A Case Study of Three Effective Collaborative School Settings
and the Principal Leadership Beliefs, Conditions, and Practices that Contribute to Student
Achievement

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APPROVED:
Abstract

Principals today have many responsibilities for including school safety, new evaluation systems, community engagement and, of course, working with teachers for increased student achievement. A great deal of recent research shows that principals can impact student achievement and the quality of teacher collaboration around student data. Quality teacher collaboration particularly the professional learning community model has shown to increased student achievement around quality teacher collaboration. The state of Ohio has adopted the Ohio Improvement Process, which is based on teachers regularly collaborating on common formative assessment data and making instructional decisions based on that data. Many schools that have implemented the Ohio Improvement Process have made documented student gains in achievement and value-added growth. The purpose of this case study was to identify the principal beliefs, principal set conditions set and principal practices that have contributed to the increased student outcomes in three specific schools that have shown documented growth. The qualitative case study was completed by the researcher over several months in three elementary schools in Cuyahoga County in the state of Ohio. Findings emerged from interviews with the principals multiple times, observations of building leadership team meetings, observations of teacher-based team meetings and observations of staff meetings. The qualitative data was coded into a data collection matrix to identify themes and subthemes. The major themes are beliefs, conditions, practices as well as technology. Subthemes from these areas that emerged from the findings include collaboration, shared leadership, communications and knowledge of practice. The case study has provided a clear outline for principal on how to create and nurture a collaborative culture in their schools where the Ohio Improvement Process will flourish and increased student achievement will result. It is recommended that central office administrators...
use these findings to help identify viable candidates for elementary principal positions in their Ohio elementary schools.

*Keywords: Principal leadership, teacher collaboration, case study*
Dedication

To my mother and father, who instilled in me the importance of education very early and very often

And to my three children, who hopefully I instill the same ideals with them
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Table of Contents

List of Tables ............................................................................................................. xi

List of Figures ............................................................................................................. xii

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study........................................................................ 1

Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1

Background of the Study ......................................................................................... 5

Problem Statement .................................................................................................. 7

Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................... 9

Research Questions ............................................................................................... 10

Advancing Scientific Knowledge ......................................................................... 11

Significance of the Study ....................................................................................... 13

Rationale for Methodology .................................................................................... 14

Nature of the Research Design for the Study ...................................................... 16

Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study .............................. 25

Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................ 27

Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................... 28

Conceptual Framework ......................................................................................... 31

General School Leadership Theories .................................................................. 33

Principal Leadership Theories .............................................................................. 35

History of Teacher Collaboration ........................................................................ 41

Convergence of Principal Leadership and Teacher Collaboration .................. 44

Gaps in Literature .................................................................................................. 51
**List of Tables**

Table 1. Comparison of Principal Leadership That Works and Principals and Student Achievement .......................................................... 40

Table 2. Forms of Professional Collaboration Reported by Teachers ......................... 44

Table 3. Case Setting #1 Student Achievement History ........................................ 68

Table 4. Case Setting #2 Student Achievement History ........................................ 70

Table 5. Case Setting #3 Student Achievement History ........................................ 70

Table 6. Time Spent at each Case Setting in Data Collection ............................... 89

Table 7. Themes and Subthemes of Research ...................................................... 97
List of Figures

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework ................................................................. 30

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework ................................................................. 32

Figure 3. Flowchart Relationship between principal practices promoting collaborative practice and improved student outcomes .................................................. 54

Figure 4. Data Analysis ................................................................................. 81

Figure 5. Data Organization Matrix ............................................................... 84

Figure 6. Ohio Improvement Process. Relationship between DLT, BLTs, and TBTs ..154
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Principal leadership and teacher collaboration are two topics that have lived in silos for quite a long time. Thousands of studies and research have been completed on each topic. Leadership has been linked to an organization’s effectiveness (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Bamburg and Andrews (1990) researched a leader’s ability to define a clear mission and goals; leaders’ abilities to shape a school’s climate and culture was studied by Griffith (2000). In addition the US Congress identified the building principal as the single most influential person in a school building (US Congress, 1970). These two studies show the importance of the principal role in modern schools. Teacher collaboration was not the norm since 1900 in schools (Lortie, 1975). It has changed in the last forty years, though, as recent school improvement efforts necessitate teacher collaboration around common student data (OIP, 2010). These two topics of principal leadership and teacher collaboration have now merged and there seems to be a paucity of relationship research.

Principal leadership has emerged from research that identified great leaders and the qualities these leaders possessed. Thomas Carlyle (1888) stated that effective leaders are those gifted with divine inspiration and the right characteristics. Herbert Spencer countered this indicating that societal and outside influences produce great leaders (Spencer, 1896). School principal leadership eventually emerged as a research topic over the 20th century. The United States government identified the building principals as the “person responsible for all activities that occur in and around a school, the climate for teaching, and the level of professionalism among teachers” (U.S. Congress, 1970, p. 56).
Donmoyer (1985) found that a principal had a significant impact on a school’s success but could not attribute this impact to anything specifically. The aforementioned studies lacked a critical component for school leadership, though. Did these leaders increase student achievement? As recent as 1999, Hallinger and Heck found only 40 studies that linked school leadership with student achievement. The recent work of Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) identified 21 responsibilities of all building leaders and their connection to improved student achievement. Principal accountability increased with the advent of high stakes statewide testing in multiple content areas and in key grade levels. The state of Ohio introduced statewide Proficiency Tests in the early 1990s, and with it raised the consciousness of how important principal leadership was to a learning organization. The subsequent paragraph will highlight studies done by numerous researchers on principal leadership and its impact on student growth as high stakes tests became the norm nationally.

Research on principal impact on student achievement shows varied results. Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) reported virtually no direct impact on student achievement as a result of principal leadership. In contrast, there is a growing mass of research that success and failure of a school can be traced to the leadership of the principal (Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Strauss, 2011). Marzano et al. (2005) and Robinson (2007) found that studies conducted in the United States showed a positive correlation between principal leadership and student achievement. Even more recent research indicates that the more skilled a building principal, the more learning can be expected from students (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Perhaps the question now emerges, what is the educational environment that these effective principals create that results in
improved student outcomes? Teacher collaboration was seldom encouraged until Lortie (1975) concluded that teacher isolationism obstructs progress in schools and student learning. Educators began to meet but it was typically around superficial topics such as scheduling, logistics, and non-instructional issues. When pressed to define collaboration, teachers defined it as faculty meetings, department meetings, beginning of year meetings, and sharing of materials (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). Data-driven decision making emerged as a growing emphasis in teacher-time. Over the last decade, professional learning communities (DuFour, 2005), building and teacher-based teams (McNulty & Besser, 2011) and the Ohio Improvement Process (Ohio Department of Education, 2012) have dramatically changed the teacher conversation around specific student data that can inform and improve instruction. The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) is the school improvement model for the state that focuses on shared leadership among teachers and administrators in addition to informing instruction by collaboratively following a 5-step process of inquiry around student work. There is significant research (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Louis & Marks, 1998) that points to purposeful teacher collaboration around student data and work that improves student achievement.

This study will look closely at three specific case study school settings in Cuyahoga County, Ohio that have strong teacher collaborative cultures in place. The practices, beliefs, and conditions that make these schools effective will be examined through observation of building leadership teams and teacher-based teams, and interviews of principals. “Effective” is defined by one or more of the following for the purposes of this study:
1. Identified schools by State of Ohio Support Team personnel who train and support district personnel in the Ohio Improvement Process. These schools have well-defined collaborative cultures as evidenced by active building leadership teams that review teacher-based team data on a regular basis.

2. Marked improvement in student achievement documented during a specific principal’s leadership tenure. The “marked improvement” could be an increase in the performance index and/or improvement in the value-added status.

3. Discernibly higher student achievement in this principal’s school relative to other similar schools in the same school district.

4. Identified principals by State of Ohio Support Team personnel who train and support district personnel in the Ohio Improvement Process. As these state support team personnel train multiple school districts in the Ohio Improvement Process, these trainers can identify principals and schools that implement this school improvement model with greater effectiveness than others.

The schools researched in this study have similar demographics to the other like schools in the same district. These schools are all located in Cuyahoga County in Northeast Ohio. As one of the most populous counties in the state, it has generally progressive school districts desiring school improvement because of the interested parent base. The school districts of the schools selected for this study are middle-class suburban districts that have a parent base with high expectations for their schools, teachers and principals.
The researcher has spent 25 years in education in the Northeast Ohio school districts. During this time, the researcher has held titles from teacher, coach, principal, director, to deputy superintendent. These varied experiences, and serving as internal facilitator of the Ohio Improvement Process in two different districts, have allowed the researcher to attain quality relationships with State Support Team and other administrators around the area. These relationships, his building-level experiences and understanding of Northeast Ohio OIP work make him an ideal researcher for case studies where he will immerse himself into the culture of a building for a period of time to identify quality teacher collaborative work and the principal practices associated with it.

This study will contribute to the effectiveness of school leaders. As they are responsible for the many aspects of the school building in addition to improving and maintaining student achievement, their time is precious and must be focused on the correct actions. This study will define some concrete practices and conditions for busy principals to enact in order for student outcomes to improve in their schools.

**Background of the Study**

Strong principal instructional leadership is more important today than ever before in our schools. Greater student accountability, student achievement attached to teacher and principal evaluation, mandates of No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), and school safety and security issues ultimately fall on the responsibility of the school principal today. Managerial tasks seem to determine the effectiveness of principals and they frustrate many teachers by not talking about instruction (Connelly, 1995). Additionally Connelly (1995) concluded that the isolationism of the teaching profession and distress over the lack of discussion about
teaching were contributing factors to teachers leaving the profession. There seems to be conflicting research on principal leadership and its impact on student achievement. Some studies conclude there is no impact on student achievement as a result of principal leadership (Witzier et al., 2003). In contrast, another study finds that principals are only behind teachers among school influences that have the most impact on student achievement (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, Anderson, & Educational Research, 2010). Marzano et al. (2005) have identified 21 specific principal responsibilities that contribute to improved student achievement. Cotton (2003) further identified 26 essential traits and behaviors of effective principals in order to be successful instructional leaders. Principals do have the ability to establish specific conditions that contribute to a positive environment in which student achievement flourishes (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). One of those conditions is a collaborative culture among the teachers and staff.

Lortie (1975) found that teachers were mired in isolation and that it impeded real student progress in schools. In a separate study good teachers were found to desire collaboration with their peers and wanted to break down the natural isolationism that teaching inherently creates (Pienta, 2004). Purposeful collaboration around student work and data has been found to have a positive impact on student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; McNulty & Besser, 2011; Morrison & Magliocca, 2012; Ohio Department of Education, 2010).

Principals are accountable to many items today including school safety, new national curricula, equality for all subgroups of students, and more stringent evaluation standards. Increased student achievement should take precedence. How are these busy
principals to focus on it? What are the conditions that a principal must set in his/her school in order to improve student achievement?

Ohio, the home state of this researcher, has adopted the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) as its school improvement model (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). The OIP has its underpinnings in strong collaborative practices among teachers. Therefore, purposeful teacher collaboration is no longer a good idea, but a state mandate. This study marries principal leadership and purposeful teacher collaboration. It begins to identify the conditions, beliefs, and practices that busy principals need to establish in order to foster these collaborative cultures and make sustainable school improvement.

**Problem Statement**

School leaders have increased accountability placed on them from many directions that greatly impact their time and work. Nationally, principals are charged with implementation of new Common Core (2013) standards in English/language arts and mathematics that require greater rigor. Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has placed greater emphasis on testing results and punitive measures abound for underperforming schools. In the state of Ohio, standards for science and social studies (American Institute of Research, 2014) have been established and next generation assessments will test these in the coming year. The Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) demands extensive annual appraisal of all teachers regardless of their quality or years of service (Ohio Department of Education, 2014). In addition, the Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES) places principals under the same appraisal microscope where student achievement will directly impact their overall appraisal rating (Ohio Department of Education, 2014). Ever present are the pressures to serve students
with special needs in the most appropriate and legal manner and provide for the safety and security of all students in an age when school shootings like the one in Chardon, Ohio have become all too common place. These significant elements take attention from improving student academic outcomes, on which skilled principals can have a positive impact (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

It seems some new accountability measures work against improvement of student achievement. Teacher evaluation can be meaningful but is not an effective strategy for school improvement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Nevertheless, principal leadership is second only to teacher quality when it comes to school influences that impact student achievement (Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson 2010). Horng, Klasik and Loeb (2010) further highlight the complex nature of the principal position by finding that school leaders who spend more time on organizational management as opposed to the instructional program gain greater favor from teachers and parents. In other words, there needs to be a healthy balance of leadership between the organizational aspects of the school and the instructional aspects of the school in order for a principal to gain maximum effectiveness. Principals do have the ability to create environments where the collective capacity of their teachers and staff can be fused and improve student achievement (Lockheed & Lavin, 2012). What are the conditions, though, a principal can set that will release this potential?

