place during the three-year turnaround.

**Common planning time and professional learning communities.** Participants shared their experiences that two collaborative structures—common planning time and professional learning communities—were necessary for teachers to collaborate on instructional planning and delivery. At times participants used these two terms interchangeably; however, the concept was that the collaborative structures existed for teachers to work with one another on matters related to curriculum and instruction. Whereas professional development time was focused on increasing teachers’ skill set and professional knowledge, common planning time and professional learning communities (PLCs) were specific and more targeted toward student learning needs within the teachers’ classrooms. Ana shared her perception of teacher interaction during PLCs;

They talked about planning, they talked about kids; they looked at data and created groupings and what they were going to do, creating these cycles for… to work with kids.

They talked about instruction, what they needed to do, in grade level teams. So it was really about teaching and learning. (Ana, p. 20)

Rita had been able to create common planning time during the school day and she met with grade level teams during those periods. Her teachers had not had the opportunity to collaborate in prior years. Rita had to lead and facilitate the teams as teachers learned how to work as a grade level team:

We talked about curriculum, we talked about lessons, how to make it more rigorous, just talking about their day and their week, any questions, any concerns. If I had questions regarding what I saw in the classroom by grade level in particular we would discuss it. (Rita, p. 6)
Although all participants created the collaborative structures for common planning time and PLCs, they varied regarding their perceived involvement with them. In scenarios such as Rita’s, described above, participants were leading the sessions, facilitating collaboration. Two participants, Ana and Valerie, had direct participation in PLCs. Valerie perceived her initial presence in PLCs as a means to set expectations for classroom instruction. She explained, “Anything that we’re looking at in classrooms is [discussed in PLCs]” (Valerie, p. 13). However, Valerie also perceived that her role has now evolved to supporting teachers:

> Basically we’ve gone to where the lead teacher and the teachers run the PLCs and we are there for support. After 7 years of I do, we do, you do,…everything is now, you do. I’m here, I’m ready, but these people have been working together. Everybody’s been here for 5 and most for 7 years. And they know the curriculum, they know how to differentiate. (Valerie, p. 14)

The reference to “I do, we do, you do” in Valerie’s comments refers to a gradual-release model of support. Initially, Valerie, like Rita, needed to lead and facilitate PLCs (i.e., “I do”). Then, Valerie shared facilitation and leadership with PLC members (i.e., “we do”). Finally, Valerie released the responsibility of facilitation and leadership to PLC members (i.e., “you do”). This gradual release toward teacher leadership helped teachers build the necessary skills for collaboration, and specifically collaboration in the spirit of accelerating student learning.

In contrast, Jen and Kate did not frequently attend their PLCs but monitored the time through review of agendas and meeting notes. This approach occurred after teachers had demonstrated their ability to take ownership of PLCs in a manner that addressed student learning. Jen describes her perception of PLCs after trust was established:

> I did feel [PLC] was sacred time for teachers, but you have to have good people that you
trust and know can have the substance to do the work in there. So if I didn’t have [teacher leaders] in there, I would have been there or one of my [administrators] would be in there. I wanted to give them that opportunity to be the professionals that they are. At some point, when are we going to say they have a Bachelor’s degree and now in almost all cases now a Master’s degree and that we need to treat them as the educators they are. If they have something [to ask] I would go, let them ask their questions, I would get to those questions and then I would leave and give them the rest of the time to finish the work. They have to turn in minutes, so I’m monitoring it through the minutes or through conversations with [building-wide teacher leaders] at the time. (Jen, p. 10)

While Jen noted PLCs were time for teachers to work together without her present, she did ensure building-level teacher leaders (those without classroom teaching responsibilities) were present to guide the conversation. And there were other weekly structures, such as common planning time, where Jen was more heavily involved. PLCs were the “sacred time” she previously described, but common planning time appeared to be more focused on needs determined by school leadership. She said,

The common planning time was a 40-minute block as a grade level which was driven by school leadership, either the principal or [building administrator] were running it, or if the senior leadership couldn’t be there, the [teacher leaders] run it. And it’s usually specific, like data analysis or specific little mini professional development about something that we need to talk about, or maybe it’s observations that we’ve done that we’re noticing a trend on one of our school initiatives and we’ll bring it to that venue and we’ll say,…..we’re noticing this, can you as a grade level talk to us about what do you do and let’s talk through what’s the best way to do it. (Jen, p. 7)
Participants also experienced collaborative structures as a means to broaden grade-level networks. Four participants had descriptions of teacher team working to coordinate efforts across grade levels, both vertically and horizontally. Teachers working in grade-level teams were more likely to address areas of curriculum and instruction. Valerie described a vertical team that created a communication system in order to ensure consistency and vertical alignment in the planning of instruction. She said,

We formed a vertical team…and every week the vertical team meets, and it’s one lead teacher from every grade level, and that lead teacher is responsible to bring information back to their teams when it is their common planning. Their team leads, they help collaborative plan for, they help with the curriculum core as far as building lessons around the standards. So that’s what the team leads do in that vertical team each week, [they] bring information or student work or structures that they’ve been working on, there’s a lot of lesson planning. (Valerie, p. 12)

Likewise, Kate experienced collaborative structures as an opportunity for team planning. However, teacher teams at Kate’s school were not vertically aligned, such as Valerie’s. Kate’s teams were focused on their particular grade level, and how the grade level could collectively act in order to increase student achievement. Kate shared her perceptions:

Teaming became the most important part, and that was PLC. And teachers looked at the data, it didn't become individual classes, it became the first grade as a whole, what did it look like? What were we doing instructionally? What were the strategies that we were sharing in order to support student achievement? (Kate, p. 11)

As participants launched collaborative structures, all noticed the need to support teachers in acquiring the necessary skill set in order to effectively collaborate. Their teachers had worked
in isolation, with individual preparation periods, and little time to gather as faculty outside of monthly faculty meetings. Formal collaboration structures did not exist. Valerie described the first few PLC sessions in her school as “uncomfortable.” She described the previous culture at her school:

When we first started, we did a lot of professional development with outside providers about collaboration. We knew we had to do it, [teachers] didn’t know how, because teachers didn’t do that. You had your classroom, you shut your door, and you did your thing. (Valerie, p. 3)

In addition to providing training, participants described supports to promote collaboration. Kate illustrated an approach to providing facilitation support to teachers: “We identified team leaders at every grade level. And, also we had a [professional development] coach…the coach is providing professional development to the [team] leaders around facilitation in teaming, and what that means to have a high functioning team” (Kate, p. 8). Other participants supported PLCs to model collaboration and investment in the work of teachers. Similar to the earlier description of Valerie and her gradual release of responsibility to teachers, Ana participated in PLCs to set expectations for curriculum and instruction. However, a subtle difference in intent was Ana’s belief that she could learn from her teachers, while observing the learning of her teachers. She explained,

In the beginning I have to say…I guess I was in a lot of them [PLCs]. I was in a lot of them because I think that you need to set the tone. And that works. First of all, I was building my expertise too, because I’m learning from my teachers, and it’s also a good way to gauge who is engaged, who is not engaged, and also gauge where they are using data as a focus area. But look, my staff needed to hear and see me engage in those
conversations with them. I think they respect you for…you need to be hands-on and I think that PLC is where the learning happens and I needed to be there. (Ana, p. 21)

**Teacher decision-making.** Participants noticed increased teacher decision-making as teachers built their professional knowledge and had opportunities to work together. Initially, given the context of an underperforming school, all participants had control over decision-making. While all participants expressed their commitment to build teacher capacity and create an environment of collective responsibility, there was greater emphasis on principal decision-making until teacher capacity was built. All participants described their need to make and model decision-making when they entered their role. Rita shared her experience:

My first year…I'm going to be very honest with you. It was not that gradual. I was adamant that we were not going to be where they were. I wanted my staff to see that instruction was the key to everything. And I was afraid to kind of release the power to them a little too early because it was just years of going back to doing things the other way. I felt like if I gave them a little room, I was afraid they were going to go back, and to start over again. (Rita, p. 7)

Over time, however, there was a gradual release from principal as sole decision-maker to teachers as decision-makers. The gradual release occurred as principals began to sense teachers were developing their content knowledge, instructional strategies, and raising expectations for their students. Jen articulated her move toward promoting teacher decision-making:

I mean you’ve got good strong people, you’re going to use them, and you develop them, and we share with them what their strengths are, and what you want them to work on, or further develop, and it’s like a baby bird and then you let them fly on their own. (Jen, p. 13)
In a similar manner, Ana described the move toward teacher decision-making from the perspective of honoring their growing expertise. Ana experienced teachers’ confidence growing as they became more involved in decision-making. She explained, “Teachers saw us respecting their expertise and respecting their work and really involving them, that also fuels their confidence. And they know that they need to continue to grow and be current because they’re being counted on as experts” (Ana, p. 20). Kate also spoke of her sense of developing teacher expertise as a signal to increase teacher decision-making. As teachers worked in collaborative structures, they had the opportunity to realize not only their growing collective expertise, but also their individual areas of expertise. Kate illustrated this experience:

They [teachers] would decide who were the experts for teaching fluency, who was the expert in teaching comprehension strategies. Who was really good? And they would divide all the kids up and provide them with intervention in those targeted areas, and they were very strategic with what the kids needed. (Kate, p. 9)

