

An Administrative Community of Practice

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This study explored how a small school district's administrative team perceived the changes and challenges associated with an instructional leadership community of practice (CoP). The participants examined their views about instructional leadership and identified how they worked together as a team to apply new understandings of into their practice. The school district's administrative team represented this participatory action research's (PAR) participants that involved reflective journal writing, instructional inventories, and reflective field notes. Instructional leadership is important, yet the complexities of managing a department or concentrated area of supervision potentially shifts an administrator's focus away from instructional leadership. The community of practice intervention unearthed barriers that hindered the existence of a CoP, such as establishing a trusting professional relationship. As the administrative team engaged in the CoP, new ways of learning from each other surfaced outside of those sessions. For school administrators to lead as learners, they must nurture a mutual trust that permit themselves to be vulnerable about their setbacks or failed instructional leadership attempts — the ability to productively function as a CoP provides limitless opportunities for administrators to lead instructional initiatives aimed at student success. More importantly, once a CoP evolves into a common administrative practice there is a greater likelihood that administrators will find value in the process and extend CoPs into their areas of expertise.

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1.0 Introduction

School district and building level leaders hold complex, high-pressure jobs that are fundamental to student success. Building level leaders such as principals, assistant principals, and academic specific supervisors, experience similar pressures as the superintendent of schools including high expectations for student success, publicized school rankings, and accountability measures. Since the execution of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in 2002, student assessment results have been the driving force behind administrative evaluations exacerbating an already enormous amount of pressure placed on public school administrators to improve student achievement (Feuerstein, 2013). In Pennsylvania, standardized test pressure is compounded by school rankings of all kinds. The Pennsylvania Department of Education's annual School Performance Profile (SPP) offers a detailed comparison of schools and school districts. The *Pittsburgh Business Times* releases a yearly rank order of all Pennsylvania School Districts and includes a ranking of schools by grade level. Publicizing school ranking supports Feuerstein's (2013) assertion that the public's perception of schools is so tightly intertwined with assessment and accountability that it is almost impossible to consider schools without testing/assessment measures. Without question, educational leaders have experienced profound challenges.

By virtue of the vast expectations and challenges facing school districts and their leaders today, the superintendent sits atop a complex, challenging role similar to, yet unlike, any other school district leadership position. Demands for more accountability in terms of student success unintentionally extends the breadth of the superintendent's role beyond managerial figure to include that of instructional leader (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Waters & Marzano, 2006; Wright & Harris, 2010). It is no longer sufficient for the designated leader of a school district to be an

accomplished educator and respected leader. In a climate of high expectations and blame-placing, the superintendent is expected to be “all things to all populations” (Gutmore & Plotts 2006, p. 28) including leader of instructional improvement efforts.

Continuously enhancing the administrative team's instructional capacity and that of the school district to advance student achievement adds an expanded and necessary ingredient to an already challenging position. Unfortunately, however, though having the best intentions for improving student success, some district leaders provide or participate in uneven or poor quality instructional improvement efforts such as disjointed professional development opportunities or quick fix practices (Kruse & Johnson, 2016) that are doomed to fail. Therefore, it stands to reason that superintendents might not realize the indispensable skills that unlock the administrative team's instructional leadership potential.

Superintendents require a “deep understanding of the conditions required to enable staff to make and sustain the changes required for improved outcomes” (Robinson et al., 2008; p. 667). Notwithstanding challenges, some superintendents successfully embrace instructional leadership by positively influencing instruction and student success through their work with the administrative team. Elmore and Burney's (1997) highly regarded work in New York School District 2, revealed that professional development was a catalyst to a systemic cultural shift within a school district. Furthermore, enhanced professional development encapsulates the context in which district and school conditions act as a gateway for improving curriculum, instruction, and assessment with an overall aim of advancing student achievement (Bredeson & Kose, 2007). An unmistakable aspect of the superintendent's instructional leadership is providing the on-going professional development of the administrative team. For superintendents acting as instructional leaders, creating focused, job-embedded professional development for school leaders is a must,

because many of the principals are already overwhelmed by numerous tasks that compete for their time (Corcoran et al., 2013). I believe, at the surface level, quick fix approach defines an unintended reality for many superintendents who are striving for instructional leadership and entangles them in the web of managerial tasks.

One approach to providing sustainable professional development for school leaders is mobilizing a community of practice. Communities of practice exist in all walks of life; they appear and then dissipate to accomplish tasks or specific work (Wenger, 2015). Buyse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003) described two theoretical underpinnings of a community of practice framework, situated learning and reflective practice. They uphold the notion that learning is mostly a social exercise. “Knowledge is generated and shared within a social and cultural context” (Buysee et al. 2003;p. 266) and within the world of practice (Wenger, 2015). A community of practice encompasses context-based professional development that promotes collaborative work with colleagues having similar interests intertwined with intentional self-reflection practices. This approach seems a good fit for the development of superintendents, principals, and supervisors as part of an instructional leadership team.

1.1 Inquiry Setting

The setting for this inquiry was the Small Valley School District which is a small, suburban school district that educates approximately 900 students and covers approximately 10 square miles. Three schools comprise the school district which includes Primary School, Intermediate School, and Junior-Senior High School.

Primary School, a traditional, self-contained primary center, had an enrollment of 300 students and consists of a 20:1 student-teacher ratio and one building principal. Intermediate School hosted 200 students and one building principal. Unlike Primary School, Intermediate School classrooms were content-specific and comprised of one Mathematics, English, or Science teacher per grade level. Jr-Sr high school, with approximately 400 students, provides four Mathematics, five English, five Science, and six Social Studies teachers.

This small district represented an ideal setting for exploring a community of practice involving instructional leadership because the reduced number of supervisors and principals allowed for a greater opportunity of deeper and more thoughtful learning about educational practices. It yielded insights into how a superintendent and administrators perceived instructional leadership and allowed for learning about challenges or changes the participants experienced based on their involvement in a community of practice.

While a small district presented an ideal setting for a CoP, the smaller setting created some hurdles because it is the superintendent who directly supervises and evaluates school and district leaders. In other words, in this setting the superintendent has a small team to work with, but a power differential exists when the objective is to work collaboratively. In addition, the responsibility to supervise principals, a role in large district that would typically be managed by an assistant superintendent falls on the shoulders of the superintendent. This enormous responsibility further complicates improvement efforts because superintendent often cannot invest the essential time for educational advancements (Johnston, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016).

1.2 Stakeholders

The administrative team at Small Valley School District at the time of this inquiry consisted of the superintendent, a director of student achievement, a technology supervisor, a special education supervisor, a high school principal, a high school assistant principal, and two elementary school principals. These leaders served as the inquiry's participants and primary stakeholders in the work.

As the superintendent of schools, I was a stakeholder because my role was to encourage leaders to acquire a deeper understanding of instructional practices. In this role, I visit each of the district's classrooms, observed instructional practices and provided individualized feedback to teachers. Additionally, my role requires me to lead staff professional development. I am desperately seeking methods to promote continuously learning yet often find myself and my team threading a "crazy quilt" of patchworked professional development (Peterson, 2002). In this inquiry, I chose to lead a community practice as a means of clear, collaborative professional development for myself and my team and learn if this effort would lead to improvement by gathering data in a participatory action research design. In this inquiry, therefore, I am a stakeholder as the superintendent of schools, the community of practice facilitator, a co-learner, and a researcher.

The second group of stakeholders were the district school leaders which consists a director of student achievement, a technology supervisor, a special education supervisor, a special education supervisor, a high school principal, a high school assistant principal, an intermediate school principal, and a primary school principal. These folks represent a distinct class of employee responsible for multiple schools and district functions that range from evaluating teachers to arranging pupil transportation within the school district.

Two final groups of stakeholders were not part of this inquiry but would benefit greatly if the community of practice succeeded and could be implemented more fully were the teachers and students. The greatest need for buy-in for large-scale change is teachers who are the largest professional group with the most autonomy in a school system. It was my hope that that by participating in and learning about a community of practice, the administrative team might positively impact instructional practices, the principals might introduce the use of communities of practice with their teachers and ultimately a district-wide culture shift might begin inquiry and professional development.

Students are the farthest from the process described, yet they stand to benefit the most from improved instructional practices. Work by Bredeson and Kose (2007) and Robinson et al (2008) offered substantial insight of instructional leadership's positive impact on student achievement when school leaders create conditions to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment with an overall aim of advancing student success. In other words, as instruction improves, so does student success.

1.3 Problem of Practice

Since becoming a superintendent, I have provided or assisted with what I describe as disjointed, task-oriented monthly professional development to our district administrative team. This haphazard programming resembled the typical makeshift programs that is provided to many principals (Peterson, 2002). For the most part, I presented on the professional development topic, asked questions, team members asked clarifying questions, we nodded in approval, and we carried on with the agenda. These sessions felt empty and, in particular, I noticed the absence of

professional discourse that would confront ideas or beliefs. I had a feeling I could do better to improve our instructional outcomes.

Literature demonstrated that professional development can be a vehicle that focuses school leaders on instructional leadership (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Peterson, 2002; Wright & Harris, 2010). Wright and Harris' (2010) study on small school district leadership provided evidence of successful school building and district level leadership that hones the skills of instructional leaders through professional development. In a 2016 RAND Corporation Report, the researchers determined that principals value time with their supervisor more when the supervisor emphasizes the principal's role as an instructional leader (Corcoran et al., 2013; Johnston, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016).

From my perspective, there remains room for on-going improvement of professional development structures in many school districts. As the superintendent, I was uncertain of any influence my leadership or professional development had on the team, yet I knew I had to strengthen the instructional leadership ability of our team members. Burney and Elmore (1997) highlighted that professional development on instruction can spark a district-wide cultural change. Like many Pennsylvania school districts, our administrative team's reaction to the pressure of accountability measures addresses improving student success. The team experienced district and building-level leadership turnover multiple times, as well as a numerous failed quick-fix reform attempts. Previous professional development focused more on leadership skills than instruction that nurtured administrators more expert in management as part of a natural existence within a pre-established culture of learning.

I do not possess an intimate understanding of the administrative team's collective instructional leadership capacity or the depth in which they perceive instruction as an important

aspect of their leadership. Furthermore, I am uncertain if the manner I provide professional development will advance our performance as administrators. I desired an understanding of what ways I could influence practice-based changes in our organization so that I might trigger a cultural shift toward deeper learning and conversation as an administrative team.

1.4 Inquiry Questions

Superintendents develop district goals with central office administrators as well as school leaders, cross their fingers, and hope for student success. As a leader, superintendents often find themselves unaware if they have the needed capacity as an instructional leader or if the professional development they provide to their administrative team amounts to real change within the district, particularly in terms of student success. In my role as superintendent, I desired a deeper comprehension of our team's instructional leadership capacity. I wanted to know if we experienced a community of practice as a team if that experience would improve our capacity as leading learners. To guide this understanding, I asked the following inquiry questions:

Q1: How did participating in an administrative community of practice focused on instructional leadership impact the administrative team's instructional leadership skills?

Q2: What challenges did a small, suburban school district administrative team need to overcome as they operationalized a community of practice focused on instructional leadership?

Q3: What practice-based changes occurred as a result of focusing the efforts of a community of practice on instructional leadership?

2.0 Review of Literature

For this literature review, I initially embarked on an investigation about what makes a superintendent successful in terms of student success and changing district culture. I quickly discovered terse descriptions of superintendents' work as nothing more than a managerial figurehead consumed with the daily challenges of their job and incapable of generating actionable results linked to student success (Bredeson & Kose, 2007). Furthermore, politically imposed accountability measures such as statewide-standardized tests or demands of the school board increase the complexity of the top official's job. Other research fundamentally contends that the superintendent is a central component of student achievement (Wright & Harris, 2010). Many researchers have found that the superintendent is a primary instructional leader (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Feuerstein, 2013; Gutmore & Plotts, 2006; Wright & Harris, 2010) that cultivates a cultural change (Elmore & Burney, 1997).

Additionally, while examining the literature, I developed further curiosities about what instructional leadership means for school and district leadership. I learned about the concept of a community of practice and how this is used in K-12 educational settings as a means of professional development and leadership development. The purpose of this literature review was to dig deeper into these areas of literature and provide a background on the superintendent's role, district and school leadership broadly and in Pennsylvania, and communities of practice to frame this participatory action research study.

2.1 Instructional Leadership

The term, instructional leadership, closely aligns with keeping teaching and learning as a top priority in school district decision-making. Instructional leadership encapsulates focusing on district and school conditions as a means of improving curriculum, instruction, and assessment with an overall aim of advancing student achievement (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Robinson et al., 2008). In summary, instructional leaders emphasize that student success is a priority, which translates into deliberate actions that direct a school district's attention to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student learning. Although instructional leadership may seem trivial, it is, in fact, critical in terms of today's concern over student success. How leaders maneuver innumerable responsibilities so that instructional leadership constantly surfaces in professional development and in their daily actions is of great importance to school districts, leaders, and students.