A collaborative culture among the teachers and staff within the school environment is a condition that a school principal does have power in developing. The principal, who works to create a collaborative culture, is implementing the most powerful strategy when it comes to improving student achievement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).
Developing this collaborative culture, though, has decades of history competing against it. Lortie (1975) identified isolation as historically the norm among teachers. Murphy and Myers (2008) found that the best performance from people in schools was an outcome of teamwork being developed at every level. Collaborative culture has been directly linked to improved student achievement when completed in purposeful manner (DuFour, R., Eaker, R., DuFour, R. 2005; DuFour, R. & Marzano, R., 2011; Graham, 2007). This is not necessarily a skill that principals are versed in and certainly not developing if they emerged from teaching ranks that have been wrought in isolationism. Some principals are skilled in this, and some training from the state level has been developed to systematically create these cultures (Ohio Leadership Advisory Council, 2014). As previously mentioned, teacher collaboration is a mandate of the Ohio Improvement Process (Ohio Department of Education, 2012) and collaborative structures are seen as exemplary practices according to the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES).

Hence, the principal of today is pulled in many directions by local, state and federal mandates. The principal’s time is valuable and must be used efficiently. Therefore, since it has been shown that developing a collaborative culture around student data improves student achievement, further study of some effective principals in creating these cultures is necessary. This multiple case study will capture the beliefs, practices, and conditions these principals develop in order to foster a creative and collaborative environment where teachers work together to improve instruction in all classrooms.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study will be to examine three collaborative school environments in order to gain insights on how effective principals create these prolific
school settings. The three principals and the collaborative settings were chosen purposefully based on recommendations of State Support Team personnel and the improved achievement data under the specific principal’s leadership. The examination will first help divulge the stated and unstated beliefs of these effective principals in their schools. Additionally the practices and conditions these principals set contribute to a positive impact on student achievement. This is exhibited by higher student achievement relative to other schools with similar demographics in their school districts as well as improved student achievement relative to a previous principal’s leadership. These elements will be extracted by observation and interview data collected in these three settings. The multiple case study will potentially provide clear beliefs, practices, and conditions that principals can enact in their schools to develop and foster these collaborative environments, which have shown to improve student achievement.

In order to examine these settings, a qualitative research approach will be utilized. The researcher will conduct interviews with each of the three principals focused around instructional leadership and building collaborative practice. This interview data will then be reviewed alongside the observation data from two distinct collaborative settings, a building leadership team and teacher-based team meetings. The observation data from these settings will be analyzed relative to rubrics established to guide effective building leadership and teacher-based teams (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

**Research Questions**

The guiding research questions will aim at gleaning specific beliefs, practices and conditions as a result of coding interviews and observations of three school settings.

Research Question 1
What are the beliefs on principal leadership and quality teacher collaboration of effective principals, who develop a collaborative culture for instructional leadership?

Research Question 2

What are the conditions for quality teacher collaboration that effective principals establish in their schools?

Research Question 3

What are the practices of effective principals to promote quality teacher collaboration in their schools?

**Advancing Scientific Knowledge**

Principal leadership has been the focus of significant research (Bamburg, J., & Andrews, R., 1990; Blase, J. & Blase, J., 1999; Cotton, K., 2003; Marzano, R.J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B.A., 2005). Journals dedicate themselves to the leadership styles and actions of school leaders. *Educational Leadership, Journal of School Leadership*, and *Educational Administration Quarterly* are three such periodicals that focus on timely and critical leadership issues in schools today.

Interestingly, the term *principal* has its origins in the larger term of principal *teacher* (Hoerr, 2007). This term alludes to the notion that the principal is the lead teacher of the school and has great instructional skill. Do these exemplary instructional skills translate into quality principal *leadership* skills though? There has been some research to connect the relationship between principal leadership actions and student achievement (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990). Heck et al. concluded that this relationship was quite complex and was best reviewed in a qualitative manner in order to best identify the roots of this causal relationship.
Principals, though, should place developing a collaborative culture within their buildings high on their priority lists. Hart (1998) found that when teachers and educators operate in isolation, students’ needs go unmet. Additionally, good teachers desire collaboration (Pienta, 2005) and teachers struggle in isolated teaching settings (Connelly, 1995). Teacher collaboration, especially in the form of professional learning communities, has been found to be effective and have a positive impact on student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The principal has a definite role in the frequency and quality of teacher collaboration when they engage in instructional leadership practices, monitor classroom instruction and share leadership with teachers (Goddard, Miller, Larsen, Goddard, & Jacobs, 2010).

The study of effective principal leadership and purposeful teacher collaboration has definitely converged but it can be advanced. Effective principal leadership that encourages purposeful teacher collaboration ultimately will lead to improved student achievement. A comprehensive study completed in a large Midwestern school district did indicate that teachers in urban settings who engage in systematic collaboration have a greater potential to improve student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Professional learning communities (PLC), a distinct collaborative model, has had a positive impact on student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). Graham (2007) studied a single middle school with a mixed method approach. The study found that changing teacher mindfulness around a collaborative culture did have a positive effect on teacher efficacy and ultimately student achievement. Morrison and Magliocca (2012) reviewed the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process, Ohio’s School Improvement PLC model. The study showed that
high fidelity to the process did have a positive effect of student achievement (Morrison & Magliocca, 2012).

Further definition of the specific principal practices, beliefs and conditions that contribute to these collaborative settings will help principal preparation in the high accountability environment of the 21st century. Principals have been able to develop cultures of collaborative practice that promote teacher collaboration through their specific principal practices (Gallagher, 2012). This study will provide clarity of the specifics that school leaders can and should do in order to improve student achievement through purposeful quality teacher collaboration.

Significance of the Study

This study has incredible value in today’s high accountability schools. Principals have been typically trained to be managers and support teachers in their classrooms with resources and curriculum. Nevertheless, today’s educational environment has shown professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) and teacher-based teams (Ohio Department of Education, 2010) reviewing student data to be a method of increasing student achievement. Therefore, examining the principal practices, conditions and beliefs that promote these true collaborative environments has great worth.

Principal interns and pre-service administrators will benefit from the results of this research. Principal preparation involves study of school law, curriculum management, and appraisal among other topics. The proposed study will identify beliefs that principals should hold that will encourage this productive collaborative environment in their learning communities. In addition the study will provide principal practices and school building conditions to institute that will help develop a collaborative culture.
research would complement the curriculum and assessment study of these pre-service principals.

Additionally experienced principals would find value in the findings from this study. As developing and sustaining a collaborative culture is a relatively new mandate, these principals will develop new approaches on implementing the Ohio Improvement Process or professional learning communities within their school settings. Lortie (1975) indicated that teachers have a long history of isolationism and Connelly (1995) confirmed they struggle with non-collaborative structures. As Pienta (2004) noted, good teachers desire meaningful collaboration, and this study will provide all principals with some authentic practices, conditions, and belief systems in order to create this collaborative culture in their schools.

The importance has personal implications as well. My career has taken me from classroom teacher, building principal, curriculum director to deputy superintendent. My current role includes leadership, coaching and evaluation of building principals, who are responsible for developing these collaborative cultures. This study will aid significantly in my understanding of the types of practices, conditions and beliefs necessary for these principals under my supervision to be successful. Their success will translate into increased student achievement for the students under our collective responsibility.

**Rationale for Methodology**

The interpretation construction theory, principal leadership theory, and the Ohio Improvement Process theory and practice are the basis of the research study. The underpinning of the interpretation construction theory is that true understanding is stimulated by the relationship and dialogue between the researcher and the participant
Principal leadership is best evidenced through interactions and relationships. In the same manner, the Ohio Improvement Process is a model based on educators collaborating around student data and making instructional decisions. The researcher in the interpretation construction theory interacts and observes the participants in authentic settings such as teacher-based team meetings or leading the collaborative process. The qualitative basis of the interpretation construction paradigm lends itself best for my strengths and the needs of the anticipated research proposed.

The study will examine three purposefully selected case study settings that have identified collaborative cultures with leadership that has proven effective. “Effective” is defined by documented improved student achievement or higher student achievement relative to other like settings. Qualitative methods are designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The three school case studies proposed in this research would be reviewed through extensive observation and interviews with the principals of the settings.

Hence, a qualitative methodology has been considered for this research. The study would be built with multiple interviews of three principals that lead collaborative learning communities that have achieved success in student achievement. A principal interview before and at the completion of data collection will allow for the researcher to probe into the school leader’s beliefs. These identified beliefs aim to identify specific principal practices that create conditions that encourage and sustain quality teacher collaboration.

Other qualitative data would be observations of building leadership teams and teacher-based teams to collect rich data on the structures in place that have emanated from their leadership practices. Personal experiences and training in the Ohio
Improvement Process (Ohio Department of Education, 2012) will allow me to utilize rubrics efficiently to gauge the relative quality of the work within the building and teacher teams. This will allow the researcher to acculturate himself into the teams and enhance the learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

**Nature of the Research Design for the Study**

A qualitative design model will be implemented to study the purposeful sampling selected. This research design allows the researcher to observe and obtain significant qualitative data from each the principal leading quality teacher collaboration. The researcher will observe, describe and interpret the work of the building leadership team and teacher-based team in the three purposefully chosen school settings. Each of these settings deserves close study making this an appropriate candidate for case study design. Case study research allows the researcher to isolate a particular population and gain data from it while studying it closely (Shuttleworth, 2008). This will necessitate a keen qualitative researcher who can describe and interpret these situations accurately.

Each of the research settings was selected for its value in both principal leadership and embedded collaborative culture. Each of the principals was identified by State Support Team personnel for effective leadership of the Ohio Improvement Process. As this process is built on the collaborative structures of building leadership team and multiple teacher-based teams, these principals are leading this process effectively by personnel well-trained in the process, the State Support Team personnel. Additionally improved student achievement has followed these principals in their leadership career.

Case study #1
Setting one for this study is an elementary school that currently serves kindergarten through fourth grade. This principal has been in this school for three years and has built a successful collaborative culture as evidenced by state support team consultants, who assist the district in school improvement efforts. Over the last three years the performance index of the school has increased from 104.3 to 107. This index is a reflection of how all students perform on the state-mandated achievement tests and is weighted toward higher achievement levels. This school is one of ten elementary schools in the district. The other elementary schools in the district experienced a decrease in performance index from 97.5 to 95.9 during the same time period. Another state report card metric is value-added that measures annual student growth on these same tests. In the three years of this principal’s tenure the district has moved from “met expected growth” to “above expected growth,” which is indicative of two standard deviations growth on average for all students taking the reading and math assessments.

This school under this principal’s leadership has created a strong collaborative culture and increased student achievement and growth. Building leadership and teacher-based teams meet on a regular basis in this setting.

Case study #2

Setting two is an elementary school with a principal who has been very successful in a previous district for her development of collaborative structures and increased student achievement. In her previous district, she inherited a school with a performance index score of 77.9 and in two years raised that to 92.5. Contributing to this increase was the improvement of passage rates in all state assessments. For example, fifth grade reading and math passage rates were 38.3% and 33.3% respectively the year before her
assuming the principal position. Two years later those rates were 75.9% and 67.2% respectively. In terms of value-added or growth, the school “met expected growth” at the beginning of her tenure and moved to “above expected growth” in the two consecutive years following.

This principal is now in the second year in a new district leading a similar elementary school but building that collaborative culture again, so the value of observing this setting is great.

Case study #3

Setting three is an elementary school that is led by a principal who has been identified by state support team personnel for her abilities in leading an effective collaborative culture in her school. Her school has outperformed the other elementary schools in her district in regards to performance index. On the 2013-2014 school report card, the performance index increased by 11 points from 90.7 to 101.7. This significant increase was due to over 60% of students taking state tests performing at the two highest levels on the tests. Overall passage rates increased dramatically as well. This school has committed to the Ohio Improvement Process and the principal has been vigilant in her leadership in these collaborative structures.

These three principals and their collaborative settings deserve close inspection and this multiple case study will provide that examination. Each principal will be involved in multiple interviews that will explore her principal leadership, her educational beliefs and how she develops a collaborative culture in her building. The dialogue between the researcher and participant is the avenue to construct new knowledge and is congruent with the interpretative constructivism theoretical framework (Ponterotto,
2005). This will study their perspectives on the collaborative culture within their schools and how the principals’ actions have impacted it.