Valerie described when she knew to release instructional decision-making to teachers. She observed teachers productively interacting with one another in alignment with her expectations of what needed to be occurring in the realm of teaching and learning. Valerie stepped back, and as described in a previous section, served in a supportive role. She said,

I think when I knew that the things they were doing were in my brain, and they were taking it on themselves, I knew they were ready to go. I could see that they were interacting with each other and they didn’t really need me to be doing that, so we would take our steps back and give them the time and space to work as adults and educators together. (Valerie, p. 17)

All of the participants experienced specific teacher dialogue occurring in collaborative
structures that led to teacher decision-making. Their experience in listening to teacher dialogue contributed to the participants’ confidence in supporting teacher decision-making. All of the participants noted that teacher dialogue within collaborative structures focused on matters of teaching and learning. As Jen described it,

They’ll talk about the re-grouping [based on data], the reading teachers will be part of that, the ESL teachers will be part of that, the special education teachers will be part of that. They talk through how did the kids do overall? The conversation is also about what needs to be re-taught? Or what kids need a second dose in the classroom to re-teach that one skill that there may be a question that they really bombed on and you’ll need to revisit it? (Jen, p. 19)

Once teacher decision-making became a norm within the school, Kate shared her experience with extending it beyond teaching and learning. Seeking the input of teachers, and asking them to participate in school-related decisions became the norm in Kate’s school. Kate provided an experience of doing business in her school that included vetting new routines and systems with teachers:

So we were asking the teachers, what do you think? What will our plan be? Before we put in [a new] system, before we changed any schedule, everything was brought before the teachers on that Wednesday afternoon, and it was a heavy-duty discussion. (Kate, p. 2)

And Jen summarized the ultimate sentiments of participants as they reflected on their respective turnarounds: “I would argue in any school, not just the turnaround schools…any good leader is going to listen to the people who are doing the work” (Jen, p. 6).

Summary: Collaborative structures. Participants experienced collaborative structures
as opportunities for teachers to increase their professional knowledge through professional
development, to work with one another in formal networks to plan for and assess student
learning, and to engage in decision-making about teaching and learning. Each participant noted
the significance of finding time during the teacher work day to provide collaborative structures.
Moreover, participants perceived that the development of teacher learning—whether through
formal professional development, or by working with each other—took time. In other words, the
content of what occurred in the collaborative structures became richer as time went on.

**Major Theme 3: Learner-Focused**

Participants shared their perceptions of teachers as they worked to identify and address
the unique and individual needs of students. Participants discussed the ways in which teachers
responded to the academic and social-emotional learning needs of students. Moreover,
participants offered their perceptions of how teachers set about reaching all students, particularly
students who were struggling with academic content, or social-emotional competencies. Many
participants discussed the ways teachers felt collectively responsible for all students in the
building. And participants shared their experiences as teachers supported students in being
responsible for their learning. Table 3 provides a brief context of the participants’ experiences in
each area.
Table 3

Perceptions and Experiences Related to a Learner-Focused Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic and Social-Emotional Learning</th>
<th>Reaching all Students</th>
<th>Student Ownership of Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have academic learning, and then you have social and emotional, they’re equally important. (Valerie, p. 7)</td>
<td>They were willing to do everything and anything for the kids. (Rita, p. 4)</td>
<td>I think that kids, they put in the effort but they also saw the results of their work, so that they felt good about themselves. (Kate, p. 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and emotional learning...We always addressed...it became another content area. (Jen, p. 12)</td>
<td>Our goal was to get as many data points so we could look at the whole child. (Jen, p. 11)</td>
<td>[There’s] a general shift for being less teacher focused to being more learner focused and having the ownership for the learning be on the student. (Valerie, p. 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We knew that we needed to address our kids’ social and emotional needs, as well as their academic needs. So we just kind of decided that we were going to take on both. (Ana, p. 8)</td>
<td>Socially, emotionally, the kids feel safe, they feel like they can get help here, not just academically but with life. (Valerie, p. 8)</td>
<td>We taught kids how to look at their data, set goals with them...all of that empowered them and motivated them to want more and to be where they wanted to be. (Ana, p. 26)</td>
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**Academic and social-emotional learning.** Because the participants’ schools were all significantly underperforming in terms of student academic achievement, academic learning was the priority. Although while teachers were building their capacity to deliver effective instruction, four participants described a dual approach to also address the social-emotional learning needs of students. Jen explained,

And we were all in agreement that the social-emotional piece had to be addressed, because if you don’t, you could be the best teacher with the best instruction, with the best materials, but if that child is socially and emotionally out of whack…you know they’re struggling, they’re preoccupied, they’ve gone through trauma, they’re not accessing that…their brain is somewhere else. (Jen, p. 5)
Kate also echoed the interplay between academic learning and social and emotional learning as she described her experience: “The whole premise was that the academic achievement was as important as the social-emotional well-being of the kids in the building. So they were equally important in order for kids to excel” (Kate, p. 20). And, although contrary to advice of outside observers to solely focus on academic learning—since that is how schools were measured by the state—Ana felt one could not happen without the other: “We just decided that we were going to take on both. Although everybody kept saying…‘ah you have got to do one,’ but really, you can’t do one without the other. I think that the social-emotional needs need to create the conditions for the learning for the kids” (Ana, p. 8).

Participants explained that the support for teachers to create the conditions for learning by addressing students’ social and emotional learning came in a variety of formats. Valerie described a targeted approach to address the social-emotional needs of students through additional services in her school. She explained,

A lot of the things that might be a detriment to school about health and social emotional are happening here. We have four people that work [here]; they can come take their kids out of the classrooms and bring them back and any emotionality, any trauma, anything that might have happened outside, behavioral…it all gets address through either my social worker or my [student support] center. (Valerie, p. 8)

In contrast to using specific services as described by Valerie, a different approach was offered by Kate and Ana. These two participants launched a whole-school social and emotional learning curriculum and instruction designed to enhance students’ skills. Therefore, teachers were directly involved in implementing a curriculum that built social-emotional competencies. This direct involvement by teachers increased their repertoire of strategies to effectively support the social-
emotional learning needs of all students. As Kate described it,

Everybody knew that it was really the social-emotional well-being of the kids that was really at risk, and the teachers at this point...they needed to have the tools. The social emotional well-being of students was at the forefront of everything we did. (Kate, p. 5–6)

In addition to a whole-school approach through a research-based curriculum, Ana also described the use of additional personnel to support the needs of students, and emphasized a system of support: “We brought in a parent outreach person as well as a student support [person], but we’ve created this system of support for our kids” (Ana, p. 8).

As described above, four of the participants’ schools created the expectation for social and emotional learning, and some schools approached it from a curriculum perspective, while others took a more targeted approach. Regardless of the approach, principals understood teachers as the primary facilitators of social-emotional learning. Kate illustrated the role of teachers in her experience:

We hired a full-time psychologist just for the school because of the support needed for the social-emotional well-being of students, but also we needed the psychologist also to really support the teachers in how were teachers able to work with kids to help them make, to become respectful and responsible and ready to learn in school. (Kate, p. 4)

Ana made sense of the roles of teachers within the realm of social and emotional learning by sharing her perceptions. She said,

Working in an urban environment with the needs that our kids have and the supports that are needed from families or lack thereof, you need to be the mother and the father and the teacher and the social worker…so you need to go above and beyond. (Ana, p. 7)

In addition to creating systems for social and emotional learning, all five participants
described unifying academic learning initiatives that focused on increasing student learning. Participants noted that the initiatives created opportunities for teachers to become more focused, coordinated, and ultimately effective in delivering academic content. Rita, whose school focused on math instruction during the period of school turnaround, shared her perceptions of developing teacher practices: “They saw kids get better [in math], and they saw their [student] scores increasing, so they couldn't deny that it was the instruction that made the difference” (Rita, p. 5). Other participants focused on reading comprehension as a unifying content area since reading for meaning is applicable in all grade levels, with all students: “Everybody has to know how to teach reading at the elementary level and I would argue at every level. We focused in on reading comprehension and we did professional development in the six comprehension strategies, it was our own professional development” (Jen, p. 5–6). Kate reiterated the need to have a school-wide focus that impacted each grade level: “There was a school-wide academic focus, you had to have a school-wide academic focus, and so ours was around comprehension, which went across every content area” (Kate, p. 18). Whereas student performance for all the schools in the study was extremely low, participants used the data to determine the need for a unifying approach. Ana explained her perspective of letting the data determine areas of focus: “The data taught us that we needed to focus on early literacy and early numeracy, so that’s where we focused” (Ana, p. 10).

**Reaching all students.** “We still have to approach them, we still have to differentiate, we still have to kind of figure it out and provide what each and every student needs” (Jen, p. 16): This comment by Jen captured participants’ sense of teachers meeting the individual needs of students. Jen’s school, similar all the participants’ schools, experienced a successful turnaround, and her comments underscored the need to sustain teachers’ work in reaching all students.
Participants described teacher dialogue that focused on the needs of all students, particularly students who were struggling, although all participants noted that building teacher capacity to engage in those discussions took time. Rita shared her experiences with teachers beginning to understand the needs of all of their students. She said,

They didn't know what kids knew, my teachers did not know what their kids knew. After the lesson I'd say, “So how many of your kids got that?” That's our problem, right there. So that's where we started, making sure they knew what their kids knew. (Rita, p. 5)

Jen also shared her experiences with teacher dialogue. “The conversation is about, what needs to be re-taught? Or what kids need a second dose in the classroom to re-teach that one skill that they really bombed on and you’ll need to revisit it?” (Jen, p. 19). Participants perceived that the focus of teachers in terms of reaching all students was in the spirit of moving students along in their learning. In other words, reaching all students wasn’t about remediation, it was about continual improvement. Valerie shared her experience in this regard: “We sit and talk it out and come to what’s best for the kids. It’s all about the students, it’s all about instruction, it’s all about learning, it’s all about building [students’] abilities to go to the next level of what they can do” (Valerie, p. 18).