2.2 Complexity of Educational Leadership

Gutmore and Plotts' (2006) labeling school district leaders as the jack-of-all-trades provided a compelling counterargument to the superintendent as an instructional leader. Gutmore and Plotts complicated matters further when they wrote, "the superintendent has become more of a Jack-of-all-Trades manager than an instructional leader" (p. 34). The relevance here addresses the notion of superintendents consumed by multiple complexities of their job including improving student achievement so that they cannot act as an instructional leader. Bredeson & Krose (2007) contributed that superintendents do respond to reform efforts by requesting improved curriculum,

instruction, and student learning, yet because of job overload and other responsibilities they cannot perform adequately.

Unfortunately, with the best intentions to improve student success, some district leaders provide or participate in uneven or poor-quality instructional improvement efforts such as disjointed professional development opportunities or quick fix practices doomed to fail (Kruse & Johnson, 2016). Failing quick fix approaches are a serious issue because superintendents must lead instructional improvement but often do not provide or create pathways for an administrative team's learning (Peterson, 2002). Corcoran et al. (2013) determined that principal supervisors have a desire to spend more time in schools working with principals but are often directed away from their duties because of district-level meetings or other administrative responsibilities including working with principals, which produces a similar experience as many superintendents fall prey to more of a managerial role than an instructional leader. Small school district superintendents whose many responsibilities include supervising principals often cannot invest the essential time for educational advancements, thereby complicating improvement efforts (Johnston et al., 2016).

Arguably, common challenges bind school district leaders, principals, and supervisors. In a report by the Wallace Foundation (2013), there stands a clear call for changing how principal supervisors develop principals' leadership and practitioner skills. Most professional development is left to the individual devices of the supervisors or relate to leadership competencies that patch together a makeshift professional development program (Corcoran et al., 2013; Peterson, 2002). What principals need are learning opportunities pinpointing what matters, how to identify and support high-quality instruction (Corcoran et al., 2013). School principals require carefully designed professional development with an emphasis on student success. Professional development opportunities should include reflective practice and have an emphasis on long-term

job-embedded learning while working with administrative peers (Peterson, 2002). Peterson (2002) expanded more deeply into specific structural arrangements of professional development that includes instructional strategies. Peterson explained, “For the most successful learning to occur, professional development for principals should use a variety of strategies that are related to the nature of the material taught and learner needs” (p. 215). In other words, principals’ professional development should focus on instruction. This learning can take place in various formats such as small group work, case study, or action research to name a few (Peterson, 2002).

The 2013 Wallace Report on the evolving role of the principal supervisor highlighted an issue with professional development provided for supervisors of principals in that preparation is often disjointed, unrelated to the needs of the school, or does not focus on instruction (Corcoran et al., 2013). In this report, a trend was determined that principal supervisors view their professional development as insufficient.

2.3 Role of Superintendent

Like many school leaders, superintendents evaluate staff, take on managerial duties, and develop goals. *No Child Left Behind* (2002) established the overall importance of the superintendent's leadership on building a healthy district culture focused on learning and student achievement (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Feuerstein, 2013). Standardized testing results increasingly mounted pressure on school district superintendents to improve student achievement (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Feuerstein, 2013), which marked a distinct shift away from previously held notions of the superintendent’s job as defined by managerial tasks that have little impact on student

achievement (Gutmore & Plotts, 2006). Gutmore and Plotts further emphasized that superintendents must become all things to all stakeholders (2006).

As a result of examining educational efforts on learning and student success, the research has revealed the phenomena of new accountability measures forcing superintendents to branch out from their managerial role. This new and different role focused on student achievement and instructional leadership (Wright & Harris, 2010). With this changing role came a new body of literature that examined the ways superintendents have come to lead curriculum, instruction, and assessment practice efforts (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Gutmore & Plotts, 2006; Wright, & Harris, 2010) as part of their daily job responsibilities.

Wright and Harris (2010), for example, selected eight school district superintendents for the project because they led small districts in successfully closing the achievement gap. A common finding among these successful district leaders was that every superintendent addressed the necessity of systemically improving instruction throughout the district (Wright, & Harris, 2010). Waters and Marzano's (2006) also studied the changing role of district leadership. They found that well-defined, impactful classroom, school, and leadership practices could translate into specific actions and behaviors that influence student success. Furthermore, Walters and Marzano (2006) defined these skills into five district-level leadership responsibilities: goal setting, non-negotiable goals for instruction and student achievement, school board support of goals, monitoring goals, and allocation of resources to support goals.

2.4 Superintendent Evaluation

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association's (PSBA) expectations for superintendents represent identifiable performance objectives for increasing student achievement, which marks yet another contrast from the previously held notion of the superintendent's role. In addition, these expectations added more political pressure for improving student achievement. Act 141 outlines components of the superintendent's contract in addition to the requirements for the superintendent's annual performance evaluation conducted by the school board. These expectations written in Act 141 apply to all superintendents who signed contracts on or after September 10, 2002. PSBA's six performance standards for superintendents are grounded in ACT 141:

- 1) Student growth and achievement
- 2) Organizational leadership
- 3) District operations and financial management
- 4) Communication and community relations
- 5) Human resource management
- 6) Professionalism

Of the six performance objectives provided by PSBA, two objectives, student growth and achievement and organizational leadership, define superintendents as the instructional leader of a school district charged with improving curriculum, instruction, and student learning. These performance standards necessitate that the district leader makes goals, acquires a depth of professional development, monitors goals, and establishes a shared vision. The point is not to understate other functions of the role of the district leader by expanding on these two performance objectives but rather to demonstrate PSBA's emphasis on instructional leadership demands for a

different type of superintendent from years past. Considering that NCLB (2001) set the bar for how the public will judge school districts (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Feuerstein, 2013) based on the challenging standards included in ESSA (2015), it is no coincidence PSBA, a state agency, defines superintendent performance with student success as well as instructional leadership. Perhaps PSBA's most assertive accountability method mandates school districts post the annual superintendent's rating on the district's public website.

2.5 Role of Principal

Traditionally, instructional leadership was viewed as the sole responsibility of the school principal (Robinson et al., 2008). The Wallace Report (2012) identified an empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement. Perhaps the principal's most significant role, simply stated, is enhancing instruction (Johnston et al., 2016). Robinson et al. (2008) suggested that instructional leadership's impact on student success is greater than another form of leadership, transformational. These findings have critical implications for more granular professional development for continuously improving classroom teaching. Although Robinson et al. (2008) may seem of concern only to a particular group of educators, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about student success. Furthermore, within a school, the principal remains the central source of leadership and plays a major role in developing a professional community of learners.

2.6 Accountability and Educational Leaders

Measuring student performance through standardized tests potentially marks the biggest accountability change for superintendents and school districts alike by adding increased judgment of how schools are viewed by the public as well as the school board. The public's perception of schools intertwines assessment and accountability so tightly that it is almost impossible to consider schools without testing/assessment measures (Feuerstein, 2013). What emerges is the perception of higher test scores equating to better schools and better leaders. I suggest the possibility of an opposing view as well. If the public relates higher test scores to better schools, then the same thinking should hold true for lower test scores attributed to poorly performing schools. An accountability outcome clearly influenced by public and bureaucratic pressure is the superintendent's annual evaluation (Bredeson & Kose, 2007).

Student assessments have created competition for district jockeying to be the highest ranked school or district. Feuerstein (2013) pronounced that while NCLB increased pressure and accountability measures on educational leaders, there was an unforeseen comfortableness among superintendents toward a reliance on standardized testing to improve instruction. Bredeson and Kose (2007) noted, "ESEA (No Child Left Behind, 2001), has intensified demands for superintendents to attend to assessment and student learning outcomes in their districts" (p. 4). One bright spot emanating from NCLB is that while experiencing discomfort, many superintendents, if out of necessity or demand, answer the call to improve student success. Lastly, the federal government reauthorized the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA, 2016). The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania intends to enact ESSA in 2017-2018.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education framework for leadership, commonly recognized as principal effectiveness, hones in on desirable leadership qualities. Principal evaluations-much like the superintendent evaluation-emphasize instructional leadership as well as improving student achievement scores on standardized tests. The principal effectiveness system, ACT 82 (2012), consists of observation, building level data, correlation data, and elective data. Of the four rubric domains, domains 1-3 all include rubric scores that address goals, change efforts for continuous improvement, ensuring a high-quality, high-performing staff, and leaving school improvement initiatives.

2.7 Catalyst for Change

Interestingly, an unintended outcome of state-mandated accountability measures (e.g. evaluations or school rankings) was a recognition by superintendents of standardized test results as a catalyst for improving classroom instruction (Feuerstein, 2013).

As the head of a school organization, there is little choice for superintendents other than establishing instructional leadership. In their 2016 report, Johnston, Kaufman, and Thompson examined the supports school districts provided to their principals as well as the emphasis of instructional leadership as a result of a survey by the Wallace Foundation. They stated, "An abundance of research suggests that effective school leaders are vital to promoting student outcomes across the United States" (Johnston, Kaufman, and Thompson, 2016, p. 1). This finding acts as a catalyst for school districts to improve instructional leadership for their school principals, which, in a small school district, is mainly the superintendent's responsibility. Broadly speaking,

school leaders appreciate when time spent with their supervisor emphasizes the learning about instructional leadership (Johnston et al., 2016).

2.8 Changing Culture

In the highly regarded case study of New York City District 2 Public Schools, Burney and Elmore (1997) uncovered strategies that mobilized a cultural shift of a poor performing school district to that of a high-performing district. Much like the concept of a community of practice enhances the daily practices of team members, Burney and Elmore (1997) expressed that professional development in District No. 2 spearheaded the cultural change for the district. They further described the general approach taken by the superintendent of schools as an instrument of improvement or a framework for change that applies to all school districts. Simply stated, quality professional development on instructional practices can be the genesis of change. The researchers determined that when district leaders focused their school systems' efforts toward instructional improvement, professional development on instructional methodology cohesively bound the work of teachers and administrators into a coherent set of actions and programs that ultimately transformed the culture of the school district. As a result, teachers took more pride in their work and recognized the exceptional professional development within the school district (Elmore & Burney, 1997).

The role of the superintendent, especially in small school districts, is to assist administrators to remain focused by producing a strategy of concentrating on instruction and providing meaningful professional development (Elmore & Burney, 1997). A key factor of this

approach is defining a focus that is then decentralized in a way that permits participants to experience learning in their own ways in various settings.

2.9 Community of Practice

Participants in a community of practice share similar knowledge and beliefs of an educational system yet offer enough diversity for organic variations of experiences to happen, which generates better performance (MacPhail, Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2014; Palincsar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, 1998). Additionally, communities of practice experience iterative life cycles; they evolve, grow, or disperse depending on need. Therefore, educators possess the ability to generate a community of practice (Palincsar et al., 1998). To summarize, the community develops a bank of cognition or "funds of knowledge" (p.17) related to the notion that team members make intellectual withdrawals and deposits about practice as a functioning member of the community that benefits the team members in various ways (Palincsar et al., 1998).

Building on the concept of a community of practice's features previously mentioned, a necessary understructure includes discourse through discussion and analysis that produces enhanced participant learning (MacPhail et al., 2014). Fundamental to a community of practice "is that learning is social and comes from our daily experiences" (MacPhail et al., 2014, p. 42).

Etienne Wenger's work drastically shifted the notion that learning has a beginning and an end, thus conceiving that learning is best situated in daily life or a community of practice. Communities of practice surround us; typically, we are unknowingly members of multiple communities. Typically, participants in communities of practice share similar passions or concerns in that they want to learn and enhance their practice from gaining a new understanding of practice

from group members' experiences. Wenger (2015) defined three mainstays of a community of practice: domain (that which distinguishes the group's connections), community (how the groups learn from each other), and practice (shared ways of addressing issues). The phenomenon of situated learning is a keystone of communities of practice (Buyse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003; Smith, 2009; Wenger, 2015). Situated learning is the experience of learning how to communicate in ways so that participants begin experiencing contextualized learning in a more personalized manner yet benefits the community at large. It is more than talking about learning, rather the experience defines learning to talk so participants begin to comprehend contextualize learning.

2.10 Framework for a Community of Practice

Buyse et al. (2003) focused two theoretical constructs of a community of practice exist situated learning, which involves learning from a social experience, and reflective practice, the realization through critical reflection with others who shared an experience. A community of practice includes a group of stakeholders focused on a topic that generates knowledge from blending thoughts and critical thinking (Buyse et al., 2003).

Perry, Walton, and Calder (1999) established a community of practice project framework for designing and implementing early reading assessments for students; their study was reviewed in the Buysee et al. (2003) article. The community met monthly for approximately three hours to examine how teachers engage in reflection as well as professional development. There are five stages in this community of practice project that I intend to incorporate as action research: free write, airtime, focus group, work time, and reporting out (Perry, Walton, & Calder, 1999).