Observations of authentic events and constructing knowledge from them are underpinnings of a qualitative study in their interpretative constructivism model (Ponterotto, 2005). This study will observe multiple collaborative team meetings in each of the case studies. These team meetings are context-specific settings that allow the researcher to build knowledge from observations, dialogue and interactions among the teachers and principal in some cases.

**Definition of Terms**

*Beliefs* – Something that a person, in this case a principal, accepts as true or right; A strongly held opinion about something (Merriam-Webster.com, 2014)

*Building Leadership Team* - A team of individuals who promote a culture of common expectations or commitments by maintaining a school-wide focus on improving student achievement. The team fosters shared leadership and responsibility for the success of every child through the creation of purposeful communities (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

*Case Study Research* – A case study is an in depth study of a particular situation rather than a sweeping statistical survey. It is a method used to narrow down a very broad field of research into one easily researchable topic

*Common Formative Assessment* - Teacher-generated periodic or interim assessments that are collaboratively designed by teams for specific units of instruction. Common formative assessments are created as short matching pre- and post-assessments to ensure same-assessment-to-same-assessment comparison of student growth. Common
formative assessments usually contain a blend of item types, including selected response and constructed response, representing power standards.

*Conditions* – Things essential to the occurrence of something else (Merriem-Webster.com, 2014); In the case of this study, what elements which the principal sets or creates that need to be in place for quality teacher collaboration to occur.

*Culture* – The way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (Merriam-Webster.com, 2014)

*District-Leadership Team*- A team of individuals who promote a culture of common expectations or commitment by maintaining a district-wide focus on high achievement for all students (Ohio Department of Education, 2012).

*Effective* – Producing an effect that is desired (Merriam-Webster.com, 2014); in the case of an “effective school,” it is a school that produces high or improved student achievement.

*Effective Principal* – a. A principal whose students or school led has shown improved student achievement or growth during his/her tenure, b. A principal who currently leads a collaborative environment in his/her school, and c. A principal identified by State of Ohio Support Team personnel to be leaders of quality teacher collaboration.

*Interpretation construction theory*- An instructional design model by Black and McClintock that combines several other instructional design theories. This model prescribes instruction based on observations and constructing information well. In this model the researcher gains understanding based on observations of authentic situations and background contextual information (Black & McClintock, 1995).
**Instructional leadership** – the term to describe the various aspects of a school administrator’s work that focuses on improving the overall academic program of the students under their supervision; Aspects could include creating a climate for learning, the curriculum materials, and the instructional pedagogy used by the teachers.

**Ohio Improvement Process (OIP)** – The name for the school improvement model for the state of Ohio. This model is based on interdependent teams of the District Leadership Team, Building Leadership Teams and Teacher-based Teams. The Ohio Improvement Process is Ohio’s state adopted professional learning community model.

**Ohio Teacher Evaluation System** - A state adopted evaluation framework that is aligned with the standards for the Teaching profession. The Ohio Teacher Evaluation System has two components, teacher performance rating and student academic growth rating, which are both weighted 50% currently.

**Ohio Principal Evaluation System** – A state adopted evaluation framework that is used to assess the performance of Ohio principals. The Ohio Principal Evaluation System as two components, principal performance rating and student academic growth rating, which are both weighted 50% currently.

**Performance Index**- The calculation that measures student performance on the Ohio Achievement Assessments and Ohio Graduation Tests at 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 10th grade levels. Greater weight is given assessment result that scores in a higher category versus a score in a lower category.

**Practices** – The usual way of doing something (Merriam-Webster.com, 2014); In this case the usual manner in which a principal conducts his/her work of leading the school.
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) –

Principal - The word principal emanated from the term “principal teacher” that indicated the instructional roots of the school leader (Hoerr, 2007). The principal needs to be the educational visionary, offering direction and expertise to ensure all students learn within a school.

Principal leadership – The set of skills, competencies, and character traits that allow a school building leader to set the vision, create the culture, and manage the operations in order to maximize student achievement for all.

Protocols – Processes that educator groups practice in order to maximize professional discussion. They are typically guidelines for conversation around student data and/or work in order to lead to effective decision making (Brown, 2009).

Quality Teacher Collaboration – A system where teachers meet at least twice monthly to review, analyze, and make committed, instructional decisions based on formative student data.

School Improvement Plan - The school’s focused plan for improvement.

State Support Team - County educational service center-based personnel who are trained in the Ohio Improvement Process and act as external facilitators for districts implementing this school improvement model for the state of Ohio. State Support Team consultants work with numerous school districts in his/her county.

Student achievement – A student’s score on a “high stakes” state-wide assessment or other measure of student learning provided the assessment is rigorous and comparable across classrooms.

Teacher-based teams (TBTs) – Teams composed of teachers working
together to improve instructional practice and student learning through shared work. As part of the OIP use of collaborative structures, TBTs follow a common set of guidelines described in a five step process connected directly to the focused goals, strategies, and actions described in the school improvement plan (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). A teacher-based team is a teacher-based professional learning community that makes instructional decisions based on student data.

*Value-Added Progress*– The calculation that uses student achievement data over time to measure the gains in learning students make. It provides a way to measure the effect a school or teacher has on student academic performance over the course of a school year or another period of time

**Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations**

The following assumptions will be made for this study:

1. It is assumed that survey participants in this study were not deceptive with their answers, and that the participants answered questions honestly and to the best of their ability. This can be assumed because the researcher holds no supervisory or authoritatively role that could impact the participant in any manner.
2. It is assumed that the observations of the Building Leadership Teams (BLTs) and Teacher-based Teams (TBTs) in each of the three school settings are indicative of a great majority of the BLTs and TBTs in these respective buildings. This can be assumed because the schools selected have made growth by Value-Added index or have shown an increase in their Performance Indexes due to the improved student achievement.

3. It is assumed that the highly collaborative Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) will be the state-adopted school improvement model for the foreseeable future. This can be assumed because the state has spent a great deal of money in training and people state-wide who guide the implementation of this model within individual districts.

Limitations are the restrictions associated with the particular methods the researcher used to gather and analyze data (Creswell, 2013). The researcher acknowledges the following limitations exist in the present study:

1. The respondents will be practicing elementary school principals and teachers in Ohio, therefore the results cannot be suggested beyond the state of Ohio.

2. One principal chosen for the study has spent only one full year in her current school but showed great student academic growth in her previous school setting.

Delimitations of a study are contextual; specifics that limit the relevancy of the study for all people at any given place. The researcher acknowledges the following delimitations exist in the present study:
1. The respondents will not be practicing middle school or high school principals and teachers in Ohio. This means that the results cannot be suggested to those settings. This delimitation exists due to the identification of “effective” principals and settings from State Support Team personnel were primarily in the elementary school setting. Specifically studying three high quality elementary school settings provides richer data for greater generalization to this important fundamental educational setting.

2. The research settings will not incorporate settings outside of Northeast Ohio and specifically Cuyahoga County. This delimitation is for convenience. Nevertheless, the Ohio Improvement Process is a state-wide initiative and should provide some context for elementary schools outside this general area

**Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

School principals have many contending pressures and responsibilities that take their attention away from instructional leadership. With safety and security, No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), new teacher appraisal processes and high stakes testing, a school principal has no lack of tasks to complete. Taking caution to build a collaborative culture around student data would seem like a luxury and not a priority. Nevertheless, this should be take precedence and would be fruitful for student learning.

Principal leadership has been dissected by many theorists and researchers. Many teachers were dismayed that their principals rarely spoke of instruction in their schools (Connelly, 1995). Principals have not naturally grown into this role as lead learner in their schools. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) identified 21 principal
responsibilities that contributed positively to student learning. Interestingly, fostering teacher collaboration is not one of these roles.

Teacher collaboration has not been the norm in schools. In fact, when teachers operate in isolation mode, student needs go unmet (Hart, 1998). Recent school improvement models have changed this paradigm. Professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) and the Ohio Improvement Process (Ohio Department of Education, 2012) necessitate meaningful teacher collaboration. This research will study three purposeful school settings that have powerful leadership that promotes meaningful teacher collaboration.

Chapter 2 will outline the parallel research on instructional leadership and teacher collaboration. It will also identify some intersecting notions on principal leadership and building collaboration. Lastly it will identify some of the limitations of this research and what this multiple case study will attempt to identify. Chapter 3 will outline the methodology, research design, and procedures for this investigation. Chapter 4 details how the data was analyzed and provides both a written and graphic summary of the results. Chapter 5 is an interpretation and discussion of the results, as it relates to the existing body of research related to the dissertation topic.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

In order to study three principals and their buildings’ collaborative structures, it will be important to review the salient literature on principal leadership and teacher collaboration. This study’s purpose is to gain insights on how effective principals create these prolific school settings by examining closely three collaborative school environments. The study will identify how principals of high achieving schools create an environment that fosters purposeful teacher collaboration that contributes to this high achievement. This chapter outlines literature that identifies research around principal leadership, teacher collaboration and the recent convergence of these two areas.

The review of literature for this study will be organized into these main sections:

1. Theoretical Framework
2. Conceptual Framework
3. General School Leadership Theories
4. Principal Leadership Research
5. History of Teacher Collaboration
6. The Convergence of Principal Leadership and Teacher Collaboration
7. Gaps in Literature

The first section, Theoretical Framework, provides the three prevailing theories that frame the proposed research study. The second section will introduce the Conceptual Framework of the study that is built on the two pillars of principal leadership and teacher collaboration. The next section, General School Leadership Theories, will initially provide some overall organizational leadership theories that have been applied to
education. The subsequent two sections will review in some detail the literature on the two main themes in this study: Principal Leadership and Teacher Collaboration. The sixth section then identifies some of the limited literature that exists at the intersection of the topics. The last section identifies the gaps in the literature that this study aims to begin to fill and hopefully encourage others to modify practice in both central office administration and principal pre-service training.

The research will show a path of building leadership over the last several decades. Principal leadership has always been important but the skill sets needed for success in 2014 are different than the expectations of 1970. High stakes testing, teacher evaluation, and emergence of community schools have placed a greater emphasis on sustainable student achievement and students growth.

**Theoretical Framework**

Black and McClintock (1995) in their interpretation construction theory work note that a researcher learns best by observing authentic, real-life situations. The research proposed is based on observation of authentic collaborative school teams and questioning practicing principals. An underpinning of the interpretation construction theory is that true understanding is stimulated by the relationship and dialogue between the researcher and the participant. The study of leadership is evidenced through interactions and relationships (Black & McClintock, 1995). The qualitative basis of the interpretation construction theory lends itself best for my strengths and the needs of the anticipated research proposed.

This theoretical model is also based on the notion that knowledge is developed from observations and constructing information from them (Black & McClintock, 1995).
The interpretation construction theory is a combination of various learning theories but parallels the current study in that it relies on learning from authentic tasks and situations (Black & McClintock, 1995). As this study is based on the collaborative environments created by effective principals, one of the instructional strategies prevalent in this model is collaboration.

Subsequent to the No Child Left Behind adoption in 2002, states were given the ability to address the stringent accountability standards in their own manner as approved by the Federal government. The state of Ohio devised a differentiated accountability model that based itself on a school district adopting the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). The OIP is based on research on the notion of teams of teachers and administrators working together at the district level, building level and teacher-team level around student data in order to make real-time decisions on instruction (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Hord, 1997; Reeves, 2007; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2006). The teacher-based team level involves the most educators and most directly impacts student performance and achievement. The teacher-based teams (TBTs) follow a discrete 5-step process that informs teachers of how to chart, analyze and make instructional strategy decisions based on student data (Ohio Department of Education, 2010).

If the OIP is built on teachers collaborating, sharing student data and making instructional decisions around data, then principals will need skills in order to encourage and promote this collaborative culture. This is directly opposed to the manner in which many teachers were trained and what the nature of teacher work has been for so long
Principal leadership was shown to have a relationship between the nature of teacher collaboration (Goddard, Miller, Larsen, Goddard, & Jacob, 2010). Other than this study, there seems to a gap in current literature focusing on how principals develop this collaborative culture around student data in their schools.

Reeves (2007), Hord (1997) and Vescio et al (2006) do not detail what are the principal practices, beliefs and conditions that are implemented in order to develop this collaborative culture that is mandated by the state of Ohio for improvement.
As a manner to investigate principal practices and beliefs, it would help identify important relationship data that positively impact teacher collaboration. Coding principal responses to interviews would help “construct” the relationship dynamics that are present that are impacting collaboration to be effective or not. In addition, qualitative data collected from observation of teacher-based team and building leadership team meetings would help identify the conditions, beliefs, and practices that could be generalized for future research or usage. Thus, the qualitative basis of the interpretation construction paradigm lends itself best for the needs of the anticipated research proposed. Figure 1 represents the theories and practices that frame this study.