Four participants acknowledged that as teachers took on an expectation of reaching all students, they began to provide various opportunities for additional learning. These additional learning opportunities would take place within the classroom with classroom teachers, or specialists, or after school. This approach was shared in a context of “whatever it takes” in order to reach all students. The decisions for additional learning opportunities were often embedded in the routines of the participants’ schools. As described by Valerie, “We do a lot of formative assessing, so that’s kind of built into our routines, our lessons, and kids will either get pulled, the
lower academic kids will get pulled immediately, or it will be approved for the next day.”

(Valerie, p. 8). Valerie further described the actions her teachers took to ensure students received additional support. She said,

Math teachers, reading teachers, special education teachers, English language learner teachers and all of that group of people in the building provide Tier 2 support [additional learning opportunities]. You’ll see them in the classroom, or walk around and you’ll see them in the hallways, outside the room. (Valerie, p. 14)

In a similar manner, Kate described the strategic actions of teachers as they determined additional learning opportunities for students. Teachers in Kate’s school collectively determined which students needed additional learning opportunities. Then the teachers decided who among them would offer specialized sessions to students, specifically targeted toward their leaning need. Kate described the additional learning opportunities from the students’ perspectives. She said,

I think another thing is that kids knew that not everybody was working on the same level. I might see the teacher five days a week. You're going to see the teacher three days a week, but at the same time, they’re all rotating [among teachers]. The schedule was up and told them who was going where. And it would show...when the teacher would see the strategic intervention kids [those needing additional learning support] daily. But you would only be with the teacher for 15 minutes, for direct instruction. And then you'd go off and put to practice whatever she taught. (Kate, p. 17–18)

Ana echoed the participants’ perceptions of teachers as they adopted a “whatever it takes” philosophy to reaching all students. She shared her perspective on actions teachers took to ensure all students were learning:

We just created a system where kids’ failing, it was not an option…failing wasn’t an
option. So they didn’t get it, okay, so what are we going to do differently? They [teachers] were there before school, they were there after school, they were there in the summers, we had MCAS academies during vacations. They were there and they stopped at nothing to support kids. (Ana, p. 25)

**Student ownership of learning.** All five participants described a shift from teacher-directed learning to a greater emphasis on student ownership of learning. Upon entering her school as the new principal, Ana described her observations of the learning environment: “It was a very controlled environment…neat little rows…everybody thought silence was a sign of a well-managed school. I always found it odd that we didn’t really encourage kids to talk because we wanted to control them” (Ana, p. 1). She also described instruction in the early days of her tenure:

> [Teachers] wanted to be able to go in a classroom and just look at a teacher’s edition and follow that, and give kids a story or the math problem, whatever, and say okay, this is it. It was more about assigning as opposed to actively teaching and engaging kids. (Ana, p. 3)

As time progressed during the three-year school turnaround, participants began to observe a shift from teacher-directed to more teacher-facilitated learning, where students became more involved in the direction of their learning. This shift required teachers to plan instruction differently, so that high levels of student engagement were possible. Participants experienced teachers moving from a more traditional approach of delivering content to one of engaging students with the content. Valerie described her experiences with teachers as they began a their shift in practice. She explained,

> [There was] a general shift for being less teacher focused to being more learner focused,
and having the ownership for the learning be on the student, so crafting lessons for that, as opposed to standing at the board saying let me do a lesson okay, now you try it.

(Valerie, p. 10)

As teachers shifted their practice as described by Valerie, Kate observed students taking on greater responsibility for their learning by actively seeking help from their teachers. She shared her observations:

The math interventionist would have kids with her at lunch, and only because they wanted to go. Because at that point in time, it was, “I need to know this, Mrs. ——. So help me.” And kids were looking for any support in learning, or just reviewing what was being taught in the classroom. (Kate, p. 12-13)

The relationship between teacher and student, as students became accountable for their learning, was highlighted in Ana’s account. She shared her perceptions of the emerging reciprocal relationship between teachers and students, as both grew accountable for their respective roles in teaching and learning:

Our kids knew that their teachers believed in them and I really feel that teachers built these relationships with kids, so kids worked hard not to disappoint their teachers at the beginning. So it was twofold. They worked so hard to support their teachers and teachers worked so hard to support them that it was a win-win. (Ana, p. 25)

Two participants also discussed the impact of students setting goals for their learning. Kate described a community of goal-setting that was aligned by grade level, classroom, and student contribution to the goal. Teachers set a ten-week academic goal as a grade-level team, and individual teachers shared that goal in their classrooms. In turn, students had goals that contributed to the classroom goal. Kate described goal-setting in the following way:
Whatever the team goal was, and most goals stayed for 10 weeks…they'd have a class goal. And [students] knew what the goal was, they would be posted in their classrooms about what they were working on. The school was very goal-oriented in the sense that there's a reason that you're in school…and you're here to learn. (Kate, p. 13)

The concept of goal-setting was also shared by Ana as she discussed her experiences: “We taught kids how to look at their data, set goals with them…all of that empowered them and motivated them to want more and to be where they wanted to be” (Ana, p. 26).

**Summary: Learner-focused.** Participants offered their perceptions and experiences as their teachers fostered a more student-focused learning environment. The shift from teacher-directed instruction to student engagement in learning occurred in the presence of strengthening curriculum and instruction, with a focus on reaching all students. Specifically, through their collective efforts, teachers attended to the academic and social-emotional learning needs of their students, while helping students develop habits of mind to support their ownership of learning.

**Major Theme 4: Joint Problem-Solving**

During the three-year school turnaround period, participants experienced teachers engaging in collective efforts to identify solutions for complex school improvement work. Joint problem-solving was observed through collaborative inquiry, timely adjustments to practice, and collective ownership of school turnaround efforts. Participants offered detailed descriptions of dialogue where key questions were asked in support of collaborative inquiry. Moreover, the collaborative inquiry often led to adjustments to practice. And participants described a context of joint problem-solving in an environment of external pressure to reverse the schools’ underperformance. Table 4 provides a sample of participants’ observations in each area.
Table 4

Perceptions and Experiences Related to Joint Problem-Solving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Inquiry</th>
<th>Timely Adjustments to Practice</th>
<th>Ownership of Turnaround</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They’re the ones on the front lines doing the work, so it’s integral that you have their input and feedback on what’s working. And, what’s not working? (Jen, p. 6)</td>
<td>Once you become a professional learning community it’s safe to come to the table and say what if we tried this? (Ana, p. 15)</td>
<td>So, we can either work as a team to figure this out, or that’s the decision that will be made [district intervention]. That’s when I saw them move. (Rita, p. 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We spend a lot of time looking at data, based on student work. (Valerie, p. 22)</td>
<td>Nothing can stay standard; everything has to be flexible, fluid, and you have to be able to go and take a step back and say what’s best for these kids? (Valerie, p. 19)</td>
<td>Some people really did not share the vision of what we had put into place, that we had collectively decided upon. And they left. (Kate, p. 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of teachers do we need to fill the school with to move our kids? (Ana, p. 6)</td>
<td>We didn’t wait and say “oh, next year we’re going to do it this way.” No, we’re going to change it right now because it’s not working. (Kate, p. 6)</td>
<td>One way or another, the school is going to turnaround, you just need to decide whether we’re going to take charge of our fate or hand it over. (Ana, p. 14)</td>
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**Collaborative inquiry.** Participants described an environment of collaborative inquiry where teachers considered key questions in order to engage in joint problem-solving. All of the participants described launching the turnaround work with teachers through a set of questions that would serve to establish new practices.

As described in previous sections, four participants had summer retreats. Those retreats were an opportunity to formulate and respond to a key set of questions as schools began their improvement agendas. Jen described her first summer retreat with the faculty. She explained,

We had a retreat that first summer where it was all about let’s talk about [our school].

We brainstormed in small groups about…who is our student? What does our school offer that student? And, what doesn’t it offer? We did a carousel of charts where I think
community was one, curriculum and instruction was one, there was a third one…But it was all about getting the teacher’s voice in it, because any work that’s done…I would argue in any school, not just the turnaround schools…any good leader is going to listen to the people who are doing the work. (Jen, p. 6)

Ana, who also held a retreat with her faculty as she entered the role, echoed this process. She asked her teachers to put themselves in the “shoes of our families and kids” (Ana, p. 2). In order to put supports into place for students, she posed the following to her teachers:

Put yourself in their shoes. So if I were an English language learner, or if I were a poor person, or child coming from a broken home or single-family home that struggled, what would I need to do? What would I need from you? What makes it difficult to be at school for students, for teachers? What kind of teachers do we need to fill the school with to move our kids? (Ana, p. 2)

After Ana’s teachers determined what would be necessary for students and teachers, they collectively developed a list of teacher attributes necessary to develop and contribute to those supports. Ana described the event:

We created this attribute list and you know everybody got involved, so we created a huge list, and then I asked them to look at the list. I said take it home, reflect on what your strengths are from that list, and what areas you need to work on, and we drew the line in the sand then. So this is what we need to have at [our school]. You need to figure if you’re going to be one of these people. (Ana, p. 6)

Rita described her first meeting with staff, which she hoped would launch collaborative inquiry. She wanted to hear from teachers what they thought their school and students needed in order to improve learning for all students. She explained, “Our first meeting was, tell me what
you think is wrong, what can we do to fix it, what's going on?” (Rita, p. 3) Rita felt initial
disappointment when her teachers first pointed to student attributes for the school’s performance.
However, their articulated beliefs gave her clear direction in terms of developing a correlation
between improved instruction leading to improved results.