2.11 Conclusion

Throughout this literature review, I frame an understanding of the relevance for how superintendents influence instructional leadership through professional development as well as the benefits of a community of practice by citing literature that encapsulates the benefits of each. Evidence exists that the superintendent juggles political pressures in addition to accountability measures daily yet carves pathways that advance instruction leadership at all levels of a K-12 public school district.

The notion of a community of practice embodies a framework that leverages situated learning for participants that creates a deeper understanding of practice-based skills. Professional development has been noted as a key ingredient that alters school as well a district culture in K-12 education. Moreover, professional development represents a key ingredient to what school administrators desire to further their skills as instructional leaders. Therefore, the combination of professional development, through a community of practice should, over time, advance the culture of an administrative team.

This is not to say the process is simple, there is a strong likelihood that administrators, much like supervisors of principals, find themselves succumbing to the managerial aspects of their jobs in the same way as superintendents. These understandings create a parallel argument that while superintendents might intend to or understand the need to focus on instructional leadership by providing professional development that some leaders will be more successful than others at sustaining pinpointed instructional leadership efforts. Nevertheless, the benefits of improving educational outcomes outweigh the risks of potential frustrations or setbacks through an administrative community of practice.

3.0 Inquiry Design and Analysis

Preceding this study, the administrative team embarked on a journey that focused and improved our professional development on instruction as part of a greater vision that might advance the culture of the team. Collectively, we prioritized the five dimensions of instructional leadership (Robinson et al., 2008) and then narrowed those five domains down to focus on two. The team collectively agreed that the most important domains to focus on were: establishing goals that centered on defining expectations, planning, and coordinating as well as evaluating teaching and the curriculum.

Next, following a close examination of instructional leadership, the administrative team synthesized their top two dimensions of instructional leadership with the rubric assessment tool for principals known as the Framework for Leadership (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014) seeking commonality between that rubric's components and instructional leadership. Over time, the administrators narrowed and agreed upon one rubric component that pinpointed our professional development: Component 3c: Implements High-Quality Instruction.

3.1 Inquiry Questions

This chapter describes the setting, stakeholders, approach, instrumentation, and methodology for this inquiry (Appendix A). Part of this inquiry included working with a team of school administrators to learn about instructional leadership by providing professional development through a community of practice framework. The second part of this inquiry

identified changes and challenges that the administrative team experienced in practice as well as by participating in the community of practice. Three inquiry questions drove this participatory action research.

Q1: How did participating in an administrative community of practice focused on instructional leadership impact the administrative team's instructional leadership skills?

Q2: What challenges did a small, suburban school district administrative team need to overcome as they operationalized a community of practice focused on instructional leadership?

Q3: What practice-based changes occurred as a result of focusing the efforts of a community of practice on instructional leadership?

3.2 Approach and Methods

I shaped my inquiry approach as a process of codeveloping research with people rather than of people that fortifies the researcher and the participants as one (McIntyre, 2008) through participatory action research (PAR). PAR represents one of many potential paradigms of action research. Action research is fundamentally about change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001); consequently, the purpose of this research will be to describe how change impacts the administrative team (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006).

Participatory action research promotes personal as well as collective change among a group of people (McIntyre, 2008). PAR projects characteristically endorse a social change (Herr & Anderson, 2014; McIntyre, 2008) as a practitioner encourages a collaborative, action-based examination of relevant, context-specific assumptions of knowledge that renders new

understandings of a given phenomenon. As a result, varying depths of knowledge emerge for participants as an outgrowth of comparing their own thoughts and experiences with the thoughts and experiences of fellow participants (McIntyre, 2008).

Participants had a voice about what they learned during CoP sessions, the process, and outcomes that produced an organic opportunity for applying new understandings of instructional leadership skills into practice. This PAR effort constructed new understandings of our practice as (McIntyre, 2008) the participants mutually examined a social transformation in similar contexts then applied those new understandings within their work environment (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Like PAR, a community of practice depends on participants acting and learning from those actions with their colleagues. Communities of practice experience iterative life cycles; they evolve, grow, or disperse depending on need or circumstance (Palincsar et al., 1998; Wenger, 2015). Therefore, it is reasonable to consider many approaches that exist for implementing a community of practice.

The superintendent can play a pivotal role in the establishment of a CoP framework by thoughtfully mixing instructional leadership professional development with the spiral nature of action research directed at enhancing the individual and collective instructional leadership skills of the administrative team. Action research typically involves a four-step, spiral process: planning, taking action, evaluating the action, and then further planning and action that ultimately creates deeper understandings of the participants' actions (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001). An advantage of the work by Perry et al. (1999) was that their methods followed a cyclical approach much like action research.

The administrative CoP, like Zambo and Isai (2012), want to “prepare scholarly and influential practitioners who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to solve the

problems of practice they face” (p. 96). For that reason, action research cycles for this inquiry mirrored Perry et al.’s. (1999) community of practice format:

1. Reflective Journal Writing, which included a self-reflective writing session (10-15 minutes).
2. Air Time, which followed reflective journal writing. Participants had an opportunity to speak about their reflection or something else that occurred to them as others shared reflections. Participants added to their reflection during this time or choose not to share. After uninterrupted airtime, participants were permitted to ask the speaker clarification questions (two minutes per person).
3. Focused Learning, which included a more focused discussion than air time. Discussion questions or professional development were derived from the previous meeting’s minutes. During focused learning, we examined our beliefs and available research or resources regarding our topic. At first, the superintendent led this endeavor, but the goal was to have our administrators take on the facilitator role. Allotted time depended on the content of the professional development.
4. Work Time allowed instructional leaders to work in groups of two, three, or alone to tackle challenges from the prior month’s experience (60-90 minutes).
5. Reporting Out: Each group established during work time reports out on how they would take action before the next meeting (Buysse et al., 2003; Perry et al., 1999).

Morphing the theoretical underpinnings from Buysse et al. (2003), Perry et al. (1999), and Wenger (2015), I focused on professional learning in a CoP. One of the most common educational community of practice tenets pinpoints the joint enterprise of professional development (MacPhail et al., 2014; Palincsar et al., 1998). I intended to establish the foundation for an administrative

community of practice that shifts our professional development from informational meetings to more ongoing and practice-based learning that drew attention to understanding instruction and learning in context (Buysse et al., 2003; Palincsar et al., 1998; Perry et al., 1999; Smith, 2009) by expanding the administrative team's understanding about instructional leadership. Elmore and Burney (1997) determined that professional development posed an opportunity to transform organizational cultures. Therefore, the aforementioned practice depicted the first step of many along a continuum of interventions impacting a larger vision of cultural change within our district.

Peterson (2002) expanded more deeply into specific structural arrangements of professional development that included instructional strategies. "For the most successful learning to occur, professional development for principals should use a variety of strategies that are related to the nature of the material taught and learner needs" (Peterson 2002, p. 215). I tried to remain cognizant that principals value professional development when it pinpointed instruction (Johnston et al., 2016). Thus, I wanted to avoid the temptation of intertwining managerial problem-solving during community of practice time.

3.3 Participants in the Study

The administrative team met monthly for professional development with the superintendent. At the time of the inquiry, the administrative team included me, the superintendent of schools, the director of student achievement, the technology supervisor, the special education supervisor, and the four principals. The administrative team meetings focused on improving our professional development regarding instruction as part of a greater vision that advances the culture of how we learn collaboratively. After close examination of instructional leadership, the

administrative team, over time narrowed and agreed upon utilizing the Pennsylvania Department of Education component framework or rubric of what quality performance looks like for all public school professional employees. The agreed-upon rubric component that will focus future professional development was Component 3c: Implements High-Quality Instruction.

As such, a convenience sample of the administrative team was selected for this inquiry to create an instructional leadership CoP. These folks represented a distinct class of employee responsible for multiple schools and district functions that ranged from evaluating teachers to arranging pupil transportation within the school district. I did not participate in the later described Instructional Leadership Inventories or Journal Writing Prompts so that my biases would not influence these data sets. However, I penned reflective field notes that captured my perceptions of the inquiry process and those thoughts were included in this inquiry.

Examining the thoughts of these stakeholders was crucial to understanding how they perceived and applied instructional leadership but also how they perceived working collaboratively with their colleagues to create a structure for CoP groups to exist throughout the district.

3.4 Data Collection

I took a constructivist view that reality is socially constructed, that multiple realities exist, and that those realities are context and time-dependent. Qualitative data analysis involved an interpretive view of the world that studies the participant(s) in their natural environment then strives to make sense of the phenomena (Mertens, 2015). In other words, how the participants constructed meaning from their experience(s) mattered.

As both the researcher and supervisor of the participants, I had to be mindful of the imbalance of authority that existed due to my role in the organization so that I did not influence participant responses. Herr (2014) made note of authoritarian relationships in action research, “Research subjects are participants in the research at the same time that they are often subordinates within the organizational setting. These relationships are further complicated when the action researcher is also an insider to the organization” (p. 1). Without question, how I negated power differentials and maneuvered the facilitation of our community of practice was meant to produce more insightful findings rather than the participants providing what they perceived as correct responses.

Two coexisting themes permeated my decision-making. Ensuring participant anonymity and peeling back the imbalance of authority to gain more genuine administrator responses guided the facilitation of the CoP sessions. These themes led me to investigate the benefits of journal writing.

Reflective journal writing, at times termed diary writing, was a qualitative data collection method utilized in this inquiry. A researcher-driven diary and questionnaire were pre-categorized by the researcher, whereas free-text diaries represented a more open format (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, & Lowden, 2011). Because of the small number of participants, the researcher-driven diary constituted an optimal data collection method.

Participants, through an anonymous coding method (Appendix C), responded to a predetermined journal prompt (Appendix D) amended from the indicators of the Communities of Practice Indicators Worksheet (Winton & Ferris, 2008) (Appendix E). As cited in Smith (2009), Wenger (2015) set the standard for conceptualizing a community of practice and maintains there are three integral foundations of a community of practice: domain, sense of community, and

practice (Smith, 2009). I developed prompts in line with professional reflection methods (Hatton & Smith, 1995) for the reflective journal writing that allowed for a deeper examination of team members' perceived changes and challenges in our community of practice.

In addition to monthly reflective journal writing, the participants completed an Instructional Leadership Inventory (Appendix B) at the onset and conclusion of the inquiry. While the focus of the dissertation was working in a community of practice, the value of instructional leadership was not diminished. Therefore, I amended the survey from Cantu's (2013) dissertation titled, "The Evolution of Superintendents as Instructional Leaders: Past, Present, Future" and then combined that survey's concepts with the administrative team's previously selected component of professional development (Component 3c: Implements High Quality Instruction). I added a Likert rating scale for each item listed on the inventory to gain a broader understanding of the administrative team's self-perceptions of the importance and use of instructional leadership.

The initial inventory required participants to pre-rate the importance of those concepts for instructional leadership as well as the current status of how often do your leaders use those behaviors in practice. At the conclusion of this study, participants took a post-rating inventory identical to the pre-rating inventory with one exception. A retrospective pre-rating (Appendix B) was also administered and the data collected. A retrospective pre-rating afforded an opportunity for the participants to reexamine their original pre-rating responses and then, as if to travel back in time with added knowledge, complete a second pre-rating based on what they now knew or believed to be true about instructional leadership. This was beneficial to compare if the participants changed their initial views after learning additional aspects of instructional leadership. In all, the participants completed three inventories: Pre-Instructional, Post Instructional, and Retrospective Pre-Instructional.

During this inquiry, the participants collaboratively worked to generate a conceptual understanding of instructional leadership as well as attempted to apply those newly-learned concepts in practice.

3.5 Data Analysis

I collected data through journal writing and instructional leadership inventories as described in the previous chapter. This chapter explores how I analyzed the data collected.

3.5.1 Reflective Journal Writing: Coding

Deductive analysis relies on analytical codes already in the mind of the researcher (Gilgun, 2011). Based on Winston and Ferris' (2008) Indicators of Communities of Practice Worksheet (Appendix E), I specifically looked for key words or descriptions that might prevent or be conducive to the formation of a CoP. I read the reflective journal writings and deductively coded how administrators described the changes and challenges they experienced within the CoP. The process produced key words and phrases about challenges and changes that aligned with the inquiry questions.

In addition to deductive analysis (Gilgun, 2011), in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016) offered an appreciation to the respondents' voice by drawing the researcher to exact words or phrases of the participants (Saldaña, 2016). Two rounds of deductive and in vivo coding of journal entries established categories of changes and challenges that I later used as a basis for explaining emergent

themes. Synthesis of each set of codes led to the creation of categories and then overarching themes (Saldaña, 2016) that aligned to the inquiry questions that guided this research.