**Conceptual Framework**

Principal leadership and teacher collaboration have significant literature devoted to them. It is only in recent literature that these topics converge. The conceptual map, figure 2, represents the framework on the proposed study. It identifies the salient literature of these topics and how it maps the multiple case study research.

**General School Leadership Theories**

The study of leadership is an ancient art (Bass, 1981). As long as there have been organizations or groups necessitating a leader, the concept of leadership has been studied informally or formally. Regardless of theory used to explain, leadership has been linked to the effective functioning of complex organizations throughout the centuries (Bass, 1981).

The following is a review of three specific leadership theories that have been used in studies of educational leadership. Transformational leadership, Total Quality
Conceptual Framework

“When educators work in isolation…students’ needs go unmet.” Hart,

Principal Leadership
- Blase & Blase, 1999
- Heck, Larsen, & Maroulides, 1990
- Cotton, 2003
- Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005

Teacher Collaboration
- Lortie, 1975
- Pienta, 2004
- Van Boschoten, 2008
- Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007

Convergence
- Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004
- McLaughlin & Talbot, 2006
- Williams, 2010

“Principal leadership is related to the degree teachers collaborate.” (Goddard, Miller, Larsen, Goddard & Jacob, 2010)

Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, 1998); Research-based quality teacher collaboration

Ohio Improvement Process: Ohio’s PLC

What specific principal practices and conditions set promote implementation of quality teacher collaboration?

“Greater need for fidelity of implementation of OIP across districts.” (Magliocca & Morrison, 2013)

Case Study: Three Effective Collaborative Settings and Principals

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for proposed study
Management and situational leadership are studies of leadership but use specific criteria to evaluate the leadership style and/or effectiveness.

Burns (1978) made the first distinction of transformational leadership, which was a style that was focused on changing or transforming organizations. Transformational leadership is typically more favorable to its partner, transactional leadership, because it produces results beyond expectations (Bass, 1985).

Leithwood (1994) enhanced this work on transformational leadership and applied it directly to education. He indicated that the Four I’s of transformational leadership were necessary for principals to be successful in the coming years. Leithwood (1994) provided clarity of what these Four I’s meant to a principal. The Four I’s and his redefinitions are as follows:

1. Individual consideration – include all
2. Intellectual stimulation – help staff members think differently
3. Inspirational motivation- communicate high expectations
4. Idealized influence – model character and accomplishments for staff members

Edward Deming was charged with restoring the manufacturing base in Japan after World War II. The framework that he provided, Total Quality Management, helped improve the products and services not only in Japan but in the United States (Deming, 1986). Although this model was made for business, some Total Quality Management tenets has found its way into educational leadership such as change agency, teamwork, trust building, and continuous improvement (Marzano et al, 2005). Deming’s notion of continuous improvement is still prevalent today as school districts develop continuous
improvement plans routinely and keep these goals in the forefront of staff and community members’ minds.

Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard are associated with the theory of Situational Leadership, which is a third leadership theory. In Hersey’s and Blanchard’s (1996) work, the leader adapts the leadership behavior to match the followers “maturity.” This “maturity is measured by the followers’ willingness and ability to perform specific tasks. High or low willingness is matched with high or low ability in a situational leadership quadrant. The leadership style for that “situation” is based on the where the followers ability and willingness falls in that quadrant (Blanchard & Hersey, 1996). The styles in the quadrant are the telling style, participatory style, selling style, and a delegating style depending on the quadrant (Blanchard & Hersey, 1996). This quadrant is a staple in most introductory educational leadership and pre-service principal courses.

To that end, the principal has been the focus of significant research. A school leader’s actions and priorities have been studied by multiple researchers and have concluded that a principal can impact positively and negatively what happens within a school.

**Principal Leadership Research**

A US Congress (1970) Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity identified the principal as the single most influential person in a school. The report indicated the following:

“…the principal’s leadership sets the tone of the school, the climate of teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become…” (p. 56)
The term principal derived from the term “principal teacher” (Hoerr, 2007). This origin of the term provides the perception that instructional leadership is the natural first priority of any principal. In fact, that is not necessarily the case.

Principals indicate that instructional leadership and improving student learning is their priority. Unfortunately their words and their actions do not match. Gould (1998) found that Massachusetts elementary principals spend more time on the organizational and administrative tasks in their buildings. This is in direct contrast to the amount of time they spend on instructional leadership responsibilities, which they perceive to be as their most important work.

Principal leadership is a research topic that has many facets when one begins to review the literature associated with it. Researchers have found varying definitions of what effective principal leadership is and how it impacts the student experience within their respective schools. Effective principal leadership is associated with whether a school has a clear mission and goals (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990). Griffith (2000) found that principal leadership could be associated with the climate within classrooms and the overall school building. Principal leadership was additionally associated with the classroom practices of teachers (Miller & Segue, 1986). In a similar respect, Oakes (1989) found that principal leadership had an impact on the attributes of teachers. These researchers found singular elements that defined principal leadership in their research.

A principal’s effectiveness is dependent on how he or she balances these varied responsibilities. In particular, the principal’s success depends on his or her efficacy on specific tasks and how they allocate their time across daily responsibilities (Rice, 2010). Furthermore, a principal’s instructional leadership needs to be balanced with
organizational management (Grissom & Laub, 2009). Principals wanting to be true instructional leaders and impact student achievement need to target resources where they are most needed.

Others found that principal leadership was multi-dimensional. Mitchell (1990) found that principal work had four dimensions. These four areas: supervision, administration, management and leadership, were analyzed separately and contributed to an overall culture in a principal’s school (Mitchell, 1990). Smith and Andrews (1989) identified four roles of a principal that related to the instructional leadership responsibilities: resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and a visible presence in the instructional process.

Blasé and Blasé (1999) further defined the principal instructional leadership by four distinct characteristics: encouraging and facilitating the study of teaching and learning, facilitating collaborative efforts among teachers, establishing coaching relationships among teachers, and using instructional research to make decisions. Effective principal leadership was identified from the teacher perspective in this study (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Their study design shares design elements to the proposed case study. Additionally the Blases’ work is a precursor to instructional coaches that were introduced in many larger school districts subsequent to this and similar studies. As these principal leadership studies defined roles and areas of influence, more recent studies began to quantify the principal leadership performance and its impact on students and instruction.

The actions of principals relative to the improving the teaching craft in their buildings has also been researched extensively. Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003) found that principals who challenge the status quo and establish challenging instructional
goals for their teachers have seen positive results in improving instruction. Establishing these challenging teaching goals, involving teachers in the teaching strategy development process and monitoring the use of feedback about student progress have shown to improve the teaching craft when practiced by principals (Waters et al, 2003).

Schlechty (2009) identified the significance of monitoring student progress in his research on principal leadership. Conversations about student progress or lack of progress need to be disciplined and planned on a regular basis and this should be led by the building principal (Schlechty, 2009). Additionally principals should be providing direction as opposed to exercising control over their teachers, in other words, lead rather than manage (Schlechty, p. 129). He further defines the work of the principal to seek and help others seek ways to effectively create engaging work for students (Schlechty, p. 130). Schlechty (2009) believes that principals should ensure that all teachers are engaged in their work and that teachers have the proper training to perform their craft well.

The indirect relationship between principal leadership and positive student outcomes was researched. Marzano and DuFour (2011) noted that principals do not directly impact student learning, but their actions impact the behaviors of teachers that directly impact instruction. It has been found that some principal actions can subsequently direct the teachers’ classroom actions to positively impact the classroom instruction (Marzano & DuFour, 2011). Unfortunately, when some principals have found that their actions do not influence the teaching behaviors, they resort to managing rather than leading their schools (Marzano & DuFour, 2011).
Principal leadership is measured by teacher instruction and the changes in their craft, but recent accountability has taken it one step further. A principal’s impact on student outcomes and student achievement has produced much study in the last several years due to the influx of high stakes testing across the country and world.

Heck, Larsen, and Marcoulides (1990) found a causal relationship between principal leadership and student achievement. The timing of this study is not coincidental as this is a similar time to the commencement of many states’ high stakes testing. In the state of Ohio, where the proposed study will be conducted, state-wide proficiency tests in fourth, sixth and eighth grades started in 1990 and has since evolved to reading and math achievement testing in all grades three through eight.

Hattie’s (2005) meta-analyses showed a .36 effect size for principals and school leaders on instruction. According to this work, a .36 effect size was deemed as a medium effect size and worthy of some attention (Hattie, 2005). This meta-analysis should be broken down, though, in order to identify specific areas that principals should be mindful of in their leadership, that in turn, have a positive effect on student outcomes.

As noted in the opening section of this chapter the theme of transformational leadership has been associated greatly with school leaders. Transformational leaders are typically viewed more favorably than transactional leaders, who act in manner of “giving something in order to get something.” Principal leaders, who focus on transformational leadership tenets in their work, are seen to have .38 effect or medium effect on student achievement (Brown, 2001). A related study by Chin (2007) found that transformational leaders who shaped high goals and elevated teacher abilities showed significant improvements in student outcomes. Brown (2001), in contrast, found that principals, who
concentrated their efforts on organizational leadership work such as scheduling, staffing and student support services, had a higher effect size, .66, on student achievement.

Supporting teacher development in their craft of teaching was found to have favorable effect on student outcomes. Principals, who focused on promoting and participating in teacher learning and development showed a very high effect size, .91, on student achievement (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Additionally Robinson, Rowe and Lloyd (2008) found that principals, who planned, coordinated, and evaluated teaching through summative and formative means had a high return, .74 effect size, on student achievement. In summation, the more school leaders focus their influence, learning, and their relationships with teachers on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes (Robinson et al, p. 23).

Cotton (2003) compiled a synthesis of over 80 separate reports and studies on principal leadership. Her work has identified 26 essential traits and behaviors of effective principals who are aiming to be strong instructional leaders. Two of those 26 are shared leadership and collaboration, which are critical skills germane to the proposed study. Her synthesis exposed the notions of “deprivatizing” teaching in our schools, as well as “creating collaborative working arrangements” within schools (Cotton, p. 23). These arrangements are not the norm, though. A lack of administrative, or principal, support is one of the main reasons why collaborative cultures are not more prevalent in schools today (Riordan & de Costa, 1998).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) conducted a meta-analysis on the subject of principal leadership and its impact on student outcomes. Marzano, Waters and
McNulty (2005) identify 21 leadership responsibilities that have a statistically significant relationship with student achievement.

Table 1
Comparison of Principal Responsibilities from *Principal Leadership That Works* by Marzano, Waters, & McNulty with principal behaviors from *Principals and Student Achievement* by Cotton. The table reflects the researcher’s view of complementing attributes from the two works.

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Rewards</td>
<td>Recognition of Student &amp; Staff Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication &amp; interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Positive &amp; Supportive Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Safe &amp; Orderly Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Support of Risk Taking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Vision &amp; Goals Focused on High Levels of Student Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideals/Beliefs</td>
<td>Role Modeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>Shared Leadership, Decision Making, &amp; Staff Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>Discussion of Instructional Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, &amp; Assessment</td>
<td>Some General Findings About Instructional Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, &amp; Assessment</td>
<td>Monitoring Student Progress &amp; Sharing Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring/Evaluating</td>
<td>Classroom Observation &amp; Feedback to Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimizer</td>
<td>Support of Risk Taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Protecting Instructional Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Parent &amp; Community Outreach &amp; Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Emotional &amp; Interpersonal Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>PD Development Opportunities &amp; Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Visibility &amp; Accessibility</td>
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</table>

These last two sources deserve some additional discussion and comparison. As Cotton (2003) identified principal practices, Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) identified 21 specific principal responsibilities. Although the terminology is different, the
two lists of principal work were shown to have overlap (Marzano et al., 2005). Each work targeted research studies from 1970 to present with an emphasis on more recent research studies.

Upon closer review there are several similarities of effective principals between these two seminal works of principal leadership. This researcher compared the two lists and found many overlapping themes. Specifically 18 of the principal responsibilities identified by Principal Leadership That Works have complementing principal behaviors from Principals and Student Achievement. Some of the compliments are obvious like the term “visibility” that is represented on each list. Others complement each other by the core intent such as the responsibility “Intellectual Stimulation” from the Marzano, Waters, and McNulty work as compared to the behavior of “Discussion of Instructional Issues” from Cotton’s work. One behavior from Cotton’s list, Support for Risk Taking, complements two responsibilities, “Flexibility” and “Optimizer,” from the other work. Table 1 represents this researcher’s comparison of the two works and the 18 responsibilities from the Marzano, Waters, and McNulty work that have complements from Cotton’s work.

Dr. McNulty was a significant figure in the development of this model with educators across the state of Ohio at a time that paralleled this book release. His research supports the principal impact in student achievement and further supports the need for a qualitative study proposed in this dissertation.