In addition to posing questions that set a new course for their schools, participants
experienced teacher collaborative inquiry in response to areas specific to curriculum and
instruction. Jen provided one example of a processes where collaborative inquiry occurred in her
school. She illustrated her perception:

We want them to be unique in their own classrooms, and there is a piece of staying
together and talking through challenges and how are you teaching. What resources are
you using? What strategies are you using? And the special education staff is there as
well, along with ELL teachers and reading teachers. So it’s everybody together
communicating to talk through the curriculum. (Jen, p. 9)

In addition to collaborative inquiry as a tool to explore school directions, along with teaching and
learning, Kate highlighted a formal process of inquiry using survey data. The purpose of the
survey was to collect data and then engage in collaborative inquiry within a data set. A survey
was administered to staff and upper-elementary students three times per year. Each time the
results were discussed with faculty. Kate said, “We did the surveys three times [per year] and
presented all of the data. And, we would pick different data points and say ‘what does this look
like across the school?’” (Kate, p. 6).

Surveys were also used in Jen’s school as a way to collect feedback and prompt
collective inquiry among teachers. She said,

We did surveys, surveys of our parents, surveys of our kids, surveys of our teachers and I
feel like that’s the culture here; that they know that if something isn’t working, or they’re really struggling with it, that it is okay to say…I don’t like this; it isn’t working; can we talk about this? (Jen, p. 15)

Jen offered a specific example of an instructional strategy that had been implemented in the school. Teachers came forward and asked, “Can we talk about this because it’s not working?” Jen offered her perspective: “And we talked it through and came up with an alternative solution…their points were valid. What they were saying was accurate, and it required us to re-think it and that’s really what true school improvement is all about, right?” (Jen, p. 15).

Importantly, participants honored the input of teachers throughout the process of collaborative inquiry. Ana framed collaborative inquiry in an emerging culture of problem-solving and welcomed input at all levels. Her comments captured her experience working with her department heads, who were working directly with teachers, as a climate of trust was emerging in the school. Ana shared her perspective:

If a [department head] is saying, “I think this is going to work; I want to try this” we can problem-solve together. Let’s figure out why you think this is the way to go, and what you’re seeing that’s not working. I think it’s about creating a culture. Once you become a professional learning community it’s safe to come to the table and say what if we tried this? (Ana, p. 15)

Timely adjustments to practice. Collaborative inquiry was an important precondition for the sub-theme of timely adjustments to practice. It was often through collaborative inquiry that adjustments to practice were made. Participants described teachers adjusting their practice in order to meet the needs of students. Ana summarized the sense of participants: “It wasn’t about our kids adjusting, it was about us making the adjustments” (Ana, p. 3). An important nuance to
this section, however, is the emphasis on timely. Given the urgency surrounding the schools’ underperformance, participants shared their experiences in the context of quick action. Kate described it well with her comment, “We didn't wait and say, ‘Oh, next year we're going to do it this way.’ No, we're going to change it right now because it's not working” (Kate, p. 6).

As teachers worked in formal collaborative structures, such as PLCs and common planning time, processes became evident to support timely adjustments to practice. Jen described her experience with teachers as they instituted a cycle of adjustments:

We try a strategy, we identify, we analyze the data, you identify what the problem is, you look at what’s the root cause, you come up with strategies that will address that root cause, you try those out, monitor it, and if it isn’t working, you reflect on it, if it isn’t working? Let’s tweak it; let’s try something else. Let’s monitor it again. It’s that cycle, this school really does use that cycle. (Jen, p. 15)

Kate also described opportunities to adjust through a public and transparent process with teachers. She explained opportunities for timely adjustments after a collective decision was made regarding school routines or school improvement initiatives. She said,

Everything that anyone was asked to do, it was written. And disseminated to everyone in the building. It was discussed. It was vetted. And then it was, it became what we were going to do. And then we would discuss it again, and if we felt as though something needed to be changed on it, we would change it again. (Kate, p. 7)

The reiterative cycle perceived by Kate and Jen enabled adjustments to occur as needed. Valerie also perceived timely adjustments to practice, and added flexibility and reflection to her sense of teachers’ practice. She explained,

You go with what’s based on fact and analysis to the building at the time. Nothing can
stay standard; everything has to be flexible, fluid and you have to be able to go and take a step back and say what’s best for these kids? (Valerie, p. 19)

Timely adjustments to practice were occurring with whole-school initiatives and activities, as well as areas specific to classroom practice. As teachers became adept at adjusting their practice in an environment where their collective input was sought after and valued, all five participants were monitoring their school improvement plans to determine if adjustments were needed in planning and implementation. All of the participants noted the significance of their school improvement plans in terms of serving as a blueprint for change. Participants attended to their plans to ensure they were representative of the flexible needs of the school. As Kate explained, “The School Improvement Plan was monitored weekly by the instructional leadership team. The admin team [also] met every week to make sure that if something were not working in the plan, we were going to change it” (Kate, p. 4).

Participants were clear about using data to guide decisions regarding adjustments to practice. Prior to the designations of underperformance, there did not appear to be a system in place in any of the participants’ schools that used data to adjust practice. More importantly, decision-making systems did not exist to make adjustments within the current school year. Participants created a system in order to support teacher teams to review data in order to take decisive action. As Jen explained,

We have a data team…they’re responsible for the School Improvement Plan and analyzing data. And those teams have consistently consisted of representation from the different grade levels, [and other departments]. They would do work individually as small groups and then would come back to the whole group to report out, and then come up with what the actions that we’re going to take. (Jen, p. 11).
Ana’s comment illustrated the perceptions of participants. She summarized teachers’ engagement with data: “We just let our data guide our work and it went from there. We kept using that data to make our adjustments” (Ana, p. 10).

Ownership of turnaround. Participants described that over time, teachers became invested in their school’s turnaround. Initially, participants needed to point out to teachers that the turnaround opportunity was in the hands of faculty, and the collective work of the teachers mattered. Valerie described a meeting where she was explicit with her teachers, shortly after she arrived as principal. She explained,

I had an after-school meeting with the staff that was here, and told them there would no longer be status quo, we would be analyzing data, we would be looking at student work, we’ll be calling in parents, it’s going to take a lot of work, and a lot of time, and a lot of effort to get this out of Level 4. (Valerie, p. 1)

Ana had a similar conversation with her teachers to set the stage for the work ahead. She explained,

It [state designation of underperformance] was validation that it wasn’t working and we needed to do something about it. What I said to the staff was…well, we have two choices: we’re a Level 4 so we can choose to turn ourselves around by adapting and changing what needs to be changed, making the changes according to what we think our kids need, or we can continue the same way and have people make those decisions for us, right? And they’ll come in and they’ll make the decision and prescribe something. One way or another, the school is going to turnaround, you just need to decide whether we’re going to take charge of our fate or hand it over. (Ana, p. 14)

As Ana and Valerie expressed optimism in the faculty’s ability to positively impact
school turnaround based on collective efforts, Valerie also expressed her desire to have a culture reflective of collective ownership for results. She also acknowledged that systems, structures, and services needed to be put into place for students in order to make the faculty’s efforts productive. She explained,

We wanted a shared culture for turnaround. We wanted teachers to be held accountable. We wanted them to know that we expected them to work…but we knew we needed to address things with the students, and we needed to know that the things that needed to be addressed with them in order for them to come into learn had to be taken care of first.

(Valerie, p. 7)

Jen incorporated messaging to students as part of the ownership for turnaround. She offered her perceptions in speaking with teachers and students about the school’s ability to turnaround. She explained,

My message is always and consistently will be…it’s about those kids. So just keep doing what you’re doing, keep refining, go into the next level, pushing them a little further, and even the students…I remember when I first came here we did an assembly…my first assembly, I told the kids…do you know that it’s out there in the real world they say this is a failing school? They need to know that the people out there are saying [the school] is failing. Are you a failure? You’re not a failure…none of us are a failure. We just need to rethink how we’re learning. (Jen, p. 21)

Jen also offered her perception of the turnaround process, “I got a sense that it really bonded us as a team like from the start, we were like there’s no reason this school and these kids can’t learn” (Jen, p. 20).