3.5.2 Instructional Leadership Inventories

The Instructional Leadership Inventory frequency percentage was calculated as an indicator of relative rating placement. Participants' responses revealed differences about how they perceived the many layers of instructional leadership. Similarly, participants rated how often they activated instructional leadership strategies in their daily practices. Every participant completed all three administrations of the instructional leadership inventories, including a pre-instructional leadership inventory, post-instructional leadership inventory, and retrospective pre-instructional leadership inventory. Each instructional leadership inventory was comprised of two parts. The participants indicated how they perceived the importance of 10 instructional leadership concepts in Part I, and then in Part II they indicated how often they acted upon those same 10 leadership concepts in their own practice. By means of comparison, I analyzed changes from the Pre-Instructional Inventory and Post Instructional Inventory ratings as well as the Retrospective Pre-Instructional Leadership Inventory to the Pre-Instructional Leadership Inventory.

The low number of participants ($n=7$) limited the data spread and excluded the researcher in order to remove any bias in the findings. Statistical analysis of qualitative data, especially in studies with few participants, is not generally warranted, therefore I utilized quantitative data analysis methods to determine the participants' frequency response percentage. Hence, the limitations of the sample size must be acknowledged, and, consequently, findings from this study will not be generalized beyond the experimentally accessible population (Mertens, 2015).

3.5.3 Reflective Ethnological Field Notes

My reflective field notes denoted what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2007) defined as a fine blend of understanding the context of participants' rituals and relationships so that the researcher assimilates into the group. Because I was a CoP participant as well as the researcher, the importance of being fully present within the group took precedence, at times, over scribing field notes. Reflective field notes created a personal as well as a therapeutic account of my learning that clarified my impressions about the experiences of the CoP participants. For the most part, I entered reflective field notes whenever CoP sessions or informal leadership meetings concluded. I also penned notes as I coded the participants' journal responses as a method of connecting my initial perceptions of the data collected that compared my feelings about experiences and thoughts to those of the participants. Later, I added my thoughts about the participants' journal writings as part of the coding process to identify categories and then characterize overarching themes.

4.0 Findings

The focus of this research was to study team growth in instructional leadership in addition to identifying the changes and challenges that the administrative team encountered by participating in a CoP as an overall learning experience. The findings presented in this chapter were reached by synthesizing Reflective Field Notes, Instructional Leadership Inventories, and Reflective Journal Writing.

4.1 Instructional Leadership Inventories Part I- Findings

Part I of the Instructional Leadership Inventory presented four possible responses for participants to select how important instructional leadership was to them: *Very Important*, *Important*, *Not Very Important*, and *Unimportant*. All participants rated each instructional leadership concept, items 1-10. Table 1 displays frequency counts and percentages for Part I of the three Instructional Leadership Inventories.

Table 1. Instructional Leadership Perceptions

Item	Instructional Leadership Concept	Pre-Inventory Percentage (n)		Retrospective Pre-Inventory Percentage (n)		Post-Inventory Percentage (n)	
		Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important
1	I give regular feedback to teachers regarding how to improve instruction.	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	42.8 % (3)	57.2% (4)
2	I play an instrumental role in improving instruction in my district/school.	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)
3	I provide staff with time and resources to reflect on and improve the district's/school's past academic performance.	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)
4	I feel prepared to help improve instruction in my district/school.	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)
5	I do a good job evaluating the effectiveness of district/school instructional programs.	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)
6	I collect information/data concerning student achievement.	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)
7	I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers.	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	85.7% (6)	14.3% (1)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)
8	I maintain a focus on student achievement with my staff.	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)
9	I create opportunities to collaboratively use data/assessment to determine instructional decisions/practices.	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)
10	I consistently ensure that the district's curricula are implemented through the school or my area of supervision.	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)

4.1.1 Instructional Leadership Perceptions

The Pre-Inventory had two items with slightly higher frequency percentages. Participants ranked Items 1 and 2 as *Very Important* (57.1%, n=4) and *Important* (42.8%, n=3). The concept for Item 1 was *I give regular feedback to teachers regarding how to improve instruction*, and the concept for Item 2 was *I play an instrumental role in improving instruction in my district/school*.

For Item 7 of the Retrospective Pre-Inventory, the participants' responses presented a slightly higher frequency percentage than all other concepts with 85.7% (n=6) of the participants selecting *Very Important* and only 14.2% (n=1) of the participants responding with *Important* to *I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers (Item 7)*. For Item 2 of the Post-Inventory, the

participants' responses presented a slightly higher frequency percentage than all other concepts with 57.4% (n=4) of the participants responding with *Very Important* and 42.8% (n=3) of the participants responding with *Important* for, *I play an instrumental role in improving instruction in my district/school*.

The highest overall item rankings were from the Retrospective Pre-Inventory, Item 7 (*I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers*) 85.7% (n=6) of the participants with *Very Important* and 14.2% (n=1) *Important*, and Item 1 (*I give regular feedback to teachers regarding how to improve instruction*) had 71.4 % (n=5) of the participants noted a response of *Very Important* and 28.5% (n=2) noted a response of *Important*.

As noted in table 1, the participants ranked 100% of the concepts as either *Very Important* or *Important*. These rankings presented only slight changes in the participants' frequency percentages among the Pre-Inventory, Retrospective Pre-Inventory, and Post-Inventory for the instructional leadership concepts, *I give regular feedback to teacher regarding how to improve instruction* (Item 1) and *I maintain a focus on student achievement with my staff* (Item 8). Of the three inventories, none had the identical frequency percentages with *Very Important* and *Important* rankings across every inventory. As a result, no substantial changes in how the participants perceived instructional leadership surfaced from Part I.

4.2 Reflective Field Notes- Instructional Leadership

I felt overwhelmed with managerial tasks associated with my position. Frequently, I wondered how I could be impactful as a leader. In my notes, I wrote about instructional leadership as the vehicle for a deeper understanding of how we engage as a CoP. I described the importance

of remaining cognizant of how we learned together. Careful construction of the CoP framework mattered most. Yet, with those priorities in mind, I rushed through the first CoP session agenda. Like any learning experience I had to learn how to facilitate CoP sessions. We politely conversed about multiple educational topics that included instructional leadership and managerial tasks during our sessions. Administrators kindly requested to piggyback on each other's comments or listened quietly while their colleagues spoke.

A mass shooting occurred in a Florida school a few days prior to the second CoP session. Student-led protests permeated the news coverage. I attempted to stay on topic with our CoP agenda, but on this day the real world thrust into our lives. It hit home for me that when something becomes important to our leaders, that problem consumes their thoughts, words, and actions.

4.3 Instructional Leadership Inventories- Part II

Part II of the Pre-Instructional Inventory required participants to indicate how often they acted on 10 instructional leadership concepts. Participants completed Part II of the inventory at the onset of the study to establish a baseline of how often participants act on instructional leadership concepts. Part II of the Retrospective Pre-Instructional Leadership Inventory required participants to identify how often they acted on the 10 instructional leadership concepts after three months of working in a CoP. The Retrospective Pre-Inventory permitted the participants to think back to their Pre-Inventory responses and address the items again. Part II of the Post-Instructional Leadership Inventory required participants to identify how often they acted on the 10 instructional leadership concepts by the conclusion of the study. Table 2 displays frequency counts and percentages for Part II of the Instructional Leadership Inventories.

4.3.1 Instructional Leadership Inventory Part II

Part II of the Instructional Inventories required participants to indicate how often they acted on 10 instructional leadership concepts. These 10 concepts were identical to the concepts presented in Part I of the inventory. A rating scale that presented four possible responses for participants to select how often they acted on instructional leadership: *Very Often*, *Often*, *Occasionally*, and *Not at All*. All participants rated each instructional leadership concept, items 1-10. Table 2 displays frequency counts and percentages for Part I of the three Instructional Leadership Inventories.

Table 2. Instructional Leadership in Action

Item	Instructional Leadership Concept	Pre-Inventory Percentage (n)			Retrospective Pre-Inventory Percentage (n)			Post-Inventory Percentage (n)		
		Very Often	Often	Occ	Very Often	Often	Occ	Very Often	Often	Occ
1	I give regular feedback to teachers regarding how to improve instruction.	00.0% (0)	57.2 % (4)	42.8% (3)	00.0% (0)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)
2	I play an instrumental role in improving instruction in my district/school.	14.2% (1)	57.4 % (4)	28.5% (2)	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	14.2% (1)	71.6% (5)	14.2% (1)
3	I provide staff with time and resources to reflect on and improve the district's/school's past academic performance.	14.2% (1)	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	00.0% (0)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)
4	I feel prepared to help improve instruction in my district/school.	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	14.1% (1)	00.0% (0)	85.7% (6)	14.3% (1)	14.2% (1)	57.4 % (4)	28.5% (2)
5	I do a good job evaluating the effectiveness of district/school instructional programs.	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	14.2% (1)	42.4% (3)	42.4% (3)	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	14.2% (1)
6	I collect information/data concerning student achievement.	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	14.1% (1)	14.2% (1)	57.4 % (4)	28.4% (2)	14.2% (1)	71.6% (5)	14.2% (1)
7	I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers.	00.0% (0)	100% (7)	00.0% (0)	14.2% (1)	71.6% (5)	14.2% (1)	42.4% (3)	42.4% (3)	14.2% (1)
8	I maintain a focus on student achievement with my staff.	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	14.2% (1)	14.2% (1)	71.6% (5)	14.2% (1)
9	I create opportunities to collaboratively use data/assessment to determine instructional decisions/practices.	00.0% (0)	42.8% (3)	57.2 % (4)	00.0% (0)	14.2% (1)	85.7% (6)	00.0% (0)	57.2 % (4)	42.8% (3)
10	I consistently ensure that the district's curricula are implemented through the school or my area of supervision.	00.0% (0)	42.8% (3)	57.2 % (4)	14.2% (1)	57.4 % (4)	28.4% (2)	14.2% (1)	42.4% (3)	42.4% (3)
Key: Occasionally = Occ										

4.3.2 Instructional Leadership in Action

Two concepts from the Pre-Inventory (Item 4) *I feel prepared to help improve instruction in my district/school* and (Item 6) *I collect information/data concerning student achievement* had a slightly higher frequency percent response of *Very Often* 28.4%, (n=2), *Often* 57.4% (n=4), and *Occasionally* 14.3% (n=1) than the remaining instructional leadership concepts.

Table 2 presented one concept from the Retrospective Pre-Inventory (Item 8), *I maintain a focus on student achievement with my staff* that had a slightly higher frequency percent response *Very Often* 42.4% (n=3), *Often* 42.4% (n= 3), and *Occasionally* 14.2% (n= 1) than the remaining instructional leadership concepts.

The instructional leadership concept, *I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers* (Item 7), had a slightly higher frequency percent response of *Very Often* 42.4%, (n=3), *Often* 42.4%, (n=3), and *Occasionally* 14.2%, (n=1) than the remaining Post-Inventory concepts.

Of the four available ratings in Part II, all subjects chose one of three categories consisting of *Very Often*, *Often*, and *Occasionally*. No leader selected *Not at All*.

Pre-Inventory Item 7, *I am an instructional leader of our teachers*, *Very Often* 0.00% (n=0), *Often* 100% (n=7), and *Occasionally* 00.0% (n=0) marked the only consensus that surfaced across all items in Part II of the Instructional Leadership Inventories.