**History of Teacher Collaboration**

Collaboration among teachers has not been the norm historically (Lortie, 1975). In reality it seems to be the manner in which many teachers prefer to operate in schools.
Some teachers perceive team teaching, university graduate classes, and even faculty meetings as examples of collaboration, which is very different from what current literature would exemplify (Leonard & Leonard, 2003).

In an era of high stakes testing, strict federal and state accountability, rigorous national curricula, and increased teacher evaluation based on student data; teacher collaboration is no longer a good idea but rather should be a district imperative. Teacher isolation has been one of the greatest impediments to improvements in teaching and learning. Educator isolation forced teachers to rely on trial and error in their own classrooms. This contributed to teachers falling back on memories of old schooling for models in their teaching (Rosenholtz, 1989).

All the way back to John Dewey and his Chicago Laboratory School there was an emphasis on the “cooperative social organization applied to the teaching body” (Mayhew & Edwards, 1965). Nevertheless, Lortie (1975) reported that teachers continued to be mired in isolation that was truly impeding real academic progress. From Lortie’s work forward the study of teacher collaboration has evolved. There are several studies that have chronicled this evolution and its impact on teachers, their classroom instruction and ultimately student achievement.

Nearly twenty years after Lortie’s work, Connelly performed a qualitative study on the factors that influence third year teachers to remain in or leave teaching. She conducted this research through two interviews and document analysis a number of elementary teachers who had completed three years of teaching (Connelly, 1995). Her findings were relevant to the Lortie work from twenty years earlier, specifically the following:
1. Teachers were distressed that principals and teaching colleagues did not talk about teaching

2. Teachers struggled with teacher isolation

3. Teachers perceived that they were not part of the leadership structure in their schools

4. Teachers were concerned with other teacher bashing (Connelly, 1995)

Connelly found that the teaching profession has not changed much from Lortie’s work in 1975.

Teachers were meeting, but were they any less isolated? An interpretative study asked about teachers’ beliefs about collaborative practice compared to what they actually perceived as actual collaborative practices (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). The methodology included questionnaires that were returned from 238 teachers initially and 56 as the follow up. These teachers ranged in experience from 3 to 34 years and represented 45 schools in eight different districts. The findings of the study are fascinating when it comes to teachers perceptions of collaboration. Table 2 represents teacher responses to various forms of professional collaboration in their schools.

Table 2

Various forms of professional collaboration reported by teachers
The study also identified hindrances to collaboration from teachers’ perspectives. These included a lack of commitment by some teachers, a lack of compensation, “lazy people” who avoided extra work, and teachers who wanted “to work alone” and stay in their “comfort zone” (Leonard & Leonard, p. 7). Some also mentioned the lack of administrative support for collaboration, which will be addressed further in future studies. This study identifies that teachers are meeting, but are they truly collaborating? Teachers seem to have a difficulty truly defining what collaboration is and what it looks like.

Van Benschoten (2008) explored teachers’ perceptions of their experiences of collaboration. This study was a qualitative study that involved ten elementary level teachers representing three schools in an urban Tennessee school district (Van Benschoten, 2008). The teacher interviews within the study provided depth of qualitative data on teacher collaboration. Van Benschoten (2008) found there were great tensions present in collaborative settings of teachers. These tensions were a result of differences in teaching and knowledge, trust, time, and gender roles within collaboration (Van Benschoten, 2008). In the dissertation, A Phenomenological Case Study of Teacher Collaboration, Van Benschoten (2008) uncovers great evidence that there are power issues within teacher collaboration. This study though indicates how teachers can become disengaged with collaborative process because of the conflicts that arise. A “reculturing”
of the collaboration process is needed and the next study shed light on possible ways to keep teachers engaged in this important school improvement activity.

Pienta (2004) used a qualitative study approach to explore the work lives of participating teachers and what contributed to their longevity in the teaching profession. From the qualitative data collected, coding themes emerged for greater analysis (Pienta, 2004). For this study nine “star teachers” were identified for this in-depth interviewing. These teachers either taught in middle or elementary schools and had been in the profession for five or more years (Pienta, 2004). These were teachers identified due to their relationship with their administrator and that each was perceived to be a “star” by a principal. These “star” teachers selected all engaged in the following:

1. Seeking opportunities to learn and enhance their practice in ways that will improve classroom teaching.
2. Use adaptive strategies to meet systemic challenges
3. Work to develop rich professional collaborative relationships with other teachers
4. Want to be recognized and respected for their professional efforts
5. View students as important partners in a democratic learning community.

(Pienta, 2004)

The fact that our best teachers “work to develop” collaborative relationships with other teachers is a point that should move more teachers out of isolation and into meaningful collegial relationships. If our “stars” want collaboration, then administrators should be looking to organize that for all teachers.

A "star" teacher was characterized by a teacher who wanted to work
collaboratively in the last study, but did that teacher make the changes in his instruction
due to the collaboration? This next study examined what qualities were most prevalent in
teachers who readily adopted strategies acquired in collaboration. Brownell, Adams,
Sindelar, Waldron and Vanhover (2006) performed a 3-year study promoting teacher
learning through Teacher Learning Cohorts. The study utilized a qualitative case study
methodology of eight general education teachers, representing two different schools with
principals identified as capable leaders (Brownell et al, 2006). One finding of this data-
rich study was that a teacher's experience, preparation, or school context had little bearing
on their propensity to adopt new strategies (Brownell et al, 2006). This is an important
item for principals and administration to consider when drafting expectations for all
teachers to make changes with their instruction. The study divided the adopters into three
categories: high adopters, moderate, and low. The high adopters differed in the following
manner, though:

1. High adopters had the most knowledge of curriculum
2. High adopters had the most knowledge and student-friendly beliefs about
   managing student behavior
3. High adopters had the most student-focused views of instruction, and
4. High adopters had the most ability to reflect on students' learning.

   (Brownell et al, 2006)

Therefore, a teacher's knowledge, ability beliefs, skills and a reflective ability
work together with other teachers impact his ability to benefit from collaborative
practice. This study, though, was limited to teacher practice influence. It did not address
the address the ability to impact student achievement, which is certainly the ultimate goal
of collaborative practice.

Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) set out to test the hypothesis of "Teacher collaboration is positively and significantly related to differences among fourth grade achievement on state-mandated assessments of mathematics and reading achievement." This was a significant study in respect to what it was attempting to prove on teacher collaboration. The results of this extensive and landmark study showed evidence of a positive and statistically significant relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement (Goddard et al., 2007). The study did indicate that teachers in urban settings who engage in systematic collaboration have a greater potential to improve student achievement. Even though the findings showed moderate increases in student achievement, school leaders should consider developing a community of learners approach in their schools. This approach done purposefully can begin to replicate the results found in this study.

Teacher collaboration and principal leadership have recently converged. There is limited research that will be reviewed in this next section. The popular term of professional learning communities and the Ohio version, the Ohio Improvement Process, represent two of these that will dominate the discussion and lend context to the study proposed.

**Convergence of Principal Leadership and Teacher Collaboration**

The aforementioned history of teacher collaboration highlights leadership responsibilities to this gradual emergence of collaborative cultures in schools. While some teachers desire a collaborative, professional culture in their workplaces, it takes purposeful action by school principals to maximize this and to positively impact student
outcomes. Lieberman and Rosenholtz (1987) reaffirmed Lortie’s work finding that “isolation and insulation are the expected conditions in too many schools (and that) these conditions do not foster individual student growth and school improvement” (p. 94).

Simply team building by principals can be a powerful intervention strategy that should not be overlooked. Teacher team building was one of the more successful organizational leadership strategies school leaders could implement, producing a medium effect on student outcomes at an effect size of .30 (Neuman, Edwards, & Raju 1989). This is only a start, as principals should be the catalyst of the development of collaborative groups among staff members (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1995). These studies began to identify the power that a school leader has in building a healthy collaborative culture within a school.

Subsequent studies reinforced with the significant position the principal holds in developing this team learning approach. Principals were found to be in a key strategic position to promote or inhibit the development of a teacher learning community in their school (McLaughlin & Talbot, 2006). This research showed they can also discourage a collaborative culture by their actions, hence reinforcing the isolation panned by Lortie and others. McLaughlin and Talbot (2006) indicated that school administrators set the stage and conditions for starting and sustaining the community development process. Principals should focus more on overall staff development as opposed to individual teachers. Fullan (2010) found that principals need to focus on building collective capacity among the school staff members and rely less on individualistic strategies.

This convergence of principal leadership and teacher collaboration, though should be focused on two specific initiatives that have recently shaped teacher professional
development nationally and within the state of Ohio, Professional Learning Communities and the Ohio Improvement Process.

Professional Learning Communities provide a vehicle for focused interactions between principals and teachers. A professional learning community, though, is not a thing but rather a process. DuFour (2004) describes the three big ideas of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as an assurance that students learn, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results.

Professional learning communities with these three big ideas at their core have some specific expectations that are present. These expectations include meetings with established norms and protocols, meetings that analyze formative student data, and meetings in which teams decide on data-driven goals for the future (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). These expectations come to fruition in different manners in different schools and learning organizations. All PLCs though should have teachers collaborating and exploring three critical questions:

1. What do we want each student to know?

2. How will we know when each student has learned it?

3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

(DuFour & Eaker, 1998)

DuFour and Eaker (1998) further indicated that the most promising strategy for continuous school improvement is the ability for a school to function as a professional learning community. The next couple of studies chronicle professional learning communities and their work.
A mixed method case study of a single middle school further studied the effects of the professional learning communities on student achievement. Graham (2007) closely studies a first year middle school and the working dynamics of its sixth, seventh and eighth grade same-subject and same-grade teacher teams. These survey results were used to identify PLC activities that a) indicated a relationship with changes in teachers' knowledge, skills and practice, and b) identified any variation of this change based on teachers' experience, grade level or subject taught (Graham, 2007). As a faculty the teachers reported moderate levels of change in their teaching practices as a result of their participation in PLCs, with an average score of 2.0 on a 0-3 scale.

The objective of professional learning communities is to become the professional development model to transform classroom instruction and subsequently improve student achievement. The manner in which schools make that transition from stand-alone professional development activities to the systematic, on-going job-embedded model of the PLCs is crucial. Much of that transition has to do with how teachers perceive their PLC activities and the structure that it takes within the assigned PLC time. The subsequent study reviews those aspects of the PLC model.

Principal leadership has a profound impact on PLCs and their functioning. A middle school is typically built around teams, whether grade level or interdisciplinary. Thompson, Gregg and Niska (2004) studied six middle schools to determine among other things whether there is a relationship between professional learning communities, leadership and student learning in the selected middle schools. This study was a mixed methodology design of qualitative and quantitative elements. The qualitative data collected was significant to this study as it allowed greater study into human interactions
on whether these individuals perceived their school settings as professional learning communities (Thompson et al., 2004). The study found that both teachers and principals universally felt their schools were learning organizations. Strong leadership that focused on job-embedded professional development was attributed to this belief (Thompson et al., 2004). This type of leadership is highlighted by McNulty (2011) when he described building data teams that focus their work on implementing instructional strategies that are committed to by instructional data teams. A strong focused principal who both applies pressure and support for his staff members creates this culture. This work will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent studies highlighted.

Graham’s (2007) mixed methods case study of a single middle school that acted as a professional learning community emphasizes the need for strong school leadership and their interest in developing a professional learning community. These leaders must take time to create the foundational structures for PLCs and reinforce this work constantly with meaningful professional development. This study affirmed the need for principals to pay attention to interpersonal relationships and conflict that happens in quality collaboration.

Williams (2010) conducted a qualitative study in a large Midwestern high school where 20 teachers were interviewed intensively. The interviews explored the impact structured teacher collaboration had on their instructional practices, their feelings of responsibility for student learning, positive adult interdependence, and teacher efficacy (Williams, 2010). This single school case study further investigated the high school’s professional learning model that had a cycle of continuous improvement. The PLC model
in the school had clear measures for goal-setting, action research embedded implementation of instructional strategies, and evaluation of these strategies.

The findings of the study, though, speak to the structures and leadership necessary for effective PLCs. A structured approach to teacher collaboration that is focused on student learning outcomes has a positive impact on teacher efficacy (Williams, 2010). The structured approach to the teacher collaboration is the most noteworthy point in this study. This purposeful work of goal setting based on data, implementation of instructional strategies, and evaluation of the strategies effectiveness within the teacher collaboration time is the strikingly similar to detailed five-step process of the Ohio Improvement Process that is the basis of the next study.

The Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) is the school improvement model developed by the state of Ohio as a result of federal differentiated accountability. The OIP is built on a shared leadership model with multiple team structures at the district, building and teacher level. The teacher-level, or Teacher-based Teams (TBTs), are collaborative teams that are built around the five-step process. These TBTs analyze common formative assessment data for the purpose of improving instructional practice in classrooms. Teacher-based teams follow a five-step process that is the following:

1. Collect and chart data
2. Analyze student work specific to the data
3. Establish expectations for implementing specific changes in the classroom including job-embedded professional development
4. Implement changes consistently across all classrooms
5. Collect, chart, and analyze post-data, discuss successes, challenges and make decisions based on the results.

(Ohio Department of Education, 2010)

The Ohio Improvement Process was funded by Ohio’s State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), and was designed to establish a state system of support focused on instructional leadership and improvement (Morrison & Magliocca, 2012). Initially the OIP was implemented in 48 of Ohio’s 613 public school districts. By 2012, the OIP is being implemented in over 500 districts and 150 Community School local educational agencies. For that purpose, a study to examine the fidelity of implementation across the populous state of Ohio and how well the process was impacting student achievement was necessary.

Morrison and Magliocca (2012) completed an extensive five-year research study on the overall state-wide implementation of this improvement model. The study included thousands of teachers, hundreds of principals, district administrators and state-wide support team personnel. These are the same state support team personnel that were critical to the identification of the three case studies for this research. The student achievement results showed little variability between “high implementation” schools and “low/medium implementation” schools (Morrison & Magliocca, 2012). But upon reviewing the study deeper, there was a disparity of implementation within districts that were deemed “high implementation” (Morrison & Magliocca, 2012). This finding accentuates the need for strong principal leadership at all buildings to support a collaborative model like the Ohio Improvement Process or a professional learning community.
A recommendation from this study is for greater focus on fidelity of implementation at all levels. This is very important at the teacher-based team, in particular. As the case study proposed is focused on Northeast Ohio school districts implementing the Ohio Improvement Process, observation of teacher-based teams and building leadership teams will be critical to the qualitative data collected. The Morrison and Magliocca study confirms what the Williams study also found in that there is great need for structure and fidelity to the structure if teacher collaboration will be successful and positively impact student achievement.

One particular study ties the relationship of principal leadership to teacher collaboration. Goddard, Miller, Larsen, Goddard & Jacob (2010) found a significant direct effect of leadership on teacher collaboration and a significant direct effect of collaboration on student achievement. Additionally the indirect effect of leadership on student achievement through teacher collaboration was significant (Goddard et al, 2010). The study’s findings suggest that principals who provide shared instructional leadership achieved greater rates of teacher collaboration. Furthermore, where teachers spent more time collaborating, student learning was increased (Goddard et al, 2010).

The culmination of this research makes the case for the current study proposed. Closely studying a shared leadership setting like the three effective collaborative cultures of the Ohio Improvement Process is very worthwhile. From these settings, teacher collaboration (teacher based teams) and principal leadership (building leadership teams) can be studied.

Gaps in Literature
The studies highlighted span a great deal of research on areas of great importance in school improvement models. There seem to be some areas though that have not been reviewed that would need to be explored further.

As many studies mention principal leadership is crucial to a collaborative culture, what specific practices of these principals is lacking. Williams (2010) identifies structure and leadership as factors to PLC success. Morrison and Magliocca (2012) confirm that building leadership and structured TBTs will improve teacher practice. What conditions does a principal set in order to promote the collaborative teacher culture that will improve student achievement? Morrison and Magliocca’s (2012) study directly answers this by outlining the professional development that is provided to principals and internal facilitators at the district level. The SPDG Grant has identified trainings for district level employees, but what is that recipe in the day to day work of a building principal? Further studies into the facilitation and monitoring practices of successful principals should shed more light on this gap in knowledge.

Summary

Leadership and specifically principal leadership are topics that have drawn great attention from researchers over the last several decades. Transformational leadership, total quality management and situational leadership are three of many theories that have helped guide school administrators. Principal leadership research has evolved along the way as the principal has been identified by some researchers as the single most important person in a learning organization (US Congress, 1970).

The principal’s leadership has changed in the last several decades due to greater accountability to student growth outcomes. But managing the day to day operations
including student safety, teacher evaluation, and coordinating support needs for students and families can take substantial time and energy. Nevertheless greater student achievement accountability and principal evaluation models, like the Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES), that attaches student growth to evaluation have added additional pressure on busy principals. Cotton (2003), Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) have distilled much research into lists of behaviors and responsibilities for principals to focus on in order to positively impact student achievement. The research has shown that effective principals have enacted systems or processes that direct teachers to the important work of student achievement.

The systems and processes most popular today are Professional Learning Communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are a process not a program that allows teachers and principals to focus on student achievement through continuous, purposeful collaboration around student data (DuFour, Eaker, DuFour, & Many, 2005). PLCs that are led with strong leadership have shown positive teacher efficacy and learning climate (Williams, 2010; Graham, 2007). Additionally Morrison and Magliocca (2010) found that strong leadership and clear structures improved teacher practice. Structured teacher collaboration has been found to have a positive impact on student achievement (Goddard et al 2007). Figure 3 represents this connection impact link.
Marzano and DuFour (2011) found that principal actions impact teacher actions that can directly impact student outcomes. What are the specific principal actions that ultimately improve student academic progress? Cotton (2003) and Marzano et al (2005) identified 26 and 21 behaviors and responsibilities respectively that improve student achievement, but what are successful principals doing today with the other responsibilities of school building leadership weighing heavily upon them? The proposed study aims to identify beliefs of principals that have been successful in creating quality teacher collaboration and improving student outcomes. Additionally the study intends to ascertain specific conditions present and practices that these successful school principals implement that promote student academic performance.

This study will have potential value for not only sitting principals but central office staff charged with leading building level administrators in the work of improving
student performance. Elementary building principals will have specific practices they can utilize in their buildings that have been successful in similar settings. This study will personally support my leading, coaching and evaluating building principals, who are responsible for developing and cultivating these collaborative settings. This study will aid significantly in my understanding of the types of practices, conditions and beliefs necessary for these principals under my supervision to be successful. Their success will translate into increased student achievement for the students under our collective responsibility.

DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005, p. 11) found that the PLC concept represents more than just a set of practices – it rests upon a set of beliefs, assumptions, and expectations regarding school. In Ohio, the school improvement PLC model is the Ohio Improvement Process, and includes similar elements. In particular the teacher-based team level of the Ohio Improvement Process focuses on the classroom teachers collaborating around student assessment data and making future instructional decisions based on that data. This is the same objective of the PLC. The methodology in the subsequent chapter aims to identify the beliefs, conditions and practices of effective principals that have led schools and improved student outcomes through quality collaborative practice. The identification of these elements will have longstanding significance for this researcher but others desiring sustainable and continuous student improvement.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The job of the school principal is extremely dynamic and includes many responsibilities that take up considerable time and energy. Building a collaborative culture that focuses on student work and instructional practice is a task that many times gets pushed to the bottom of the “in basket.” The busy principal should focus on creating definite conditions and enacting purposeful practices that contribute to a collaborative culture. The proposed study wishes to identify these elements that have shown to produce improved student outcomes in schools from a quality collaborative culture. In addition, this study hopes to identify the beliefs the principals that shape their practices and define the collaborative culture they develop in their schools.

The researcher employs a qualitative approach for this case study of school settings that have established collaborative systems and have shown improved student achievement. The research study will utilize principal interviews, teacher-based team observations, and building leadership team observations over several months. Through the analysis of this data the researcher desires to identify specific practices, conditions and beliefs of effective principals in order to replicate in other settings in order to create collaborative cultures that improve student achievement.

This research will suggest actions and practices for principals in similar districts implementing similar team structures. As DuFour (2004) identifies a collaborative culture as one of the three “big ideas” of PLCs, this study will identify the beliefs about teacher collaboration and leadership from three effective school leaders.
As collaborative cultures are becoming more the norm, it is not typical for pre-service principals to be provided training on how to lead healthy professional learning communities that focus on student data. This potential research study may begin to fill the gaps in principal pre-service training on leading collaborative environments.

**Statement of the Problem**

School leaders have increased accountability placed on them that greatly impact their time and work. Nationally principals are charged with implementation of new rigorous Common Core (2013) standards in English/language arts and mathematics. Additionally the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has placed greater emphasis on testing results and punitive measures abound for underperforming schools. In the state of Ohio where the proposed study is situated, next generation assessments, Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES), Ohio Principal Evaluation System (OPES), and ever-present school safety concerns make for a stressful and busy principal. These items take attention from improving student academic outcomes, which skilled principals can have a positive impact (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

It seems some new accountability measures counter improvement of student achievement. Teacher evaluation can be meaningful but is not an effective strategy for school improvement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Three out of four teachers report that their evaluation process has no impact on their classroom practice (Duffett, Farkas, Rotherham, & Silva, 2008). Nevertheless principal leadership is second only to teacher quality when it comes to school influences that impact student achievement (Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Principals do have the ability to create environments where the collective capacity of their teachers and staff can be maximized.
and improve student achievement (Lockheed & Lavin, 2012). What are the conditions a principal can develop that will release this potential?

A collaborative culture among the teachers and staff within the school environment is a condition that a school principal does have power in developing. The principal, who works to create a collaborative culture, is implementing the most powerful strategy when it comes to improving student achievement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Collaborative culture has been directly linked to improved student achievement when completed in purposeful manner (DuFour, R., Eaker, R., DuFour, R. 2005; DuFour, R. & Marzano, R., 2011; Graham, 2007). This is a skill that principals are not necessarily versed in, are not taught in pre-service coursework, and are certainly not developing if they emerged from teaching ranks that have been wrought in isolationism. As previously mentioned, teacher collaboration is a mandate of the Ohio Improvement Process (Ohio Department of Education, 2012) and collaborative structures are seen as exemplary practices according to the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES).

Today’s principal is pulled in many directions by local, state and federal mandates, thus their time is valuable and must be used efficiently. Time creating a collective responsibility and collaborative culture is efficient use of time. Educators in schools that have embraced these collaborative learning environments are more likely to take collective responsibility for student learning, help student achieve at higher levels, and express greater levels of professional satisfaction (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Therefore, since it has been shown that developing a collaborative culture around student data improves student achievement, further study of some effective principals in creating these cultures is necessary. This proposed study will capture the beliefs, practices, and
conditions these principals develop in order to foster a creative and collaborative environment where teachers work together to improve instruction in all classrooms.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this case study are as follows:

1. What are the beliefs on principal leadership and quality teacher collaboration of effective principals, who develop a collaborative culture for instructional leadership?

2. What are the conditions for quality teacher collaboration that effective principals establish in their schools?

3. What are the practices of effective principals to promote quality teacher collaboration in their schools?

The research questions target identifying specific beliefs, conditions and practices as a result of coding interviews and observations of three school settings. These settings were chosen for their principal quality, high relative student achievement, and the quality teacher collaboration. These three terms will be further defined in the population and sample selection section of this chapter. Due to these factors, these principals’ beliefs, practices, and conditions carry weight for establishment and sustainability of a collaborative culture that improves student achievement.

The researcher collects specific qualitative data in order to identify principal beliefs about collaborative culture and building it within their schools. The data collection sources for these beliefs are principal interviews, observations of building meetings and observations team meetings within the school. The interviews will be purposeful in order to glean the academic and school culture beliefs of the principal.
The researcher additionally aims to identify the specific practices and conditions produced by effective principals, who develop a collaborative culture in their schools. For this construct, the researcher leans upon observation data of building and teacher teams. These observations, relative to vetted rubrics for these teams should identify specific practices and conditions established that create the healthy collaborative culture within the school.

**Research Methodology**

The interpretation construction theory, principal leadership theory, and the Ohio Improvement Process theory and practice frame the research study. The underpinning of the interpretation construction theory is that true understanding is stimulated by the relationship and dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Ponterotto, 2005). Principal leadership is best evidenced through interactions and relationships. In the same manner, the Ohio Improvement Process is a model based on educators collaborating around student data and making instructional decisions. The researcher in the interpretation construction theory interacts and observes the participants in authentic settings such as teacher data meetings or leading the collaborative process. The qualitative basis of the interpretation construction paradigm lends itself best for the researcher’s strengths and the needs of the anticipated research proposed.

The qualitative study will examine three purposefully selected case studies that have identified collaborative cultures with leadership that has proven effective. Effective is defined by documented improved student achievement or higher student achievement relative to other like settings. Qualitative methods are designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln,
The three case settings proposed in this research would be studied through observation and interviews with the principals.

Hence, a qualitative methodology has been considered for this research. The study would be built with interviews of three principals that lead collaborative learning communities that have achieved success in student achievement. An initial interview would identify principal beliefs about leadership and collaboration. A follow up interview after a series of building and teacher team observations would allow the researcher to further probe data that was recorded.