Kate approached her conversations with teachers from a position of transparency and
honesty about the work ahead. She shared her approach with teachers:

We also decided that everyone had to be honest and say what they thought...because nothing was going to change unless we all were honest and above board with everything that we said. And I said that point blank to them, you know...that we were all in this together. And I think they pretty much agreed at that point. I think they really wanted a change to happen in the school. (Kate, p. 4)

It is important to note that Rita’s interview did not generate a sense of joint ownership of turnaround. Ana, Valerie, Jen, and Kate had explicitly communicated with teachers about the collective work ahead in order to reverse the trend of underperformance. These four participants, in their own ways, expressed the concept that effort creates ability. At the time of the interview, Rita’s school had just experienced their exit from the fifth percentile of all schools, and was ranked in the 31st percentile. Rita’s sense of her school, as described in earlier sections, was that she was leading much of the work, and there was not yet evidence of collective ownership of the turnaround.

**Summary: Joint problem-solving.** Collaborative inquiry, timely adjustments to practice, and ownership of turnaround contributed to the joint problem-solving among teachers. Participants experienced teachers engaging in key questions that guided collaborative inquiry in order to solve complex problems. The complex problems ranged from whole-school initiatives and routines to student-specific needs in classrooms. In order to respond to student needs in a fluid and flexible manner, participants perceived teachers adjusting their practice with a sense of urgency. And participants explained their efforts in setting the stage for teachers to take collective ownership of school turnaround.
Chapter 5: Findings, Discussion, Limitations, and Implications

This study employed a qualitative research design in order to explore the lived experiences of principals, as they perceived collective teacher efficacy. The study was guided by the central research question: *How do principals make sense of and explain teacher collective efficacy in a turnaround school?* Five female principals from low-income, diverse, urban elementary schools participated in this study. An IPA provided the methodology to understand the complexity of teacher professional practice as experienced by the principals. According to Smith and Osborn (2008), “IPA is especially useful when one is concerned with complexity, process, or novelty” (p. 55). Moreover, the selection of five participants was consistent with IPA methodology expectations: “fewer participants examined at a greater depth is always preferable to a broader, shallow and simply descriptive analysis of many” (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p. 756).

The data collected were through semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The semi-structured interview questions drew from existing questionnaires of collective teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, and principal leadership. Data analysis included a two-stage, single-case analytic approach, and a detailed cross-case analysis, providing the opportunity to reveal major themes and subthemes (Shinebourne, 2011). Four major themes were realized from the data: culture of learning, collaborative structures, learner-focused, and joint problem-solving, each with corresponding sub-themes. These findings complement existing literature on collective teacher efficacy because it is one of the first to provide narrative accounts from principals of turnaround schools. Research to date has primarily focused on the outcome of teacher collective efficacy, with few studies detailing specifically how educators experienced teacher collective efficacy, particularly in a school turnaround context. Furthermore, while there is existing
research on collective teacher efficacy, as well as teacher collaboration, there is little evidence of how these two seemingly interrelated constructs support the transformation of professional practice within turnaround schools.

For purposes of this study, collective teacher efficacy was defined as the belief among teachers that their collective efforts will have a positive impact on student achievement. The findings are presented in the following sections: first in connection to the theoretical framework, and then each theme separately, generating links to the corresponding literature. This presentation is consistent with IPA methodology described by Smith and Osborn (2008, p. 76).

**Discussion of Findings Related to Theoretical Framework**

Teacher collective efficacy is defined as a group-level attribute, the product of the interactive dynamics of group members. The theoretical framework for this study positioned teacher collective efficacy within sources of joint problem-solving and collaboration. Bandura (1997) suggested that collective teacher efficacy could be strengthened through faculty collaboration as teachers developed their beliefs and social systems. Moreover, Ross et al. (2004) suggested that teacher collaboration, which occurs in a social system, influenced collective teacher efficacy. Their definition of collective teacher efficacy highlights instructional teaming: “collective teacher efficacy refers to teacher perceptions that they constitute an effective instructional team, capable of bringing about learning in students” (Ross et al., 2004, p. 163).

As stated by Goddard et al. (2015), “Principals’ instructional leadership may support the degree to which teachers work together to improve instruction, and together leadership and teacher collaboration may contribute to school effectiveness by strengthening collective efficacy beliefs” (p. 501). Specifically, teacher collaboration networks have been shown to contribute to building collective capacity when teachers focused on building knowledge, exchanging
Participants in this study each established structures for teacher collaboration and confirmed the contributions to collective instructional capacity. The collaborative structures launched by participants included opportunities for ongoing, sustained professional development that occurred throughout the school year, as well as time for PLCs and common planning time. Participants perceived that through collaborative structures, teachers focused on building their professional knowledge and expertise. Kate explained the significance of the structures for teacher collaboration and their connection to increasing instructional capacity: “Teaming became the most important part, and that was PLC. And, teachers looked at the data, what did it look like? What were we doing instructionally? What were the strategies that we’re sharing in order to support student achievement?” (Kate, 2017, p. 11). Ana shared her experiences of collaborative structures and their influence on building collective capacity within the school: “As we grew and built capacity, we involved the staff and we started doing some differentiated professional development. What we tried to do was try to create experts in different areas so that we could have this internal system” (Ana, 2017, p. 19).

Participants confirmed the significance of social systems within teacher collective efficacy. Social systems (i.e., collaborative structures/networks) provide the opportunity for teachers to exercise various forms of capital. Decisional capital is a term offered by Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) to define opportunities for teachers to make complex judgments about students. Participants noticed increased teacher decision-making as teachers built their professional knowledge and had opportunities to work together. As Kate illustrated, “Teachers would decide who were the experts for teaching [various content]. And they would divide all the
kids up and provide them with intervention in those targeted areas, and they were very strategic with what the kids needed” (Kate, 2017, p. 9). Social capital, which is defined as resources available to teachers by virtue of their membership in a social system or network, can impact student achievement, particularly when there is a high degree of trust among members (Leana, 2011). Principals discussed how common planning time—a social system—resulted in teachers relying on one another for professional knowledge and expertise. Ana’s experience highlights social capital within common planning time: “They talked about planning…they looked at data and created groupings and what they were going to do, creating these cycles for…to work with kids. They talked about instruction, what they needed to do, in grade level teams” (Ana, 2017, p. 20).

Human capital is defined by a number of researchers as teachers’ abilities, skills and knowledge, built through informal and formal experiences (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Pil & Leana, 2009; Daly et al., 2014). Participants experienced teachers increasing their capacity through various opportunities within their schools. Teachers participated in formal and informal professional development opportunities, engaged in coaching cycles with teacher leaders, conducted peer visits to each other’s classrooms, visited other schools, and participated in faculty-wide book studies with professional texts. As Ana explained, “Teachers came to a point where they were asking us to go on monthly learning walks so that they could learn from one another” (Ana, 2017, p. 14). Human capital also determined how professional development was structured and offered. As described by Valerie in reference to teacher leaders in the building,

It evolved…these are the structures that you work with, and these are the things you focus on, and it almost came to be organically from what was needed from the teachers, what our supports were from the district, what we can do in-house. (Valerie, 2017, p. 2)
Similarly, intellectual capital (a combination of social and human capital), and the “joint work” of teachers within the social system, impacts instructional practices leading to increased student achievement (Daly et al., 2011; Leana, 2011; Leana & Pil, 2006). Participants shared a number of examples of teacher dialogue in PLCs, or common planning time, where the joint work of teachers impacted instructional practice. The conversations among teachers in this regard were often grounded in new instructional practices. Many of the participants indicated that new practices were formed in response to new curriculum or instructional programs brought into the school. As an example, Jen shared a time when teachers were implementing a new reading program. She said,

> You bring in this new resource, it’s huge, it’s very rigorous, there’s a lot to it, a lot of components to it, you’ve got to let them play with it first, but now we need to refine it; and allow teachers the opportunity to go back to lesson planning based on the standard. (Jen, 2018, p. 18)

As discussed above, the theoretical framework for this study included sources of capital. When teachers have opportunities to develop strong social, human, and decisional capital, yielding overall professional capital as described by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), refinement of instructional practices occurs, and collective instructional capacity is built among teachers. In turn, the collective instructional capacity contributes to collective teacher efficacy, leading to increases in student learning and performance. In summary, three findings were identified as a result of this research study.

1. Principals established collaborative structures that enabled teachers to build their collective instructional capacity.

2. Collaborative structures created a social system that provided teachers the opportunity to
exercise various forms of capital to include social, human, intellectual, and decisional capital.

3. Teachers exercised various forms of capital and built their collective capacity to improve student learning outcomes.

**Discussion of Findings Related to Relevant Literature**

**Sources of collective teacher efficacy.** Bandura (1993, 1997) was a seminal researcher of collective teacher efficacy. As he did in his work within teacher self-efficacy, he identified four sources of efficacy. However, a notable difference was that teacher collective efficacy was a group level attribute. Therefore, the four sources of teacher efficacy occurred at a collective level, based upon the interactive dynamics of group members. The four sources of efficacy include mastery experience, vicarious learning experiences, social persuasion, and affective states. School faculty can experience these sources of collective teacher efficacy as they engage in opportunities through social persuasion, participating in a vicarious learning experience that results in mastery experience. More specifically, a school principal may convince a faculty of their collective capabilities, providing social persuasion. The faculty participates in a vicarious learning experience by replicating a research-based instructional practice that is successful with their students, resulting in a mastery experience, thereby reinforcing collective teacher efficacy (Goddard, 2001; Goddard et al., 2004; Ross et al., 2004). Participants provided detailed examples of this process, including teachers observing one another in their classrooms. Jen shared her perception: “There’s great power in watching someone who already is doing it, and sometimes just watching answers the questions that you have in your head” (Jen, 2018, p. 15).