4.4 Instructional Leadership Inventory Comparison Parts I and II

Table 1 Instructional Leadership Perceptions

Item	Instructional Leadership Concept	Pre-Inventory Percentage (n)		Retrospective Pre-Inventory Percentage (n)		Post-Inventory Percentage (n)	
		Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important
1	I give regular feedback to teachers regarding how to improve instruction.	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)
2	I play an instrumental role in improving instruction in my district/school.	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)
3	I provide staff with time and resources to reflect on and improve the district's/school's past academic performance.	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)
4	I feel prepared to help improve instruction in my district/school.	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)
5	I do a good job evaluating the effectiveness of district/school instructional programs.	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)
6	I collect information/data concerning student achievement.	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)
7	I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers.	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	85.7% (6)	14.3% (1)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)
8	I maintain a focus on student achievement with my staff.	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	57.2% (4)	42.8% (3)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)
9	I create opportunities to collaboratively use data/assessment to determine instructional decisions/practices.	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)
10	I consistently ensure that the district's curricula are implemented through the school or my area of supervision.	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)

Table 2. Instructional Leadership in Action

Item	Instructional Leadership Concept	Pre-Inventory Percentage (n)			Retrospective Pre-Inventory Percentage (n)			Post-Inventory Percentage (n)		
		Very Often	Often	Occ	Very Often	Often	Occ	Very Often	Often	Occ
1	I give regular feedback to teachers regarding how to improve instruction.	00.0% (0)	57.2 % (4)	42.8% (3)	00.0% (0)	42.8% (3)	57.2% (4)	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)
2	I play an instrumental role in improving instruction in my district/school.	14.2% (1)	57.4 % (4)	28.5% (2)	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	14.2% (1)	71.6% (5)	14.2% (1)
3	I provide staff with time and resources to reflect on and improve the district's/school's past academic performance.	14.2% (1)	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	00.0% (0)	28.5% (2)	71.5% (5)	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)
4	I feel prepared to help improve instruction in my district/school.	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	14.1% (1)	00.0% (0)	85.7% (6)	14.3% (1)	14.2% (1)	57.4 % (4)	28.5% (2)
5	I do a good job evaluating the effectiveness of district/school instructional programs.	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	14.2% (1)	42.4% (3)	42.4% (3)	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	14.2% (1)
6	I collect information/data concerning student achievement.	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	14.1% (1)	14.2% (1)	57.4 % (4)	28.4% (2)	14.2% (1)	71.6% (5)	14.2% (1)
7	I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers.	00.0% (0)	100% (7)	00.0% (0)	14.2% (1)	71.6% (5)	14.2% (1)	42.4% (3)	42.4% (3)	14.2% (1)
8	I maintain a focus on student achievement with my staff.	00.0% (0)	71.5% (5)	28.5% (2)	28.5% (2)	57.4 % (4)	14.2% (1)	14.2% (1)	71.6% (5)	14.2% (1)
9	I create opportunities to collaboratively use data/assessment to determine instructional decisions/practices.	00.0% (0)	42.8% (3)	57.2 % (4)	00.0% (0)	14.2% (1)	85.7% (6)	00.0% (0)	57.2 % (4)	42.8% (3)
10	I consistently ensure that the district's curricula are implemented through the school or my area of supervision.	00.0% (0)	42.8% (3)	57.2 % (4)	14.2% (1)	57.4 % (4)	28.4% (2)	14.2% (1)	42.4% (3)	42.4% (3)
Key: Occasionally = Occ										

The presented rankings indicated only slight changes in the participants' frequency percentages among the Pre-Inventory, Retrospective Pre-Inventory, and Post-Inventory for Parts 1 and 2. As a result of these slight changes, no substantial changes surfaced about how often the participants acted on instructional leadership concepts.

As presented in Table 2 of the Pre-Inventory Part II, the participants ranked Item 7, *I am an instructional leader of our teachers*, *Very Often* 0.00% (n=0), *Often* 100% (n=7), and *Occasionally* 00.0% (n=0). The Pre-Inventory, Part II ranking of Item 7 was the only occurrence

of an item that had participant consensus throughout administration of the Instructional Leadership Inventories.

The most notable difference between Part I and Part II of the Instructional Leadership Inventories was an additional administrator ranking in Part II. As noted in Table 1, the participants ranked 100% of the concepts as either “*Very Important*” or “*Important*”. As noted in Table 2, all subjects selected one of three categories “*Very Often*”, “*Often*”, and “*Occasionally*” in Part II. The additional ranking in Part II created slightly more variance in the frequency percentages than in Part I of the inventory. Subsequently, while all participants viewed the Instructional Leadership Concepts as important they were unable to act on those concepts with the same consistency.

4.5 Reflective Field Notes-Instructional Leadership

While our CoP sessions focused on aspects of instructional leadership, rarely did the participants share how they incorporated those concepts in practice. As a result, an inner turmoil emerged between what I believed would happen among our team and what actually occurred.

In contrast to my CoP session experience, noticeable changes in practice evolved, which became more obvious to me outside of our sessions. For example, two administrators who attended a workshop on Human Centered Design presented by the LUMA Institute, conducted a hypothetical exercise about what teaching assignments might look like if we based those assignment on students’ social, emotional, and academic needs. We started with a cross-section of our CoP that, along with me, included five administrators. Those redesigning teacher assignments

meetings, promoted a deeper examination of our beliefs about learning and instruction more so than any CoP session. Our interactions altered previous views about teaching assignments and students' needs. I witnessed a passion flow among those administrators that, until that time, was undetectable. Those administrators insisted that the reassignment of staff based on students' needs would better promote student success. At the request of the administrative team, we as a unified administrative team presented these changes to the K-6 staff.

My experience was as eye-opening about instructional leadership as it was confusing because the administrators were acting as instructional leaders, yet they did not share those experiences during our CoP sessions. I started to wonder if an ambiguity of what instructional leadership was presented unintended barriers to our CoP discussions, or if my role of session facilitator negatively influenced the participants' willingness to share.

4.6 Community of Practice- Reflective Journal Writing

In addition to learning about the instructional leadership of the administrative team, this inquiry simultaneously analyzed how the administrative team functioned in a CoP. I designed the three reflective journal writings so that I could access a more tacit understanding of how the district leadership team perceived their craft and acted as a CoP. The seven CoP participants responded to all journal writing requests. The participants completed one reflective journal writing prompt (Appendix D) monthly over a three-month span for a total of three reflective journal writings per participant. Journal writing Parts A, B, and C focused the leaders on specific elements of a CoP. As the researcher, I looked for how those leaders viewed changes as a collective group. In all three

journal writings, Part D explicitly inquired about challenges the participants encountered in practice or within the community of practice.

4.6.1 Reflective Journal Writing: Categories

Because of the limited amount of time provided for journal writing, I changed the first three reflective statements/questions so that each prompt included one section about a specific CoP component. Prompt 1, Section A targeted the CoP component of Domain. Prompt 2, Section B targeted the CoP component of Community. Finally, Prompt 3, Section C targeted the CoP component of Practice as modified from Wenger (2015). In all three journal prompts, Section D explicitly inquired about challenges the participants encountered in practice or within the community of practice and Section E explicitly inquired about changes the participants encountered in practice or within the community of practice.

According to Wegner (2015), Domain is described as being more than friends in that it becomes an identity defined by a shared field of interest. Members are committed to that domain and value their collective competencies while learning from each other. The Community consisted of relationships that helped members learn from each other. More than having commonality, community blended interaction and learning from and with other members of the CoP. Practice included the development of shared resources such as stories, experiences, tools, skill at addressing reoccurring problems. The members are considered true practitioners of a CoP as modified from Wenger (2015).

From the reflective journal writings, I extracted how leaders conveyed challenges or changes about their experience in CoP. Based on the descriptions written by the participants, I developed relevant qualitative categories.

4.6.2 Community of Practice: Categories- Challenges

Participants described challenges that at times caused frustration, impeded their work, or created barriers that influenced how they engaged in learning either in practice or as CoP member. For example, participants wrote about a Lack of Trust in their responses to prompts 1, 2, and 3. While other challenges emerged from the participants' reflections, I found that Detractors from Work, Not Enough Focused Time, Desire for More Meaningful conversations, Lack of Genuine Relationships, and Hesitation to Participate in the CoP had the most relevance to this inquiry.

Table 3. CoP Challenges

Categories	Participants Who Referenced the Category		
	Prompt 1 Percentage (n)	Prompt 2 Percentage (n)	Prompt 3 Percentage (n)
Lack of Trust	43% (3)	86% (6)	72% (5)
Detractors from Work	43% (3)	43% (3)	57% (4)
Not Enough Focused Time	29% (2)	14% (1)	43% (3)

Table 3 (continued)

Desire More Meaningful Conversations	29% (2)	43% (3)	57% (4)
Lack of Genuine Relationships	14% (1)	43% (3)	43% (3)
Hesitation to Participate within the CoP	14% (1)	43% (3)	29% (2)

I depicted the six categories that emerged from the deductive analysis of Reflective Journal Writing Prompts 1-3 in table 3. I coded the reflective journal responses through a deductive method (Gilgun, 2011) directed at uncovering challenges the team experienced. The deductive method relied upon analysis of the CoP's challenges codes that were previously established (Gilgun, 2011).

The data analysis revealed that three participants mentioned the first category, a *Lack of Trust*, in Prompt 1. In Prompt 2, six participants mentioned a *Lack of Trust*, and then in Prompt 3 five participants mentioned a *Lack of Trust*. The next category was *Detractors from Work*. In Prompts 1 and 2, three administrators wrote about *Detractors from Work*. That number increased to four participants in Prompt 3. *Not Enough Focused Time* was mentioned by two participants in Prompt 1, one participant in Prompt 2, and three participants in Prompt 3. Two participants mentioned the fourth category, *Desire More Meaningful Conversations* in Prompt 1. In Prompt 2, that number increased to three participants and then to four participants in Prompt 3. One administrator wrote about a *Lack of Genuine Relationships* in Prompt 1. In Prompts 2 and 3 the same number of administrators, three, wrote about *Lack of Genuine Relationships*. A *Hesitation to Participate within the CoP* was mentioned by one participant. That number increased to three participants in Prompt 2 and then decreased to two participants in Prompt 3.

4.6.3 Community of Practice: Categories- Changes

Participants described changes that inspired different ways of working collaboratively as well as what the team noticed about their interactions during and outside of CoP sessions that positively influenced how they engaged in learning either from practice or as CoP member. While other changes emerged from the participants' reflections, I found that Appreciating Strengths of Others, Talking More with CoP Members, Polite Interactions, Learning from Others, Listening More Intently had the most relevance to this inquiry.

Table 4. CoP Changes

Categories	Participants Who Referenced the Category		
	Prompt 1 Percentage (n)	Prompt 2 Percentage (n)	Prompt 3 Percentage (n)
Appreciating Strengths of Others	86% (6)	29% (2)	43% (3)
Talking More with CoP Members	57% (4)	43% (3)	29% (2)
Polite Interactions	43% (3)	72% (5)	14% (1)
Learning from Others	43% (3)	86% (6)	57% (4)
Listening More Intently	29% (2)	57% (4)	57% (4)

I depicted the five categories that emerged from the deductive analysis of Prompts 1-3 in Table 4. Six participants mentioned the first category, *Appreciating Strengths of Others*, in Prompt

1. In Prompt 2, two participants mentioned *Appreciating Strengths of Others*, and then in Prompt 3 three participants mentioned *Appreciating Strengths of Others*. Four participants mentioned the second category, *Talking More with CoP Members*, in Prompt 1. In Prompt 2, that number decreased to three participants and then to two participants in Prompt 3. *Polite Interactions* were mentioned by three participants in Prompt 1, five participants in Prompt 2, and one participant in Prompt 3. Three participants mentioned the fourth category, *Learning from Others*, in Prompt 1. In Prompt 2, that number increased to six participants and then decreased to four participants in Prompt 3. Finally, two participants wrote about a *Listening More Intently* in Prompt 1. In Prompts 2 and 3, the same number of participants, four, wrote about *Listening More Intently*.

4.7 Community of Practice- Reflective Field Notes

Following the first CoP data collection, I hesitated to read the participants' journal writings. I blamed procrastination as the culprit, but now, looking back, I feared that the team would describe my leadership as ineffective or that I was the clueless new guy. Fear of failure fueled an anxiety about reading the participants' responses, so much so that I waited a few days before reading and coding journal responses. It was not until I mentally situated myself in the position of a learner that I felt ready to code. Even then, reading one or two journal responses in a setting marked all that I could complete in a coding session. Eventually, reading participant responses became easier, because my focus shifted to learning how to lead a CoP rather than my ego.

The administrators appreciated working collaboratively outside of CoP sessions. Two of the administrators whom I presumed had the least opportunity to focus on instructional leadership surprisingly applied instructional leadership concepts into practice more than the other

administrators. Their actions led to greater curiosity about how they accomplished this feat, prompting curiosity about the relationship between stress and peak performance. In addition, Participant #347 stated that the work session about teacher assignments and students' needs created a pathway for the involved administrators to “assist one another to push beyond the status quo.” He or she continued that the group pushed aside personal or professional barriers that might have previously stifled the team, freeing themselves of perceived barriers that as a result promoted staffing assignments that best-supported student well-being and academic programs.

Initially, I overlooked the emphasis that the CoP members placed on trust even though it cropped up in front of me. While I coded journal responses, I became much more aware of the role trust played within our team. In preparation for the third CoP session, I added trust as a discussion topic. This discussion marked the first time that I picked up on multiple administrators speaking passionately about a problem. We talked at length about what trust was, looked for signs where trust was evident, and identified what trust meant to our team. The conversations were lively and enthusiastic. By far, the administrative team's dialogue and interaction between all CoP members was more prominent than any meeting to date. The team had the mutual opinion that our beliefs and actions should align and that we build trust through authentic and less formal experiences. Aligned with potential iterations of trust were concepts that included honesty, truth, and open-mindedness.

I noticed greater commonality among the types of challenges cited in the journal writings. For example, three participants cited *Hesitation to Participate within the CoP*, *Desire More Meaningful Conversations*, *Lack of Genuine Relationship*, and *Detractors from Focused Work* as challenges. After coding the journal responses from Prompt 2, I noticed that categories surfaced about *Detractors from Work* and *More Meaningful Conversations*. As I reflected, I wondered if I

misinterpreted our team's need to discuss the student protests during the CoP session. Possibly, what I recalled as a learning experience, others perceived differently. Finally, the participants consistently wrote about the notion of time and what time meant to them. Time represented CoP participants' time together or that important or unimportant job-related demands created a deficit of time.