Additional qualitative data would be observations of building leadership teams and teacher-based teams to collect rich data on the collaborative structures present. Personal experiences and training in the Ohio Improvement Process (Ohio Department of Education, 2012) will allow me to utilize rubrics efficiently to gauge the relative quality of the work within the building and teacher teams. This will allow the researcher to acculturate himself into the teams and enhance the learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Adding texture to the specific observations of team functioning would be some additional day-to-day observations of principal and school.

The researcher expects to identify very specific strategies that aid building principals in developing and encouraging a collaborative culture within their schools. From the varied qualitative data, one hopes to pinpoint clear conditions that should be established within elementary schools that will contribute to this productive culture. From the interview, principal beliefs may emerge which indicate the important elements that these principals hold in high regard and share with the teachers in each of their school buildings. These strategies, conditions and beliefs will direct current and future
elementary principals where to funnel energy in order to create a collaborative culture.
These elements in addition to the principal beliefs that emerge should begin to fill the gap in pre-service training for principals to help them create a powerful collaborative environment that is using student data to inform and improve instruction.

**Research Design**

The researcher in the interpretation construction theory interacts and observes the participants in authentic settings such as teacher data meetings or leading the collaborative process (Black & McClintock, 1995). Observations of authentic settings can generate qualitative data by the researcher. Hence, a qualitative case study research design model will be implemented to study the purposeful sampling selected.

**Case Study Design**

Case study research allows the researcher to isolate a particular population and gain data from it while studying it closely (Shuttleworth, 2008). Additionally case study research allows the researcher to tailor the design and data collection procedures to the research questions (Meyer, 2001). The research questions will focus the data collection as case study research emphasizes the researcher observing each setting well (Shuttleworth, 2008). This research design allows the researcher to observe the principal leading the collaborative environment and gain significant qualitative data from the principal and team observations.

In this study, three specific cases or schools will be studied closely by qualitative methods. Multiple cases add value to the study as single-case studies produce limitations in generalizability and information-processing biases (Eisenhardt, 1989). Yin (2003) further states that multiple case study research produces robust evidence that can be used
to predict similar results in other settings. Multiple case studies augment external validity, guard against observer bias, and add confidence to the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher plans to spend substantial time in each setting of this case study that will gain ample data on the research questions.

**Population and Sample Selection**

This case study research focuses on three information-rich settings as Crabtree and Miller (1992) suggest that qualitative sampling seeks information richness and selects the cases purposefully rather than randomly. Each school case is worthy of in-depth study due to what can be learned from each about leadership and collaborative culture (Patton, 2002). The purposeful selection of these multiple case studies gives this proposed research study its potential value.

A three-fold criteria was used to determine appropriate case study settings for this proposed research. First, the school setting must exhibit quality teacher collaboration relative to the Ohio Improvement Process. This means active and regularly meeting teacher and building level data teams. Second, documented student improvement and/or achievement have been attained under the current principal’s leadership. Third, an effective principal is leading this collaborative culture within the school. These three criteria were presented to State Support Team leadership in the Cuyahoga County area, who identified potential settings that fit this criteria and would be worthy of study.

As five possible settings were provided to the researcher, these three rose to the top after some due diligence. Each school’s student achievement history was researched by reviewing state issued report card data. Four of the potential principals were called by the researcher for an initial discussion about the potential study and their referral from the
above criteria by state support team personnel. The final three settings for this case study were finalized upon reviewing 2014 school report card data. All three of these potential school settings continued to high achieve in either achievement or growth on this report card. As successful teacher collaboration that results in improved student outcomes is at the core of this study, it helped make the final case setting determinations for this study. The following provides some background and context for these three information-rich settings.

*Case Setting #1*

Case one for this study is an elementary school that currently serves kindergarten through fourth grade. The principal has been in this school for three years and has built a successful collaborative culture as evidenced by state support team consultants, who assist the district in school improvement efforts. Over the last three years the performance index of the school has increased from 104.3 to 109.2. This index is a reflection of how all students perform on the state-mandated achievement tests and is weighted toward higher achievement with 120.0 being a maximum score a school or district can attain. This school is one of ten elementary schools in the district. The other elementary schools in the district experienced a decrease in performance index from 97.5 to 95.9 during the same time period. Another state report card metric is value-added that measures annual student growth on these same tests. In the three years of this principal’s tenure the district has moved from “met expected growth” to “above expected growth,” which is indicative of two standard deviations growth on average for all students taking the reading and math assessments. This school under this principal’s leadership has created a strong collaborative culture and increased student achievement and growth.
Table three reflects the academic improvements made during this principal’s tenure. The table shows how the principal in case one has led increases in every area of the school report card. Increases are documented in the performance index and the passage rate of grade level assessments during the principal’s tenure in her current school. For example, the third grade math passage rate increased from 90% to 97% over the three years, and the 4th grade reading passage rate increased from 88% to 98% in those same three years of leadership. During this time the principal has fostered a collaborative environment that is dependent on teams meeting and analyzing student work. These changes and improvements are clearly seen in case one since the start of this principal’s tenure at the school in fall of 2011.

In case one, the principal was the instructional leader in an elementary school that served students in kindergarten through sixth through the 2011-2012 school year. The school district experienced some restructuring that changed the enrollment of this principal’s school to kindergarten through fourth grade beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>State of Ohio report card data for case setting #1. Years 2011-2014 represent data under the leadership of current and case study principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>metric</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance index</td>
<td>104.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-added</td>
<td>Met expected growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Gr. Reading</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Gr. Math</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Gr. Reading</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Gr. Math</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: From Ohio Department of Education

State Support Team personnel identified this case study school as a prime example of a collaborative culture given their fidelity to the Ohio Improvement Process. The SST indicated that there were solid team structures in place and that the current principal has much impact on the establishment and sustaining of these collaborative structures.

Case Setting #2

Case two represents a setting where the principal was highly successful in another school district and has recently completed her first year in this new setting. In the previous district, this principal inherited a school with a performance index score of 77.9 and in two years raised that to 92.5. Contributing to this increase was the improvement of passage rates in all state assessments. For example, fifth grade reading and math passage rates were 38.3% and 33.3% respectively the year before this principal assumed the position. Two years later those rates were 75.9% and 67.2% respectively. In terms of value-added or growth, the school “met expected growth” at the beginning of the principal’s tenure and increased to “above expected growth” at the completion. This principal is now in case study setting two leading a similar elementary school but building that collaborative culture again, so the value of observing this setting is great.

Table four shows the improvements that the principal in case study two made while leading an elementary school in a previous school district. The principal established a collaborative culture and built teams reviewing student data and making decisions based on that data in this previous school. The table reflects improvements in all areas of the report card in a very short period of time. As this principal is now entering
year two as principal in case study two, the leadership paradigm has superb value for study to gain implementation data of a new collaborative culture.

Table 4
*State of report card data for Case Setting #2 principal in a previous district. Years 2011-2012 & 2012-2013 reflect this principal’s two year tenure at the district.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>metric</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Index</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-Added</td>
<td>Met</td>
<td>Above</td>
<td>Above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Gr. Reading</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Gr. Math</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Gr. Reading</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Gr. Math</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Gr. Reading</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Gr. Math</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Gr. Science</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: From: Ohio Department of Education*

Case Setting #3

Case setting three is an elementary school that has seen significant growth in the past year. This school has committed to the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process and has consistent principal leadership for a significant number of years. On the most recent state report card, the school made dramatic increases in the performance index and passage rates of the state reading and math assessments. Table five reflects these increases from the 2012-2013 to 2013-2014.

Table 5
*State of Ohio report card data for the last two years for Case setting #3.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>metric</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
<th>2013-2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance index</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>101.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Gr. Reading</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: From Ohio Department of Education

The principal has been in the position for 17 years. According to State Support Team personnel, this principal has made a commitment to effective implementation of this collaborative structure and it has paid off significantly with student outcomes per the latest report card. As this principal has adjusted the conditions and practices significantly in her tenure, the case study has great value for close inspection. The proposed principal interviews and team observations could garner some insights that could be helpful for other principals, supervising administrators and principal pre-service instructors. In particular principals with longer tenures can learn how practices and conditions can be modified within their principalship to encourage greater quality teacher collaboration and improved student outcomes.

These three principals and their collaborative settings deserve close inspection and this study will provide that examination. The principals will engage in an initial interview that will explore the instructional leadership, the educational beliefs and the methods for developing a collaborative culture in their schools. The dialogue between the researcher and participant is the avenue to construct new knowledge and is congruent with the interpretative constructivism theoretical framework (Ponterotto, 2005).

Observations of authentic events and constructing knowledge from them are underpinnings of a qualitative study in their interpretative constructivism model (Ponterotto, 2005). This study will observe multiple collaborative team meetings in each of the settings over a four month period. These team meetings are context-specific.
settings that allow the researcher to build knowledge from observations, dialogue and interactions among the teachers and principal in some cases.

**Sources of Data**

A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy that also enhances data credibility (Patton, 2002). Three specific data collection tools will be utilized for this research.

An initial interview protocol was developed for the three effective principals. This interview protocol was patterned after existing interview protocols that aim at questioning principals about their leadership practices. The modified interview protocol, which is appendix A, includes questions focused on the two main constructs of this research, principal leadership and quality teacher collaboration. As principals’ beliefs are at the core of this study, the researcher will ask about their understandings, beliefs and how they share those collaborative beliefs with their teachers and staff. A follow up interview will be conducted at the end of the research to ask clarifying questions of the principals based on the observations over the four month period. It will add further context to the principal beliefs, conditions and practices already articulated and observed.

The questions in the principal interview protocol have been purposefully crafted to gain data relative to the three research questions. Questions 1 and 14 are specifically warm up and wrap up questions that have no specific connection to the research questions. In order to gain data on the principal beliefs, questions 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 13 will provide support. Questions 4, 10, 10a, and 11 will provide data on gaining information on the conditions established by principals that encourage a collaborative culture. The
various principal practices that encourage a collaborative culture will be gleaned through responses to questions 4a, 5, and 9.

It will be imperative to observe building leadership and teacher teams within these three settings. Building teams are typically comprised of teacher leaders from various teacher teams that meet monthly to review teacher team work, data, and building data. Principals are typically active members or facilitators of these meetings. Teacher team meetings occur at least twice monthly and are grade level or content area specific in nature. Effective teacher teams review common formative assessment data at these meetings and assess instructional strategies effectiveness based on student results (Ohio Department of Education, 2010). Appendices B and C are rubrics associated with these two important levels of the Ohio Improvement Process. These rubrics are derivatives of Ohio Leadership Advisory Council materials that serve as a basis for the Ohio Improvement Process in the State of Ohio (Ohio Leadership Advisory Council, 2013). A few reflective questions are at the end of each of these observation rubrics. These questions relate directly to the research questions and how the previously articulated principal beliefs, conditions and practices are manifested through the work of the teacher and building teams.

Sampling time, particularly how many times data should be collected and when to enter a setting, is an important decision to make for case studies (Meyer, 2001). Observing teacher teams and building teams over a four month period provides ample data to identify consistent patterns of conditions and practices among schools and principals. Through these multiple observations, two principal interviews, and additional informal observations, the principal beliefs should be identified in both word and action.
Validity and Dependability

The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-rich quality of the cases selected than the sample size (Patton, p.245). Patton (2002) additionally suggests that validity in qualitative study is further defined by the terms quality or rigor. The three settings chosen for this study have principals that have led schools that have shown student improvement or high achievement. This student outcome element coupled with the high quality teacher collaboration identified by a State Support Team consultant enhances the quality or validity of this study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further claim that dependability is critical when defining reliability for qualitative studies. Other terms pursued in qualitative studies in lieu of reliability are credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness. The triangulation of the varied data sources is also pursued in qualitative data to enhance the study.

The researcher’s background of 11 years as an elementary principal and four years as an internal facilitator for the Ohio Improvement Process in two different districts affirms the dependability of the data collected based on experiences and training. Patton (2001) reaffirms this notion stating that a researcher’s skill and ability in qualitative research increases reliability based on the validity these experiences create.

The principal interview protocols will be piloted in the researcher’s home district in order to provide any feedback on the consistency of the instruments. The researcher will not have any principal who has an evaluative link with the researcher to review the
principal interview instrument in order to gain as quality and non-biased feedback as possible.

The data collected from the principal interviews, the building team observations, the teacher-based team observations, and informal observations enhance the study’s credibility and dependability. A methods triangulation will be implemented in the proposed research as it will check consistency of findings among these various data collection sources (Patton, 2002).

**Data Collection Procedures**

The proposed study of the three purposeful school settings with a collaborative culture and effective principals has several steps in its implementation procedure.