Mastery experience was considered within the literature as the strongest influencer of collective teacher efficacy (Goddard, 2001; Strahan, 2003; Mawhinney et al., 2005). In other
words, success breeds success. When teachers viewed their collective actions as successful, momentum was built, raising the faculty’s belief in their collective actions. Mastery experience was evident in the participants’ schools. With each year’s state assessment results, teachers saw the improvement of their collective efforts. Thus the expectation of successful teaching was established, resulting in continued effort.

**Collective action.** Collective teacher efficacy influences the type of futures teachers seek through collective action. Specifically, collective teacher efficacy influences how well teachers use resources, how much effort they put into their endeavor, their staying power when collective efforts failed to produce quick results or when faced with opposition, and their vulnerability to discouragement (Bandura, 2000, p. 76). Participants reflected on the influence of collective teacher efficacy in two ways. First, participants described the effort of teachers. As Valerie explained, “It’s persistence. It’s just working daily” (Valerie, 2017, p. 19). Kate also spoke to the effort of her faculty: “One of the things I learned, it was about the effort that everyone put forth that really made the change” (Kate, 2017, p. 7).

Second, participants described the staying power of teachers once the turnaround began. When Valerie’s school began their turnaround, all but three teachers left; however, the staff that began the turnaround have remained stable over the past five years. In fact, all of the participants’ faculties remained intact through the three-year turnaround period. This effort and staying power contributed to how well teachers used resources—specifically professional development. As Valerie explained,

> And no one has left. So all the professional development that was done, all the hard work in the summers, the teaming, anything that’s happened here, it’s the same people, so you don’t need to replace in September and start over again. We end in June and we start on
Day One and it’s like we never left. (Valerie, 2017, p. 5)

**Task and competence.** Collective teacher efficacy beliefs are social perceptions based on an assessment of the capability of the school as a whole (Goddard, 2001; Goddard & Goddard, 2001). When teachers believe in their collective capability, they establish expectations for successful teaching. However, task and competence can influence teachers’ beliefs in their collective capacity (Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard, 2001; McCoach & Colbert, 2010).

Competence, referring to skill in content and pedagogy, is a factor that influences collective capacity. And the cognitive demand of the academic task is an interrelated factor. In other words, teachers can feel more or less efficacious depending on the cognitive demand of the academic task required of their students and their view of the collective competence in the subject matter.

The participants of this study created structures for teachers to build their competence through professional development opportunities. Professional development included job-embedded coaching, common planning time where teachers shared best practices, and PLCs. As a result, teachers built their collective capacity content and pedagogy. Ana shared her experience: “As we grew and built capacity…what we tried to do was create experts in different areas so that we could have this internal system” (Ana, 2017, p. 20). Teachers began to see one another as experts in particular areas, thereby increasing their view of their collective capacity. This confirms research indicating that when teachers perceive high collective capability of their peers and an expectation of successful teaching is established, effort is put forth to increase student learning.

**Organizational goals.** Once collective teacher efficacy is established, it becomes part of the culture and does not change easily (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Therefore, the staff turnover that initially occurred in the schools enabled the school culture to reset. Three of the five schools in the research study had significant turnover as the principals entered their new
roles. Studies demonstrated that collective teacher efficacy is a significant factor in attainment of school goals, as norms are established for student learning (Goddard et al., 2004; Strahan, 2003; Goddard & Skrla, 2006). As participants began their new assignments, they were able to engage faculty, and re-imagine goals for their schools. Moreover, they established new norms for student learning. As Valerie stated, “Teachers knew that we were not settling…this building [was] turning around…to an educational setting” (Valerie, 2017, p. 9). Teachers in Ana’s school created a collective vision. Ana explained, “We created that vision together, so that we held one another accountable for it, but [teachers] knew that in order for us to shift that culture of the building, it needed to be about teaching and learning” (Ana, 2017, p. 25).

**Collaborative cultures.** Studies suggested collaborative cultures enabled teachers to coordinate their efforts to improve instruction. Moreover, teacher collaboration contributes to group attainment (Bandura, 2000; Goddard et al., 2015; Mawhinney et al., 2005; Minckler, 2014; Ross et al., 2003; Strahan, 2003). Participants provided many examples of teacher collaboration. However, participants first needed to create the collaborative structures by finding time within the school day. Some participants were able to expand their school day with support of the teachers’ union and district, while others restructured the master schedule in order to find time for teachers to meet. In order for teachers to work together to improve their instruction, the participants created collaborative structures for common planning time and PLCs. Rita described her teachers’ common planning time: “We talked about curriculum, we talked about lessons, how to make [instruction] more rigorous” (Rita, 2018, p. 6). Teachers who characterize their school as collaborative also believed their colleagues could improve student learning.

**Ownership in decisions.** Importantly, research has shown that teachers need the power to exercise their collective agency in order to foster their belief that their collective actions can
make a difference (Goddard et al., 2004; Ross et al., 2003; Strahan, 2003). As teachers met in their collaborative structures, participants explained that teachers were engaging in joint decision-making. Thus, the joint decision-making permitted teachers to exercise their collective agency. Kate shared her perceptions: “[Teachers] would decide who were the experts for teaching [content areas]. And, they would divide all the kids up and provide them with intervention in those targeted areas” (Kate, 2017, p. 9). The examples provided by participants aligned with research suggesting when teachers perceive high collective capability of their colleagues, an expectation of successful teaching is established, and effort is put forth to increase student learning. Moreover, studies suggested teachers develop a sense of agency when they had the discretion to act. As Ana explained, “[Teachers] became very open to feedback. They were very involved in decision making” (Ana, 2017, p. 18).

Research has underscored that in order for teachers to strengthen collective efficacy, collaboration must be focused on instructional improvement (University of Chicago, 2006; Wood, 2007). Interestingly, research demonstrated that collective teacher efficacy increased when the capacity of teachers was built through instructional initiatives that were purposeful and ongoing. This includes an instructional focus, teacher leadership development, and leading by example (Versland et al., 2017). Each of these three areas was evident in participant responses. Participants described a prioritization of academic learning and programming that required an instructional focus. Given that the schools were identified for persistently low student achievement in academic areas, an instructional focus was an obvious priority to the participants. They identified major content areas of English language arts and math as top priorities, and teachers engaged in learning new curricula and new strategies in these two content areas.

Teacher leadership was also a priority for participants. Most participants had identified
and developed formal teacher leaders who led common planning time and PLCs. Two of the participants illustrated the concept of leading by example. Valerie summarized her position as, “There’s no hierarchy here. I work as hard as they do, they work as hard as I do. It’s all professional” (Valerie, p. 18). Similarly, Ana shared her perspective: “I knew I had a responsibility to lead that work, and to lead by example, and I was going to work right alongside of them” (Ana, 2017, p. 7).

Another important aspect articulated in research studies is the notion that as teachers engage in collaboration that ultimately yields higher student achievement, higher levels of collective teacher efficacy are established through mastery experience (Goddard, 2001; Strahan, 2003; Mawhinney et al., 2005). That is, as teachers experience success, their confidence grows. Rita’s perceptions of her faculty emphasized mastery experience:

I had the charts all up and I said [to the teachers] look at the numbers. We had between 60-70% of kids in the warning in math, and [now] those numbers are all proficient and advanced. We had no students in warning. What does that tell you? We have the same kids; we have the same staff. (Rita, 2018, p. 8)

Further, given each school’s exit from their underperforming status in a three-year period, the annual improvement realized built momentum, thereby raising the faculty’s belief in its collective capabilities. This example aligns with previous research suggesting mastery experience has the strongest influence on collective teacher efficacy, raising the faculty’s belief in its collective capabilities.

**Teacher networks.** Collective teacher efficacy occurs in a social context, as teachers share information and collaborate to achieve goals (Bandura, 2000). Teacher goal-setting and goal achievement were both explained by participants. Kate referenced academic goal-setting by
grade-level teams that were, in turn, used for classroom goals, and more specifically student
goals. She described her experience: “whatever the team goal was…they'd have a class goal. And
[students] knew what the goal was…they would be posted in their classrooms about what they
were working on. The school was very goal-oriented” (Kate, 2017, p. 13). Participants also
described professional development as a vehicle to support teacher goals. In this manner,
teachers collaborated within professional development structures to share instructional practices.
Often, teachers became leaders in professional development, as they formally shared new and
research-based practices. As Ana described it, “we used our teacher goals as guides…as to the
kind of professional development we needed to deliver…we paired them off at first [to deliver

Teacher networks may also be described as teacher teams. And, teachers’ perceptions of
their teams matter in terms of collective teacher efficacy. Researchers (Supovitz, 2002;
Moolenaar et al., 2012) found that teacher beliefs in the capability of their colleagues to
influence student learning served to increase student learning. Moreover, researchers (Moolenaar
et al., 2012) found that the “denser the network,” the more likely teachers were to perceive that
they could positively impact student learning. Networks in this case referred to the relationships
teachers had at work and otherwise. A number of participants echoed the relationship-building
that occurred among teachers during the three-year turnaround process. Valerie shared her
perception of teacher relationships. She said, “The teachers are really friendly with each other,
they spend time with each other, they do fun things after school, on weekends, there’s a big
camaraderie here” (Valerie, 2017, p. 5). Another participant spoke of the early days of the
school’s turnaround, during the faculty’s first retreat. Many of the teachers at Kate’s school had
been together for three years prior to her arrival at the school, but they didn’t have established
relationships. As Kate explained, “Those [retreat] sessions…let everybody know one another. They didn't really know one another. It was a real community-building” (Kate, 2017, p. 4).