4.8 Community of Practice: Emerging Themes-Challenges

The third cycle coding constructed themes about the challenges the administrators experienced. As recommend by Saldaña (2016), essential themes were kept to a minimum for a more coherent analysis. As noted in table 5, essential themes about challenges included *building trust within professional relationships* and *taking intentional action to complete important tasks*.

4.8.1 Community of Practice: Emerging Themes- Building Trust Within Professional Relationships

I generated themes from previously established categories about challenges that confronted the administrative team. Two themes discussed in this section best describe the challenges that the administrative team faced during this inquiry. One emerging theme enveloped the on-going need to build trust within professional relationships. Tschannen-Moran (2001), captured the multi-faceted complexity of trust that included concepts such as honesty, truthfulness, and the alignment of words and deeds. Furthermore, she expanded on how trust generated a sense of vulnerability among professionals who worked together.

The following excerpts from the reflective journal writing provide examples of the first theme, building trust within professional relationships. Prompt 1, Section A asked: *How do you view the internal motivation of the community members?* Participant #789 responded: *When other members of your group might be in opposition to an idea or project that you are working on, it can be a de-humanizing experience to feel your work or passion isn't important to the greater group.* Participant #399 responded to Prompt 2, Section D that asked participants to reflect on barriers to utilize their skill(s) or learning a new skill(s) in practice or within the community of practice by stating,

I have to be careful to not be perceived as an intruder and overstep my boundaries when trying to encourage change. Because I see things from a different perspective, others could easily mistake my assistance as an intrusion into their "territory."

Participant #555 responded to the Prompt 3, Section D, Question 1 about Community that asked participants how successful they are at turning principles/values of the community into realized practice by stating,

Where I often see issue of a group not functioning into a practice is when there is not trust or some of the group members do not wish to participate in the group. Our community of learning for administrators is tough. First, we are small, and secondly, we do not have the trust of the group.

Participant #817 responded to the Prompt 2, Section B, Question 2, that asked participants what their sense of members' interaction in the community as a conversation, as opposed to a series of one-sided reports, by stating,

When you trust your team and colleagues, you form a powerful bond that helps you work and communicate more effectively. If you trust the people you work with, you can be open and

honest in your thoughts and actions. We communicate all day, whether we are sending emails, texts or meeting face-to-face. The better and more effectively we communicate with members of our administrative team in a conversation with the richer our relationships will become.

Participant #500 wrote about trust as he or she responded to Prompt 1, Section D, regarding Barriers to Utilizing My Skill(s) or Learning (a) New Skill(s) In Practice or Within the Community of Practice. The participant wrote,

Currently some barriers in my practice with the community would be working with all different perspectives within the community, how to work together for the greater good, how to trust and building relationships amongst my colleagues, and how to ensure that what I am doing impacts the community in a positive way.

Participant #789 in response to prompt 2, section D described the authenticity necessary for trust to emerge, *“The biggest barrier that I see between administrations within the community of practice is trust in relationships. I have quickly noticed within our administrative community of practice that there is a lack of authenticity between our actions and our conversations.”*

4.8.2 Community of Practice: Emerging Theme- Taking Intentional Action to Complete Important Tasks

Another emerging theme that surfaced from the administrative team members’ responses was taking intentional action to complete important tasks. Participants noted that many demands have been put upon them, oftentimes, all at once (Corcoran et al., 2013). As a result, this urgency overload influences how administrators determine what to act on daily, especially when taking into consideration that administrators continuously are pressed for time.

The following excerpts from the reflective journal writing provide examples of the second theme, taking intentional action to complete important tasks. Participant #500 wrote in response to Prompt 3, Section C, Question 2, What common problems do you express a desire to solve? *“As a community of learners, we all have different goals and tasks to complete/achieve.”*

Participant #817 wrote in response to Prompt 3, Section D, Barriers to utilizing my skill(s) or learning (a) new skill(s) in practice or within the community of practice? *“...being an administrator, manager, diplomat, teacher, disciplinarian, counselor, school secretary, school nurse, curriculum leader etc., sometimes all within one school day.”* As Participant #817 described how multiple daily responsibilities potentially agitate the disconnect between knowing and doing, he or she reflected:

It is definitely a balancing act, and principals must be proficient in all of these areas as well as able to fluidly move from one role to another...there seems to always be a deficit of time for total execution of instructional activities...

Participant 789 wrote in response to Prompt 1, Section D, Barrier to utilizing my skill(s) or learning (a) new skill (s) in practice or within the community of practice?:

Oftentimes we get caught up talking about student issues, issues that are high energy and low impact, or the day to day of the building. While those conversation are important and need to happen, they monopolize our time and keep us from working on the strategic ideas or high impact ideas.

Participant #555 wrote about building issues as a distractor in response to Prompt 2, Section D, Barriers to utilizing my skill(s) or learning (a) new skill (s) in practice or within the community of practice? The participant wrote, *“...building issues needing attention for several days. Student needs have taken my focus off our team discussions, etc.”*

4.9 Community of Practice: Emerging Themes- Changes

The process of coding changes presented a more daunting task because it appeared that the participants described many actions as challenges even when responding to questions about change. However, subject #500 provided a firm example of changes as challenges in response to Prompt 1, Section E, *What changes have you observed in you and your colleagues in practice or within the community of practice?* That participant noted that the team paid more attention to each other, but the challenge of transformation takes a great deal of time. The participant wrote, “*At this time I believe I have observed my colleagues listening to each other and taking it all in. We continue to have work to do and miles to go...*”

4.9.1 Community of Practice: Emerging Themes- CoP Members Contribute to Each

Other’s Learning

Two themes surfaced through the analysis of participants’ reflective journal writings that best describe the changes that the administrative team encountered during the ongoing CoP sessions. The first emerging theme was that the CoP members began to contribute to each other’s learning during the CoP sessions. Many in the field of education look at professional development as fundamental to school improvement efforts as well as one of the fundamental underpinnings of transforming school culture. Yet, much remains unknown about what is currently available to school administrators in terms of on-the-job supports (Johnston et al., 2016). To this point, principals appreciate when the emphasis of professional learning is dedicated to instructional leadership (Johnston et al., 2016). Furthermore Wenger (2015) expanded on the phenomena of learning together as being a crucial indicator that a CoP is functioning as it should. In other words,

administrators appreciated professional development that incorporated their own learning through learning together with others about instructional techniques.

The following excerpts from the reflective journal writing provide examples of the theme, CoP members contribute to each other's learning. Participant #399 wrote about how he or she assist their colleagues with learning, *"I try to use the information to help the other administrators see the broader perspective as they deal with problems."* Participant #348 described in his or her writing a context about how we communicate within our system. The participant wrote:

The communication between each administrative member continues to refine and link to purposeful District system talk. This leads us to discuss the differences in how we view the importance of certain concepts as well as connections are made between goals/concepts/learning at each building within the whole K-12 system.

Participant #347 described the benefits of learning from CoP members in Prompt 2, Section B, Question 3, "...I find some of my peers' credibility and documentation to be more in-depth so that I am able to build an application for staff or myself.

Participant #500 in Prompt 2, Section B, Question 1 wrote about their perception of joint discourse as a proponent of learning from the CoP members,

I believe that it is not always what you say, but rather how you say it that matters. There will always be differing opinions within a team/unit and when engaging in these discussions or activities you learn best by learning together.

Participant #817 Prompt 3, Section C, Question 3 described how they generated new knowledge. "...from my interactions within the community of practice by sharing knowledge and promoting learning through our building and district goals, solving problems and issue and completing projects." Finally, participant #789 described how the CoP influenced their learning,

First, the conversation that we have as a group had helped me gain large understandings of how my fellow administrators think and function. The conversations have helped me build relationships with those administrators, which ultimately give me insight on how to leverage change in the building.

4.9.2 Community of Practice: Emerging Themes- Focusing on What Group Members Say or Do

The second emerging theme was best described as a change where the participants gradually began paying more attention to what the group members would say or do during the CoP sessions. This is a significant change from how our leadership meetings played out prior to incorporating the CoP model for professional development where participants sat quietly and shared suggestions to support their peers on a limited basis. For example, participant #555 wrote about how he or she pays attention to CoP members when he/she stated, *“I assist in conversations, listening, and will help where necessary. I am willing to share opinions and disagree or give another perspective if need be.”* Participant #399 in response to Prompt 2, Section B, Question 1, described how at times his or her actions are grounded in the perceived engagement of CoP members, *“I will listen to what other have to say first and then comment later. Sometimes, if the discussion is one sided, I will try to include the silent party with some direct questions.”* Participant #0128 provided a specific change noticed that reflected how the participant viewed what CoP members say and do, *“The biggest change I believe is that there is actual conversation about technology.”* Furthermore, Participant #347 Prompt #2, Section B, Question 1 wrote, *“...I observe and listen to each member's input...”* Participant #500 described the value of paying attention to what CoP members say and do in Prompt 2, Section E, *“I am not the only one with*

valuable information and therefore expect that others have information just as valuable which will make me better at what I do.”

5.0 Findings

My problem of practice focused on my inability to provide quality professional development to my team and increase student outcomes. To improve this problem, I felt that it was essential for me to better understand my capacity as an instructional leader as well as the impact of my leadership on the administrative team. In my role as superintendent, I desired a deeper comprehension of our team's instructional leadership capacity wanted to know if we experienced a community of practice as a team would this experience improve our capacity. The following describes the findings and how they answer the three inquiry questions:

Q1: How did participating in an administrative community of practice focused on instructional leadership impact the administrative team's instructional leadership skills?

One major finding addressed this question. Participants reported a disconnect between the perceived importance of instructional leadership and their actions.

CoP participants consistently recognized the importance of instructional leadership in their administrative roles. However, participants indicated less frequent use of instructional leadership concepts in practice, which revealed a disconnect in the nexus of believing instructional leadership is essential and actuating those concepts. I propose two reasons to explain this disconnect. First, simply knowing instructional leadership concepts and understanding the importance of effective instructional leadership to the school and district may not necessarily create or translate to the ability to enact that knowledge in practice (Roberts, 2006). Secondly, participation in a CoP may not always lead to changes in practice, because school leaders do not readily alter their biases about

management and leadership, or regarding how they interact with other professionals. These predispositions can impede change rather than advance it (Roberts, 2006).

Q2: What challenges did a small, suburban school district administrative team need to overcome as they operationalized a community of practice focused on instructional leadership?

Three findings addressed this question. First, building trust is crucial for establishing productive professional relationships. Trust is one of the identifiable limitations to a CoP reported in the literature (e.g. Roberts, 2006), and difficulty establishing trust was one of the primary challenges for the administrative team in this study. For example, the highest number of participants mentioned a “Lack of Trust” in every journal prompt, Prompt 1 three out seven participants, Prompt 2 six out of seven participants, and Prompt 3 five out of seven participants. Concerns about trust surfaced so frequently during the data collection that I included it as a discussion item on one of the CoP agendas. While the CoP team acknowledged the value of trust, they depicted a *lack of trust* among the team in their writings as well as in conversations during CoP sessions. The lack of trust reported by the participants is likely an effect of standardized tests and other accountability measures in the state. School rankings and published test scores promote more competition than collaboration among administrators who are vying to be the highest ranked schools. Because of this competition, trust amongst administrators is not something that is well-developed or cultivated within school districts. School leaders must keep at the forefront of their thinking that a lack of trust breeds distrust, and that distrust will negate transformational change efforts (Tschannen-Moran, 2001) The toxicity of distrust negatively influences communication, because information that should be disclosed among colleagues becomes distorted (Tschannen-Moran, 2001) or knowledge is left unshared (Roberts, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Second, competing priorities challenge school and district administrators to prioritize instructional leadership. School leaders encounter competing priorities as part of their daily experience. Multiple tasks might become urgent at once (Corcoran et al., 2013) such as parent phone calls, student discipline, and building upkeep, which often takes away from the importance of instructional leadership efforts. Participant #817 described, “It is definitely a balancing act,” further explaining, “Principals must be proficient in all of these areas as well as able to fluidly move from one role to another. There seems to always be a deficit of time for total execution of instructional activities.” Further complicating this for leaders in my study many believe it is unacceptable to make errors. As a result, when competing priorities hold the same level of importance, it is a challenge to prioritize instructional leadership tasks. Despite many distractors the administrative were able to act on instructional leadership, yet opportunities were also missed due to these interruptions.