**Social capital.** As previously mentioned, collective teacher efficacy occurs in a social context, within a social network. Researchers have defined social capital as the interactions among teachers (Leana, 2011). Specifically, Minkler (2014) defined teacher social capital as “the resources available to and used by a teacher by virtue of membership of social network(s) to produce outcomes that are beneficial to the teacher, her students and ultimately to the school community as a whole” (p. 658). Furthermore, high levels of social capital strengthen collective teacher efficacy, and teachers exercise their social capital within structures of collaboration. The combination of teacher collaboration and teacher social capital supports the development of collective teacher efficacy, thereby increasing student achievement (Minkler, 2014). The participants offered examples of social capital, as they described interactions within common planning time and PLCs. These networks (common planning time and PLCs) provided teachers with resources in instructional planning and delivery. The resources included shared expertise, as well as opportunities to learn research-based practices, with support for implementation from peers. Ana described teachers within their PLC network: “[teachers] are bringing in information, saying this worked for me, or this didn’t work. People weren’t afraid to share what was working and what wasn’t working” (Ana, 2017, p. 9). In addition, to formal PLC networks in her school, Jen shared her experience with teachers serving as a resource to one another. By virtue of their membership in a social network, teachers could observe each other as they implemented new instructional practices, also considered a vicarious learning experience. Jen explained, “There’s great power in watching someone who is already doing it, and sometimes just watching answers the questions that you have in the head” (Jen, 2018, p. 15). The turnaround schools in this study
had built their improvement efforts around creating teacher networks, where teachers could exercise social capital.

Principal leadership and collective teacher efficacy. Researchers have highlighted a possible direct relationship between principal leadership and collective teacher efficacy, through collaborative practices (Goddard et al., 2015; Versland et al., 2017; Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2016). Most importantly, principals are responsible for creating and providing opportunities for collaboration. As discussed in earlier sections, participants in this study created collaborative structures for teachers to learn and work together. Particular research studies viewed principals through a lens of transformational leadership and their ability to influence groups as a whole (Akan, 2013; Kurt et al., 2012; Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2016; Prelli, 2016). These studies demonstrated that a “stance” of transformational leadership positively influenced collective teacher efficacy through a principal’s influence on collaboration. Transformational leadership focused on vision-setting, capacity-building, and modeling norms for culture in group settings (Kurt et al., 2012).

The participants in this research study provided detailed accounts of their leadership in the three areas. Vision-setting was evident in all five of the participants’ accounts. Participants established new, collective visions for their schools. Four of the five participants used the first-year retreat as an opportunity to establish a new vision for their schools. Kate described a new vision and philosophy for the school, explaining, “We had collectively decided upon a vision and shared philosophy for the school” (Kate, 2017, p. 7). Likewise, Jen shared her experience in her first year. She said, “Although I came in with a vision of where I’d like to see it go, I didn’t come in and direct that. We had a retreat that first summer where it was all about let’s talk about [the school]” (Jen, 2018, p. 5).
Capacity-building was also evident in all of the participants’ schools. The participants focused on building the capacity of teachers in instructional planning and delivery, content knowledge, and strategies to support the social and emotional learning of students. Teacher capacity was built through specialized professional development, peer observation, job-embedded coaching, and opportunities for teacher leadership. As teachers grew in their ability to meet the need of students, student learning improved. As Rita described it, “We changed the instruction. Once that changed, we saw big improvements” (Rita, 2018, p. 12).

Ana best described the third area of transformational leadership, modeling norms for culture. She illustrated her intent in modeling: “My staff needed to hear and see me engage in those [student-centered] conversations with them. I think they respect you for [being] hands-on” (Ana, 2017, p. 21). Like Ana, participants seemed to model norms for culture in group settings by participating in teacher networks. For example, all participants engaged in common planning time and PLC structures with teachers. While their involvement shifted from facilitators as these networks were launching, principals remained with the groups in most cases to provide support and guidance only as necessary. Their ongoing presence provided the ongoing expectation for norms focused on student learning.

**Summary**

This study set out to explore how five principals experienced collective teacher efficacy in their schools. The uniqueness of this study was the context of collective teacher efficacy in turnaround schools. Each school in the study was once considered among the lowest 20% of all schools in Massachusetts, with persistent low student achievement. These schools, designated by the state educational agency as underperforming, experienced accelerated student learning and reversed the trend of underperformance in a three-year period.
An IPA provided the methodology to understand the complexity of teacher professional practice as experienced by the principals. The personal narratives of principals provided detailed accounts for inductive analysis within the context of urban school turnaround environments. When a school is designated by its state agency as underperforming, the call for urgency creates a high-pressure environment for teachers, principals, and students. Schools in this situation are required to adopt a specific state model for turnaround and must develop and launch a redesign plan in a matter of months.

The data from this study indicated that principals launched systems and structures to build collective teacher efficacy. The four sources of collective efficacy—mastery experience, social persuasion, vicarious learning experience, and affective states—were present in these various systems and structures. Specifically, principals created collaborative structures that enabled teachers to build their collective capacity. Through social persuasion, which included feedback that supported persistence and resilience, principals were able to enlist teachers’ authentic participation in collaborative structures, such as common planning time or PLCs. Data also indicated that the collaborative structures created a social system whereby teachers could exercise various forms of social, human, intellectual, and decisional capital. In turn, teachers built their collective capacity to improve student learning, as evidenced by student learning measures. As teachers exercised their professional capital, student learning increased, and mastery experience was realized. Moreover, mastery experience contributed to a future-oriented perspective that performance would continue to be proficient. Teachers in the study’s underperforming schools began to perceive that their performance had been successful, thus increasing their collective efficacy beliefs. Data also indicated that teachers participated in vicarious experiences, allowing them to observe a skill performed by someone else. Finally,
principals experienced teachers’ excitement about their collective capability to improve student learning, indicating prompting of teachers’ affective state.

Limitations

This study described the experiences of five principals who were charged with leading their schools out of a trend of underperformance. The sample size of five was consistent with IPA methodology to recruit participants who are homogeneous in order to enable detailed exploration of the phenomena. While a limitation may be the selection of five principals within only urban districts, the specific phenomenon studied was collective teacher efficacy in a turnaround school. The vast majority of state-designated underperforming schools (i.e., those designated in the lowest 5% of schools in the state) occur in urban school districts. However, there are ten urban districts, referred to as Commissioner’s districts, in Massachusetts. This study focused on three of those districts in the eastern part of the state. A limitation may be the geographic location of the study in terms of experiences of other principals in other parts of the state.

Underperforming schools in Massachusetts encompass a range of school types, from elementary, middle, K-8, high school, to vocational. This study explored the perceptions of five female elementary school principals. A limitation may exist given the gender and school type of the principals interviewed. A suggestion for future research would be to include male principals, as well as principals representing different grade levels of teachers to explore their sense of collective teacher efficacy.

Implications for Educational Practice

This study explored the perceptions of school principals as they experienced collective teacher efficacy in urban turnaround schools. The research was concerned with teacher
professional practice in an environment of urgency, as schools attempted to rapidly change the persistent downward trajectory of student performance. The federal government and state educational agencies are holding schools increasingly accountable for student outcomes; as a result, a number of mandated reforms are occurring. Specifically, under the No Child Left Behind Act, now replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act, states were required to adopt a federal model of school turnaround. This model employed reforms ranging from school closure to replacing the principal and the majority of school staff. These types of reforms are often referred to as technical reforms, mainly because requirements seek to replace educators, rather than build their professional practice.

This research may provide impetus for scholar-practitioners to further study teacher professional practice and principal leadership in the context of school turnaround. MADESE has embarked on studying effective practice in turnaround schools through its Office of School and District Turnaround. The state-level inquiry has resulted in a set of reports describing emerging practices, as well as a more formalized research report that began to identify teacher agency for collective responsibility and ownership for student achievement (MADESE, 2016). To date, however, studies have not viewed schools through the lens of increasing collective teacher efficacy as an intentional strategy for school turnaround. Moreover, as detailed in chapter 2, there are voids in collective teacher efficacy, particularly the sources that shape it, and its antecedents and consequences. Given the significance of school turnaround work, it is essential that school and district leaders explore teacher professional practice, specifically ways to increase collective teacher efficacy. Importantly, Hattie (2016) used a meta-analysis conducted by Eells (2011) and determined that collective teacher efficacy had an effect size of 1.57, ranking it as the highest influence on student achievement. Given the influence of collective teacher
efficacy on student achievement, the following recommendations are made as a result of this study.

**Recommendation 1.** Study participants launched structures for collaboration in order for teachers to participate in professional development and engage in joint decision-making. Although it was challenging for participants to find time within the school day for collaboration, they felt it was an essential structure in order to provide teachers with research-based practices, as well as collective ownership of the school’s turnaround. It follows that collaborative structures are an antecedent, or precondition, for collective teacher efficacy. It is recommended that schools create collaborative structures within the school day in order to facilitate the joint work and joint decision-making of teachers. Moreover, participants described the need to support teachers in their collaborative structures through training, facilitation, and monitoring. Teachers who have worked in relative isolation may need specialized training in collaborative practice. Principals would be wise to ensure that teachers, as adult learners, gain the necessary skill set to be contributing members in a collaborative structure. Further, in addition to training, teachers may need group facilitation as their collaborative groups are launching. Participants served in this capacity until teacher leaders were developed. As teachers gained the necessary skills to self-facilitate, participants continued their involvement through monitoring of the groups’ agendas and minutes. Therefore, training, support, and monitoring are recommended practices to ensure effective collaborative structures.