Third, “change” in professional practice always involves “challenge”. Participants consistently communicated challenges more so than changes in how they engaged as a CoP as well as how they changed their role to meet new challenges. Even when a prompt specifically inquired about changes in practice or how the CoP participants engage with each other, the participants’ responses denoted challenges to overcome. For example, one of the administrators responded to the question, “What changes have you observed in you and your colleagues in practice or within the community of practice?” by writing about the challenge of having more work than time available, *“At this time I believe I have observed my colleagues listening to each other and taking it all in. We continue to have work to do and miles to go...”*

Overwhelmingly, participants perceived changes as challenges when our potential solutions put prevailing norms or cultural values at odds (Waters & Marzano, 2006) with closely

held practices or beliefs (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Participants may have responded this way because autonomy in practice exists in classrooms as well as the way administrators manage their areas of supervision. This autonomy does not readily embrace external pressure for change. For a school leader to alter their practice, they often must set aside current practices or biases about their professional culture that they believe works or comes naturally. For administrators, the slightest request such as asking teachers to submit their lesson plans on a different date is rarely met with complete compliance. This phenomenon came to light when the administrative team confronted existing beliefs about instruction as well as learning as a CoP because they have an intellectual as well as culture expectations about what an instructional leader should represent.

Q3: What practice-based changes occurred as a result of focusing the efforts of a community of practice on instructional leadership?

Two findings addressed this question. First, a Community of Practice facilitates shared learning. Concentrated professional development on instructional improvements can transform school culture (Elmore & Burney, 1997). Learning in an instructional leadership CoP marked a significant change in how administrative team members contributed to the learning and training of others. Participant #789 wrote about these contributions as, “collective intellectual resources, skillsets, and emotional fortitude of each other.” As CoP members became comfortable learning from each other, I noticed changes outside of the CoP setting. Collaboratively, the participants applied new knowledge and skills to various aspects of their professional roles such as redesigning teaching assignments based on student needs. Organic professional opportunities provided a

gateway for shared learning, which led to shared decision-making that facilitated learning from other CoP members.

Second, participants shared more openly through their written reflections rather than in conversation. The participants' writings symbolized a passage into the fragile underpinnings of what matters most to our team. Previously unrevealed thoughts freely traveled to me concerning the opinions, fears, or desires of the CoP participants. For the first time, I possessed an all-access pass into the minds of the administrators. Written reflections identified gaps between theory and practice so that individuals could rethink prior assumptions to advance their practice and themselves as learners (Wesley & Buysse, 2001). To that end, participants depicted CoP functionality gaps, questioned perceptions of what it meant to be a CoP member, and communicated struggles associated with instructional leadership that they did not disclose with the group.

Instruments that inform practice such as reflective writing often get pushed aside in favor of other responsibilities perceived as more critical (Wesley & Buysse, 2001). One participant noted, "spending time to sit, write and reflect on my own learning has been impactful on me. While I am constantly reiterating on my own process and things that are important to me, I don't spend as much time on reflecting on my part in the system as a whole." Designated journal writing time in the CoP yielded insightful thinking about the benefits of reflection as a practice for supporting effective instructional leadership.

6.0 Implications, Limitations and Recommendations

The overarching goal of this inquiry was the transformation of an administrative team's culture of learning. I implemented an instructional leadership CoP as a catalyst to better understand how district administrators engaged with instructional leadership and experienced the challenges of instructional leadership in their practice. When implementing an instructional leadership CoP, adaptive changes occur on a messy continuum such as overcoming issues with trust or changes in practices or beliefs about leadership surface as challenges. This type of change requires patience and is challenging for the facilitator and participants.

Tacit Understanding. The findings concluded that participants reported a disconnect between the perceived importance of instructional leadership and their actions. The implication is to transform tacit understandings into explicit actions.

The next school year, I will provide structured time and opportunity for reflection regarding what the administrators believed to be examples of instructional leadership and why. When administrators begin to identify what job-embedded practices are indicative of instructional leadership, this builds coherence. If this should occur then, the opportunity exists to recognize valuable patterns and connectivity between principle and practice, hence making hard-to-describe practices explicit and shareable.

Trust as a Foundation. The findings concluded that building trust is crucial for establishing productive professional relationships. The implication is without trust an effective Community of Practice cannot exist. Moving forward, every member will facilitate a CoP session based on the previously described framework that incorporates reflective writing, air time, focused learning, work time, and reporting out. From this facilitation, we should see each other not only as

leaders but also as people who work hand-in-hand to solve problems without easy answers, which builds empathy. If we nurture empathy through sharing similar experiences, we may become more trusting as well as more in-tune of other stakeholders' perceptions. Hence, our experiences should purge the competition of school rankings and guide us toward learning from inquiry. Should this occur, then our culture of learning can transform into learning with and from each other through a Community of Practice.

Competing Priorities Require Short-Term Planning. The findings concluded that competing priorities challenge school and district administrators to prioritize instructional leadership. This implication is to set short-term goals, monitor them, and report. Setting concise, short-term goals within the realm of administrators' influence allows leaders to focus on critical instructional observation. As administrators frequently observe instruction using a specific monitoring tool paired with a criteria-based feedback system, they should make greater sense of classroom teaching. Lateral accountability that further reinforces our focus comes from reporting out these experiences to the team. Promoting successful student learning that can be extended beyond the Community of Practice grows from both administrators and teachers sharing common classroom instructional knowledge.

Change and Challenge- Long-Term Commitment. The findings concluded that "change" in professional practice always involves "challenge". The implication is to understand that people are the system. I will provide Human Centered Design training for the administrative team during the upcoming school year. We will examine systemic problems by generating multiple iterative solutions. These iterations will potentially eliminate ineffective solutions by considering the people inside our system. If we start to conceive highly useful and desirable outcomes, we should cultivate an immunity against quick-fix school improvement measures. If administrators

grant themselves permission to patiently learn about as well as understand problems as others perceive them, we should be more accepting of change.

Extending PAR and CoPs Across Schools. The findings concluded that a Community of Practice facilitates shared learning. The implication is to extend action research into school buildings. I will encourage Community of Practice participants to create state mandated Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) with small teams of teachers. A common interest of improving instruction can be created through a joint administrator-teacher SLO. Because of this jointure, principals and teachers might become more supportive of learning from and applying instructional methods in context. If principals and teachers unite toward achieving a goal, there is greater opportunity to enact action research or improvement science as natural part of shared learning.

Using Written Reflection for Sharing. The findings concluded that participants shared more openly through their written reflections. The implication is to build a different perspective from various views.

I intend to have the administrative team examine solutions to challenges by utilizing Human Centered Design. As administrators start to investigate problems, they might realize that others experience similar problems. Administrators might detect relevance in how others experience or view these problems. In the end, administrators might be more courageous in initiating deeper conversations about common issues. It is my hope that the use of a Community of Practice might spread throughout our organization so that we can advance action research and improvement science from each other's' experiences. In essence, this can create an on-going cycle of knowledge building from our experiences.

6.1 Limitations of the Research

The superintendent represented the direct supervisor of the participants as well as the primary investigator of this study. Due to the level of authority granted to a superintendent, there is an obvious imbalance of authority between the administrative team and me. The difference of authority levels might have influenced the participants' responses. Even though I ensured an anonymous method of responding to the Instructional Leadership Inventories as well as reflective journal writing, it is conceivable that some participants might have answered in ways that they thought would be beneficial to me or potentially sway my thinking on a particular topic. For example, if a leader was not apt to participate in the CoP, their responses might reflect wording that speaks poorly of the experience.

Furthermore, in participatory action research, the participants have a voice about what is learned and the process of learning to take social action where an imbalance of power exists (McIntyre, 2008). The contextual challenge here is that the superintendent of schools by title executes a known or unknown imbalance of power. In other words, the researcher embodies the imbalance of power. In this study, I established the framework of the CoP. While the participants had a voice, that voice was limited. I am left uncertain if they did or would have expressed any concerns with the CoP framework or altered it in some fashion. Future studies might prove more beneficial from having someone outside of the agency with no authority differential as the primary researcher.

Additionally, as the researcher and superintendent, I was learning about myself while simultaneously learning about the administrative team, which detracted from how quickly I was able to process journal reflections. Being the CoP leader, superintendent, and researcher created unintended complications when it came to internalizing data from the perspective of learning as a

leader and learning as a researcher. To put it a different way, while trying to figure out how the CoP participants dealt with changes and challenges, I too was having the same experience. Moreover, the researcher should possess a greater comfort in learning about themselves at the same time that they explore how a team of people learn.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Study

This study described factors about instructional leadership and changes and challenges of working in a CoP. Future inquiries might explore the readiness of school and district leaders to take on such work or preferences in learning about instructional leadership. Do they favor one method of reflection over another? What makes a nebulous concept such as instructional leadership more actionable in practice? Would administrators consider joining a CoP if it were driven by a colleague rather than the superintendent? How to build trust in a CoP? How accountability measures (especially school ranking systems) impact the culture of school and district leadership? How does school rankings detract from building trust in CoPs? How to reframe change so that it's not automatically viewed as challenge? How to support administrators working amid multiple distractions so they can focus on instructional leadership, Future exploration of value about how to conduct participatory action research when the researcher symbolizes the potential imbalance of power could shed light on the following questions: How ready is the superintendent to learn specifics about their leadership that they might not be prepared to hear? In what ways might power differentials be negated?

7.0 Personal Leadership Reflection

Entering a new school district as a novice superintendent, I recognized the expectation to soundly lead and manage the school district, which at the time felt overwhelming. I felt a higher level of accountability as well as responsibility to a community, school board, staff, and students than I was ever subjected to in previous administrative experiences. Often, I questioned my ability to lead a school district, which triggered some trepidation about my capacity to head an administrative team. I imagine that some other newly-hired superintendents might have a similar experience.

Compounding my apprehension, as I embarked on my journey as a leader of a school district, I simultaneously started my first-year as a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. I felt overwhelmed with managerial tasks associated with my new position in addition to being consumed with doctoral studies. Frequently, I wondered how I could be impactful as a leader while avoiding the trap door of the “Jack-of-all-Trades” (Gutmore & Plotts, 2006) superintendent, a leader that possesses a variety of skills but masters none. “Increased pressures of accountability”, can create a “Jack-of-all-Trades manager” rather than an instructional leader (Gutmore & Plotts, 2006, p.34). Personifying that type of superintendent at the time seemed inevitable because of the sheer amount of responsibility thrust upon me all at once. I sensed a persistent nudge to accept the warm embrace of the status quo rather than transforming it.

As a new doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh, I was introduced to a different conceptualization of leadership that helped me to shape a new understanding about inquiry. My doctoral studies introduced me to the concept of “wicked problems.” Deeply embedded dilemmas within organizations that leaders might thoughtfully examine through action research to transform

their organizations (Camillus, 2008). It became clearer that successful schools require instructional leadership throughout the administration, starting at the top. I began to see the need for a longer and more involved cultural change, leading a district through a transformation. I decided that sitting behind my desk, succumbing to the pressures and accountability of the job would not scar my superintendency. I would lead *as a learner* even if the process became messy or painful.

Previously, professional development was routinely “sit and get” and more times than not, resembled the disjointed, “crazy quilt” of opportunities that many leaders experience (Peterson, 2002, p.217). As a result, I considered various forms of interventions that would enhance our professional development. I knew a change would require learning by both myself and the administrative team. In schools, places of learning, it seems that the phenomena of students learning from their mistakes is permissible and acceptable. Conversely a belief exists that educators cannot make mistakes, especially at the administrative and supervisory level.

Starting small and being mindful of where to start presented a reasonable first step to alter professional development. I attempted an intervention that might positively influence student success as well as how the administrative team learns together. The biggest, and what I hoped to be the most impactful change, was restructuring the administrative team's professional development through a CoP. I modeled what I trusted our team would evolve into, learners.

The two most impactful renderings from this process on me were the perception of trust and leading as a learner. We as administrators tightly hold our experiences close to us, which dictates who and when we trust others. It is almost as if administrators have a sixth sense that determines if who they interact with represents a professional threat or not. If they perceive some negative consequence might result from an interaction, they are less likely to share, and unknowingly barriers are constructed. Because I am solely responsible for the evaluation of this

group, I sense a natural barrier to trusting me in that I represent a potential threat to an administrator's performance rating. Also being a leader who wants to support the learning of our team, the dichotomy of evaluator and facilitator of learning lessens my ability to build trusting professional relationships with the administrative team. Therefore, determining ways to minimize this power differential remains at the forefront of my thinking and is quite frustrating. I find myself unsure of how I might overcome such an obvious barrier to trust based on what I recognize about how we perceive trust.

Leading as a learner symbolizes the execution of exciting tasks such as designing professional development and orchestrating conversations about instructional improvements. However, to indeed lead as a learner I must become more mindful of the impact I have on the team's learning. Furthermore, to deepen my leadership capacity, I require honest, accurate feedback on my abilities from the group so that I can learn. Reading potential negative views about me caused the most anxiety during this process and even now. For example, it took days to muster the courage to read the first set of participant journal writings because I feared to learn something about my leadership that I was not ready to see. While I accept that discourse and learning walk hand-in-hand, that walk is not easy.

While this research has concluded, my passion for instructional leadership grows. Several administrators and I participated in Human Centered Design training sponsored by the LUMA Institute and our instructional leadership CoP continues. Building trust and supporting joint learning remains at the forefront of my decision-making. I experience more comfort in my role than I did when this process started, yet I internally question if I am doing the best that I can to lead as a learner in a way that builds trust.

Appendix A Inquiry Methods

Table 5. Inquiry Methods Table

Inquiry Questions	Method	Evidence	Data Analysis
<p>Q1: <i>How did participating in an administrative community of practice focused on instructional leadership impact the administrative team's instructional leadership skills?</i></p>	<p><u>Instructional Leadership Inventory</u></p> <p>The initial inventory required the participants to use a Likert scale to rate the importance and current status (one's level of use in practice), which was amended from Cantu's (2013) survey.</p> <p>The final inventory required participants to use a Likert scale to rate the importance and current status as part of the initial inventory. This inventory included two steps a post rating and a retrospective pre-rating.</p>	<p>The Pennsylvania Department of Education designed an evaluation rubric for school leaders, Framework for Leadership (2014).</p> <p>The rubric included four domains that each entails several subcomponents. The administrative team chose to focus on the following component for professional development.</p> <p><u>Domain 3: Leadership for Learning,</u> Component 3c: Implements High-Quality Instruction</p>	<p>What changes occurred pre-inventory, post inventory, and retrospective pre (Qualtrics)</p> <p>Analysis: Pre to Post Pre to Retrospective</p>

Table 5 (continued)

Inquiry Questions	Method	Evidence	Data Analysis
<p><i>Q2:</i> <i>What challenges did a small, suburban school district administrative team need to overcome as they operationalize a community of practice focused on instructional leadership?</i></p> <p><i>Q3:</i> <i>What practice-based changes occurred as a result of focusing the efforts of a community of practice on instructional leadership?</i></p>	<p><u>Journal Writing</u> Journal writings were used based on the concept explored by Perry, Walton, & Calder (1999) to capture the inner thoughts of the participants contextualized experiences. Reflection was utilized to bridge the gap between what should have happened and what actually occurred (Wesley & Buysse, 2001). Professional reflection methods (Hatton & Smith, 1995) served as a framework for self-reflection.</p> <p>A community of practice meeting began with participants responding to reflective journal writing prompts about their professional experiences as a result of participating in a community of practice. I amended the indicators of a community of practice from Winton & Ferris (2008) and concepts from Wenger (2015) community of practice attributes to create journal prompts.</p>	<p><u>Indicators</u> Winton and Ferris (2008) designed a Communities of Practice Indicators Worksheet divided into three overarching categories membership, process/activities, and outputs/outcomes.</p> <p>Within each category were specific indicators related to each specific function of a community of practice.</p>	<p><u>Coding</u> Deductive Analysis to determine categories e.g. changes and challenges (Gilgun, 2011; Winton & Ferris, 2008)</p> <p>In vivo coding for specific quotes from participant journal writing (Saldaña, 2016)</p>

Appendix B Instructional Leadership Inventories Parts I and II

Table 6. Instructional Leadership Inventory Part I

<u>Item</u>	<u>Part I</u> (How important are these concepts for instructional leadership)
1. I give regular feedback to teachers regarding how to improve instruction.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
2. I play an instrumental role in improving instruction in my district/school.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
3. I provide staff with time and resources to reflect on and improve the district's/school's past academic performance.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
4. I feel prepared to help improve instruction in my district/school.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
5. I do a good job evaluating the effectiveness of district/school instructional programs.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
6. I collect information/data concerning student achievement.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
7. I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
8. I maintain a focus on student achievement with my staff.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
9. I create opportunities to collaboratively use data/assessment to determine instructional decisions/practices.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)
10. I consistently ensure that the district's curricula are implemented through the school or area of supervision.	Very Important (4) Important (3) Not very important (2) Unimportant (1)

Table 7. Instructional Leadership Inventory Part II

<u>Item</u>	<u>Part II</u> (How often do you use these behaviors in practice)
1. I give regular feedback to teachers regarding how to improve instruction.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
2. I play an instrumental role in improving instruction in my district/school.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
3. I provide staff with time and resources to reflect on and improve the district's/school's past academic performance.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
4. I feel prepared to help improve instruction in my district/school.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
5. I do a good job evaluating the effectiveness of district/school instructional programs.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
6. I collect information/data concerning student achievement.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
7. I am an effective instructional leader of our teachers.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
8. I maintain a focus on student achievement with my staff.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
9. I create opportunities to collaboratively use data/assessment to determine instructional decisions/practices.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)
10. I consistently ensure that the district's curricula are implemented through the school or area of supervision.	Very Often (4) Often (3) Occasionally (2) Not at all (1)

Amended the survey from Cantú (2013) to focus on PDE leadership components 2b, 3b, and 3c ("Pennsylvania Department of Education," 2014)

Appendix C Coding Procedure for Anonymity

Participants please enter a personalized number to the following prompts and then add that number in the heading.

1. The last number in your social security number ().
2. The last digit of an important phone number ().
3. The last number of your mother's or father's birth year ().

Please remember this three-digit number, all *Reflections* and *Inventories* during this study will be coded in the same manner. Please keep your number confidential, as it is unique only to you. Entering the personalized number allows the researcher to analyzing the unique perspective of each participant, while keeping your identity anonymous.

Please adhere to the following procedural steps for reflective journal writing:

1. Enter your personalized number(s) in the heading.
2. Complete your reflection as a Word Document (do not type your name).
3. Print the document from the central office break room printer, and place in the envelope on the conference room table.
4. Once all reflective journal writings are in the designated folder. A participant will seal the envelope.

Appendix D Reflective Journal Writing Prompts 1, 2, and 3

Prompts 1, 2, and 3

Community of Practice: Reflective Journaling
<p>Please respond with as much detail as possible. You are not required to answer every question. Feel free to begin journaling prior to our leadership meeting. I will provide time at the beginning of our meeting for reflective journal writing. As described during prior administrative meetings there are three components to a community of practice domain, community, and practice.</p>
<p>A. Domain (connection of working together; membership): More than friends, an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Members are committed to the domain and value their collective competences and learn from each other.</p>
<p>B. Community (process or activities that promote learning from each other): Relationship help members learn from each other, more than having commonality it is interaction and learning with and from other members.</p>
<p>C. Practice (share practice with each other the outcomes/outputs): The development of shared resources, such as stories, experiences, tools, skill at addressing reoccurring problems. The members are practitioners.</p>

Prompt 1

<p>A. Domain (connection of working together): More than friends, an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Members are committed to the domain and value their collective competences and learn from each other.</p>
<p>1. Describe what you believe to be our team's common sense of purpose. Response:</p>
<p>2. In what ways do you assist in running the community? Response:</p>
<p>3. How do you view the internal motivation of community members? Response:</p>

Figure 1. Prompts 1, 2, and 3

Figure 1 (continued)

Prompt 2

B. Community (learning from each other):

Relationship help members learn from each other, more than having commonality it is interaction and learning with and from other members.

1. How do you engage in joint activities and discussions?

Response:

2. What is your sense of members' interaction in the community as a conversation, as opposed to a series of 1-sided reports?

Response:

3. How useful is the information you learn from others in the Community of Practice community?

Response:

Prompt 3

C. Practice (share practice with each other):

The development of shared resources, such as stories, experiences, tools, skill at addressing reoccurring problems. The members are practitioners.

1. How successful are you at turning principles/values of the community into realized practice?

Response:

2. What common problems do you express a desire to solve?

Response:

3. In what ways have you generated new knowledge from your interactions within the community of practice?

Response:

Prompts 1, 2, and 3

D. Barriers to utilizing my skill(s) or learning (a) new skill(s) in practice or within the community of practice?

Response:

Prompts 1, 2, and 3

E. What changes have you observed in you and your colleagues in practice or within the community of practice?

Response:

Prompts adapted from Professional Reflection Methods (Hatton & Smith, 1995), domains from Wenger (2015) and (Winton & Ferris, 2008) indicators of communities of practice

Appendix E Communities of Practice Indicators Worksheet

Communities of Practice Indicators Worksheet			
Membership	Check One		
	<u>Desired</u>	<u>Emerging</u>	<u>Current Reality</u>
<p><i>Joint Enterprise</i> (Barab & Duffy, 2000, as cited in Buysse et al., 2003; Buysse et al., 2003; Cambridge et al. (2005), as cited in Gotto et al.; Hafeez & Khlalid, 2007; Cashmen et al., 2007; Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Hildreth & Kimble, 2004; Iverson, 2008; Linehan et al., 2005; Wenger et al., 2002; Wesley & Buysse, 2001; Wubbles, 2007)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do members share a competence that distinguishes them from others? 			
ity?			

Communities of Practice Indicators Worksheet (2008). Developed by Pam Winton and Megan Ferris. FPG Child Development Institute.

Figure 2. Communities of Practice Indicators Worksheet

Figure 2 (continued)

<p><i>Sharing and Exchanging of Knowledge</i> (Cambridge et al. (2005), as cited in Gotto et al.; Cashman et al., 2007; Hafeez & Khlalid, 2007; Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Hildreth & Kimble, 2004; Iverson, 2008; Wenger et al., 2002; Wubbles, 2007)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Do members engage in narration, or sharing their experiences through stories?	<u>Desired</u>	<u>Emerging</u>	<u>Current Reality</u>
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me?

Figure 2 (continued)

Outputs/Outcomes	<u>Desired</u>	<u>Emerging</u>	<u>Current Reality</u>
<p><i>Action Orientation</i></p> <p>(Cashman et al., 2007; Hafeez & Khalid, 2007; Henri & Pudelko, 2003; Hildreth & Kimble, 2004; Iverson, 2008; Linehan et al., 2005; Wesley & Buysse, 2001; Wubbles, 2007)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do members spend the majority of their time analyzing real-life situations or problems? 			

Appendix F Participant Consent Form

CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

STUDY TITLE: An Administrative Community of Practice

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Patrick Graczyk
107 Pasture Crossing Drive, Sarver, PA 16055
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pmg31@pitt.edu

FACULTY MENTOR: Cynthia Tananis
University of Pittsburgh
School of Education
412/648-7171
tananis@pitt.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: none

This is a research study to describe how administrators experience changes and challenges as you experiment with the application of new understandings of instructional leadership into the context of K-12 educational role at the Allegheny Valley School District. It is hoped that this study triggers a cultural shift in how the administrators function as a team of instructional leaders that learn through a community of practice (CoP).

You have been chosen to be a participant in this inquiry based on your role with the district as part of the administrative team. This study will explore how a group of district administrators can work collaboratively through a community of practice to uncover what barriers need to be identified and resolved in order to allow our staff to meet the needs of our growing population of students. You will be one of ten participants in this study. Total participation in this study will last 2-3 hours each and will occur over 2-3 months.

You will be provided with time before each CoP meeting to write reflections about your experiences in a community of practice as well as instructional leadership and be encouraged to engage in open dialogue, professional development, and situated learning experiences. Participants will create an anonymous coding system for reflective writing. The reflective journal writing should take no longer than 10 minutes at the beginning of each meeting.

In addition, members of the CoP will complete a pre- and post- Instructional Leadership Inventory through a secure website, Qualtrics, that allows participants to answer pre-determined questions without being able to be identified. As the facilitator and member of the CoP, the PI will participate in the reflections as well as taking discussion notes during the session.

There are no direct benefits for participation in this study, nor is any compensation attached. Your participation is purely voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue the inquiry study at any time. There are no risks associated with participation. If a participant chooses to withdraw from this study, all data collected prior to the date of withdrawal will be continued to be used, unless they request we destroy it. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Pittsburgh was previously requested and granted prior to this invitation.

Page 1 of 2



University Of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: «Approval Date» IRB #: **PRO017110255**
Renewal Date: «Renewal Date»

Figure 3. Participant Consent Form

Figure 3 (continued)

CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Should you wish to receive results of the study, you may request a copy by emailing me at png31@pitt.edu. Your information will be anonymous and not connected to your name. Even your de-identified information will be treated as confidential. Data and results from this research may be shared with investigators conducting similar research, if so that information will be shared in a de-identifier manner.

The data collected will only be available to me as the researcher, as well as my Faculty Mentor and Committee Chairperson, Dr. Cynthia Tananis. If you have questions or concerns about the research study, you can also contact Dr. Tananis at tananis@pitt.edu for additional information.

Consent to Participate

The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions, voice concerns or complaints about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions, concerns or complaints will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator(s) listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number(s) given.

I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns, or complaints be addressed by a listed investigator. I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that occurred during my participation. By signing this form I agree to participate in this research study. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

Participant Signature

Date

CERTIFICATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual, and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual has about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Page 2 of 2



University Of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: «Approval Date»
Renewal Date: «Renewal Date»

IRB #: **PRO017110255**

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