**Recommendation 2.** Participants observed that teachers exercised various forms of capital, thereby building their collective capacity. The results of the study indicated that teachers had increased opportunities to use human, decisional, social, and intellectual capital in their collaborative structures or teacher networks. Interestingly, participants noted that teachers had
formed relationships that were centered on teaching and otherwise. This relationship-building among teachers appeared to strengthen their social system and corresponding social capital. Given the sense of urgency to rapidly impact student achievement in turnaround schools, teacher relationship-building may not be intuitive to the process. Yet the participants observed a sense of camaraderie developing, as teachers took on collective ownership of the school. Providing teachers the opportunity to know and understand one another’s interests and backgrounds may support their joint work.

Additionally, it may be beneficial to explicitly identify opportunities for teachers to exercise their human and decisional capital. Participants often observed human capital, or skills and abilities, when teachers helped one another learn new practices. Moreover, as teachers expanded their own human capital, they became in-house experts within their schools. Cultures within schools may not lend themselves to identifying in-house experts, as teachers may prefer to stay out of the “spotlight.” This may be particularly evident in schools that are underperforming. As such, it is recommended that school turnaround strategies focus on professional development to build human capital, while creating systems for teachers to share their knowledge. Similarly, teachers need opportunities to exercise decisional capital. In order to increase collective capacity, teachers need opportunities to jointly solve complex problems relative to student learning. A final recommendation in this area includes providing teachers with a formal structure and protocol to exercise their decision capital.

**Recommendation 3.** Data from the study demonstrated that participants perceived that the four sources of collective efficacy—mastery experience, social persuasion, vicarious learning experience, and affective states—were present in the various systems and structures established in the turnaround schools. Of the four sources, mastery experience was noted in the research
literature as the greatest influencer of collective teacher efficacy. Given efficacy beliefs are increased when perceptions exist that performance has been successful, school turnaround strategies need to include frequent benchmarks of success. A system of benchmarking progress in student learning will allow teachers to realize success, thereby supporting their beliefs that their collective efforts are making a difference. Vicarious learning is another source of collective teacher efficacy that needs to be included in school turnaround strategies. Teachers who observe a skill performed by someone else create vicarious learning. These opportunities can occur in peer classrooms or by visiting schools with effective instructional practices. Again, school turnaround strategies need to include occasions to observe effective practice with opportunities to debrief as a collective group. A final recommendation in this category includes social persuasion. Principals can establish social persuasion by expressing their confidence in teachers’ collective abilities. Social persuasion may push teachers through times of discouragement, helping them establish resilience and persistence.

**Personal Reflection**

My desire to conduct educational research in school turnaround settings reflects my years as an urban educator. I maintain the belief that education can level the playing field for students who don’t enjoy the privileges of their white, middle-class peers. As educators we must close the opportunity gap, and we must get it right for the sake of all children in our care. Getting it right means that schools must provide each child with the skills, knowledge, dispositions, and mindset to enter the world as young adults ready to accomplish their hopes and dreams. Race, ethnicity, zip code, income level, learning disabilities, or native language must not be excuses for us.

State and federal policymakers were right to sound the alarm when schools failed to create strong educational outcomes for students. While we could debate definitions of success, or
measuring outcomes, as educators we knew when we were failing our students. Too many students, in urban settings in particular, were not held to high expectations. Too many teachers did not have the necessary professional knowledge and skills to meet the diverse learning needs of all students. Too many schools did not attend to the academic and social emotional-learning needs of their students.

The goal of this research study was to study principals’ perceptions of teacher professional practice in a context of school turnaround. This framework is missing in school turnaround strategies, as well as in current research. When federal and state policymakers sounded the alarm, they created school accountability mandates and reform strategies in the absence of a body of research. Many of the reforms focused on hard-line approaches—close a school, restart a school, remove the principal and 50% of the staff, or replace the principal and implement a rigorous teacher-evaluation and reward system. Few of the federal strategies incorporated teacher professional practice. None of the strategies incorporated collective teacher efficacy.

Research has demonstrated that the teacher matters. Why not invest in teacher professional practice? I have implemented three of the hard-line turnaround approaches required by state and federal policymakers. In the end, what made the difference in reversing the trend of underperformance was collective teacher efficacy. As a superintendent of schools I have seen first-hand the positive impact of teacher practice on reversing the trend of school underperformance. Schools that became highly efficacious created better outcomes for students. I am convinced we need to continue to study ways in which principals and teachers positively impact and accelerate student learning. Then in the field we need to implement and further study those strategies. Scholar-practitioner research can offer the opportunity to connect research and
practice in school turnaround settings.
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Appendix A

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: September 8, 2017  IRB #: CPS17-07-05
Principal Investigator(s): Kristal Clemons
                          Meg Mayo-Brown
Department: Doctor of Education Program
            College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
            Northeastern University
Title of Project: The Lived Experiences of Principals in Urban Turnaround
                 Schools: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
                 Study Examining Teacher Collective Efficacy
Participating Sites: Permission letters forthcoming
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: SEPTEMBER 7, 2018

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
   recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
   be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
   prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
   other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear (prospective participant):

My name is Meg Mayo-Brown and as a current doctoral student at Northeastern University, I am in the process of recruiting participants for my research study, the final requirement of my doctoral program. The goal of my study is to gain insight into the ways in which principals perceive and make sense of teacher collective efficacy in urban turnaround schools. As a current (or former) leader of a turnaround school in Massachusetts, I am interested in learning about your experiences as you reversed the trend of chronic underperformance at your school. In particular, I am interested in how the efforts of the faculty contributed to school turnaround.

A review of existing research indicates school turnaround is an area that warrants further study. If you volunteer for this study, and tell your story, you could help provide insight to effective school turnaround practices, grounded in teacher professional practice. The stories of turnaround principals can provide policymakers and practitioners with additional school improvement strategies that utilize and develop existing professional capital, leading to high quality teaching and learning. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in an in-depth, confidential, face-to-face interview with me lasting approximately 90 minutes after signing an informed consent document.
2. Talk about your experience leading your school out of chronic underperformance.
3. Participate in a short follow-up interview or be available for follow-up questions by phone as needed.
4. Review the transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy.
5. Review my interpretations of your responses to ensure I have represented your perspective.

Additionally, consideration of confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and beyond. Your name and respective school will be given a fictitious name so that any reader will not be able to identify you as a participant, or your school.

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you wish to opt-out, please email me at mayobrown.m@husky.neu.edu requesting you be removed from my recruitment list.

If you are interested in sharing your experiences with me, please contact me via email at
mayobrown.m@husky.neu.edu. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I appreciate your consideration, and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Meg Mayo-Brown
Appendix C: Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**Project Title:** The Lived Experiences of Principals in Urban Turnaround Schools: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study Examining Teacher Collective Efficacy

**Investigators:** Dr. Kristal Clemons, Principal Investigator and Meg Mayo-Brown, Student Researcher

We are inviting you to take part in this research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

The goal of this study is to gain insight into the ways in which principals perceive and make sense of teacher collective efficacy in urban turnaround schools. In order to better understand principals’ experiences, the study will examine the stories of 4-6 principals who fit the following criteria:

1. You were a principal of a Level 4 school in Massachusetts.
2. During your tenure as principal, your school exited Level 4 status as determined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
   
   or
   
   1. You are/were a principal of a school that was designated as Level 3 and the percentile ranking of the school was among the lowest 5% of all schools as determined by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
2. The percentile ranking of the school rose to at or above 20% within a three-year period during your tenure.

**If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to:**

6. Participate in an in-depth, confidential, face-to-face, audiotape interview lasting approximately 90 minutes.
7. Talk about your experience leading a school out of chronic underperformance.
8. Participate in a short follow-up interview or be available for follow-up questions by phone as needed.
9. Review the transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy.
10. Review my interpretations of your responses to ensure I have represented your perspective.

Participation is completely voluntary. The interview can take place at a location of your choice that is conducive to interviewing and recording. As a participant you may decline to answer any of the interview questions during the interview and may withdraw from the study at any time. There is no compensation for participating in the study.
There are no direct benefits for your participation. However, the stories of turnaround principals may provide policymakers and practitioners with additional school improvement strategies that utilize and develop existing professional capital, leading to high quality teaching and learning.

Consideration of confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and beyond. Your name and respective school will be given a fictitious name so that any reader will not be able to identify you as a participant, or your school. The audiotape of the interview will be destroyed after data analysis. Any other materials, including but not limited to field notes, printed transcripts, and drafts of all data collected will be maintained in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed after three years. Your name will not be disclosed to anyone during the interview process or in any publication associated with this study, without your written permission to do so.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Meg Mayo-Brown at mayobrown.m@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contract Dr. Kristal Clemons at kclemons@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator.

**If you have any questions about your rights in this research**, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

__________________________  __________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part    Date

__________________________
Printed name of person above

__________________________  __________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent    Date

__________________________
Printed name of person above