*Sample Recruitment*

As this study is based in the state of Ohio, it is important to consult with personnel who supervise and work with districts on the implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process. State Support Team personnel, based out of county Educational Service Centers, are a good resource to identify districts, schools and specific principals that positively impact student outcomes. These personnel work in districts and schools and have first-hand knowledge of quality, effective collaborative school environments.

In the case of this study, a respected State Support Team (SST) Consultant, who works with multiple Cuyahoga County school districts, was contacted by the researcher. The researcher provided the two criteria of a strong collaborative culture and documented student achievement and/or growth. The SST Consultant named a few area schools and principals that fit those criteria. These schools were researched closely on past student achievement and progress data. In addition, the researcher asked additional SSTs for
recommendations and similar schools and principals were identified as well. After reviewing historical state of Ohio report card data on these schools and principals, three settings have been tentatively selected for closer review per this proposed case study.

*Informed Consents*

The three principals were contacted regarding their willingness to participate in this study. The referral from the SSTs on their acumen relating to leading and facilitating a successful collaborative culture was relayed to each principal. The purpose of the study and the background of the researcher as a building and district administrator leading these types of collaborative environments were discussed. The researcher outlined the proposed study and its relative unobtrusive relationship on the day-to-day operations of the school building. This initial contact was to also build a relationship of trust between researcher and potential participant. When relying on interviews as a primary data collection method, building trust between researcher and interviewee is very important (Meyer, 2001).

Each principal has been provided informed consent letters. In addition, any participant of a building leadership team and teacher-based team that is observed will be informed of the audio taping of that meeting and the secured anonymity of individuals for this study. No names will be associated with any of the audiotapes or paper protocols, thereby securing anonymity with the process entirely. Schools will be named as cases one, two, and three for purposes of this study. Principals and teams will also be associated numbers respectively from the case study settings. These consent forms and cover letters are available in the appendix of this study.
All data will be kept secure with the researcher in his home. The audio tapes of the building leadership teams and teacher-based teams will be kept on the researcher’s personal phone and deleted upon the publishing of this study. Paper protocols, interview notes, cards for data coding will be kept at the researcher’s home in a secure file cabinet and shredded upon publishing as well. Digital files from the study will be kept on separate flash drive of the researcher and will be deleted and any related data files will be permanently removed from the computer recycling bin as well.

*Procedures*

The collection is consistent with the aforementioned Interpretation Construction Theory that identifies researcher observation and interviews with participants as the manner in which to gain understanding and context of a setting (Black & McClintock, 1995).

The researcher will contact the principal by phone or email to set up a convenient initial interview time of approximately 30 minutes. Principal interviews will be facilitated preferably before or after school hours at the school setting, so the principal does not have school-day pressures and can speak freely about the collaborative culture and work. Although the interview will be audiotaped the researcher will take notes of significant comments made by the principal on the interview protocol. Some conversation will follow about the relative effectiveness of the teacher-based teams in the school and which would be representative of the building. This could guide the researcher to which of the teacher-based teams would be most advantageous to observe.

The principal interview protocol will be used as a guide and note taking device. The interview will be recorded via Smartphone and then transcribed for purpose of
capturing all comments carefully. The notes and transcription will be coded onto note cards or spreadsheet by themes that emerge from the discussion.

The observations of building leadership teams and teacher-based teams will be facilitated at each of the respective school settings. The researcher is targeting observations of monthly Building Leadership Team (BLT) meetings and at least one Teacher-based Team (TBT) for a four month period. Each of these meetings are approximately 60 minutes in length and will be coordinated according to the convenience of the school, principal's, and researcher’s schedule. Upon the start of a BLT and TBT observation, the researcher’s intent and appropriate sign-offs will be distributed and explained, so participants understand the anonymity of the usage of observation notes.

During the four month period while team observations are completed, additional time will be spent within the case study setting to glean further qualitative data. These more informal observations will gain data about the principal’s actions that directly and indirectly impact the quality collaboration and school culture. These will typically be positioned before or after scheduled team meeting observation for convenience of scheduling. These informal observations are supported by Black and McClintock (1995), whose construction interpretation theory, values the data and information gained from observing real-life, authentic experiences.

At the completion of the four building team and teacher team observations at each case study setting, a follow up interview with the principal will be conducted. This interview will be less structured but will ask follow up questions that may add further depth to the principal’s beliefs, conditions created, and practices observed over the last several months.
The researcher plans to log from 10-15 hours of time in each setting from interviews, team observations and informal observations for this study. The over 30 hours of time logged will provide rich qualitative data for the proposed study. This estimate of hours logged in each case setting is determined from the following:

- Building Leadership Team observations
  4 months X 1 hour each = 4 hours
- Teacher-based Team observations
  4 months X 1 hour each = 4 hours
- Initial Principal Interview = 45 minutes
- Culminating Principal Interview = 30 minutes
- Additional informal observations during interview and/or Observation times = 2 hours

*Proposed total for each setting = 11 hours, 15 minutes*

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The research questions will attempt to be answered through principal interviews, observations of Building Leadership Teams, and observations of Teacher-based Teams. Each of these data elements will be analyzed in a distinct manner, but as in any other qualitative study the data collection and data analysis occur concurrently.

This research study is built on the review of three school settings that have been identified to have a healthy collaborative environments and are led by effective principals as deemed by State Support Team personnel. The analysis of the data collected will follow a model of building the understandings in the individual setting first, and then drawing cross-setting conclusions from the three school settings combined (Yin, 2003).

The various data from the individual settings will be analyzed keeping the research questions in forefront. Yin (2003) warns researchers to not treat each data source from a specific case study and the findings reported separately. Rather the individual case
study data should be reviewed cumulatively and themes emerge from the various data sources. In each case, the three sources of data will be triangulated to identify prevailing themes that emerge from interviews and the different types of observations.

Figure 4. Data Analysis. This represents the within and across setting data analysis of the data. The expected themes shown are based on the research questions proposed. Unexpected themes that emerge from the research are represented by the question mark.

Qualitative data analysis requires researchers to dig deep to collect data and then study it from several angles to construct a meaningful picture (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In order to study the data from the case studies, the qualitative data will need to be coded properly. Coding is defined as “the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (Creswell, p.251). The transcribed interviews, and the transcribed notes from the teacher and building teams will be coded around the broad themes from the research questions: the principal beliefs, the building conditions in place to encourage collaboration, and the principal practices that make collaboration
successful, will help code the text segments. Additional themes from these may emerge as the text segments are further reviewed. The following is the manner consistent with Creswell (2007) theories in which interviews and observations will be coded for the proposed research study:

1. The transcribing process. Each meeting and interview will be transcribed in order to review specific responses or comments by participants.

2. Read and reread the transcribed notes. This allows the researcher to “see” themes that emerge from the raw data collected from interviews or observation.

3. Bracketing of data. The researcher will bracket text segments and code accordingly. Coding will identify case study, data source (teacher interview, building team observation, or teacher team observation), and source of data segment (principal, teacher, other).

4. Arrange text segments. The three research questions of principal beliefs, principal conditions established, and principal practices will be the three large themes that text segments will be placed under. Text segments not fitting into these themes will create new themes that are formed. The researcher will look for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity from the text segments in the themes (Creswell, 2007).

Categorical data from a single case study will be aligned and studied initially. This will allow the researcher to identify themes and sub-themes from each case study. Subsequently the researcher will align categorical information across the three case studies. This will aid the researcher to identify themes across case studies, develop a
description of the data relative to the themes, and help in answering the research
questions of the study.

The evidence and data collected in a qualitative case study can be robust and
reliable, but it can also be time consuming and expansive (Yin, 2003). For these purposes
it is important to effectively organize case study data in order to analyze it properly
(Stake, 1995). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest the use of matrices to display and
organize the data for review. The researcher plans to develop matrix for each case study
that identifies the three research questions across the top axis and the three main data
sources down the side axis. Initially data sources will be coded manually but the themes
that emerge from the data could necessitate digital database support. Figure 5 shows a
potential database matrix for use in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Beliefs</th>
<th>Principal Conditions</th>
<th>Principal Practices</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Team Observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Team Observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5. **Data Presentation Matrix.** The matrix above is a potential database for use in organizing the study data for each case.

The ensuing multiple matrices could be visually and electronically analyzed in order to identify recurring text segments and terms. These recurring text segments and words would help develop that overall description of the data that supports the research response to the research questions.

**Ethical Considerations**

Identifying and finding principals for this study could pose some ethical challenges. Supervising and evaluating many principals in my current school district, it seems more advantageous to identify cases for study outside my district. As the research is focused on the beliefs, the conditions and practices of highly effective elementary principals in a collaborative culture, the best of the “best” was desired for this study. Through extensive discussions with a State Support Team consultant, the desired candidates for this study were all outside my current school district. This eliminated any ethical concern due to no supervisory relationship with these principals.

All schools, principals and teachers will be promised complete anonymity throughout this research study. As the schools and principals work has been identified as exemplary, nevertheless the study is being completed in order to identify elements that can be replicated in other elementary school settings and identify components of future pre-service training for potential school administrators.

In order for this anonymity to be preserved, the researcher will solely handle all data collection protocols, notes, coding artifacts and tape recordings of interviews. These
will be held in the researcher’s home through the completion of the study and destroyed thoroughly at the appropriate time in the future.

The appropriate IRB approval will be gained by all participants in this study including the principals interviewed and the teachers observed in team meetings.

Summary

The proposed multiple case study research aims to identify exemplary collaborative practices of principals and school teams. Two data collections methods, interviews and observations, will provide rich data for the study. This qualitative research multiple case study will aim to gain a clear description of the data collected among the cases in order to suggest practices by principals and teams to produce improved student outcomes in other settings.

The data collection tools have been developed and vetted to maintain validity and reliability. Home district administrators will be used to pilot the interview protocol increasing reliability. The researcher’s background as an elementary principal and an Ohio Improvement Process internal facilitator enhances the validity of the research.

Data analysis of the multiple case studies will be completed in a purposeful manner. The data will be analyzed within each setting and then across settings. Each settings various data will be reviewed collectively to identify common themes. The data from the interviews and observations will be triangulated in order to gain strength and credibility to the findings. Because of the robust amount of data, computer-based data collection software will be utilized to aid the process.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

Principals have great accountability to many issues today including school safety, teacher evaluation, parental concerns, and student achievement. These school leaders have a great impact on what happens in their schools, and in particular student achievement. DuFour and Mattos (2013) found that principals do have the ability to establish specific conditions that contribute to a positive environment in which student achievement flourishes. A healthy collaborative culture contributes to improved student achievement.

Many current theories including professional learning communities and the Ohio Improvement Process are built around a collaborative culture among all staff members. The Ohio Improvement Process, the school improvement theory this study focuses on, utilizes purposeful teacher collaboration to improve student achievement. DuFour (1998) identified professional learning communities to be a proven manner of collaboration that has improved student outcomes. Additionally the Ohio Improvement Process, the state of Ohio’s PLC, utilizes a five-step data review process that also has shown to have positive impact on student achievement when implemented with fidelity (Magliocca & Morrison, 2013). As the Ohio Improvement Process is contingent on purposeful teacher collaboration, the principal has a profound impact on the teacher collaboration within the school. Principals have been found to have a positive influence on the degree that teachers collaborate (Goddard et al, 2010).

This case study researched three effective collaborative settings to identify the principal beliefs, conditions and practices that contributed to these effective collaborative
settings. These principals led schools that have experienced documented improved student achievement and/or student growth during their tenures. The research questions for this study were as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the beliefs on principal leadership and quality teacher collaboration of effective principals, who develop a collaborative culture for instructional leadership?

Research Question 2

What are the conditions for quality teacher collaboration that effective principals establish in their schools?

Research Question 3

What are the practices of effective principals to promote quality teacher collaboration in their schools?

Research Methodology

Principal leadership is best evidenced through interactions and relationships. In the same manner, the Ohio Improvement Process is a model based on educators collaborating around student data and making instructional decisions. This case study research was based on interviews and observations of specific settings. The qualitative data collection selected for this case study lent itself best for the researcher’s strengths and the needs of the anticipated research proposed (Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative methods are designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The case study examined three purposefully selected schools and principals that have identified collaborative cultures with leadership that have proven effective. The
researcher immersed himself into each school’s culture over several months in order to capture answers to the three research questions on principal beliefs, conditions established and practices that encourage these fruitful collaborative cultures.

The study’s foundation was an initial interview of three principals that lead collaborative learning communities that have achieved success in student achievement. An initial interview identified principal notions about leadership and collaboration. These initial findings helped frame the observations from building leadership meetings, teacher-based team meetings, and other related observations of the principal, teachers and school community.

Participants of Case Study

The three schools and principals were purposefully selected for their potential value in being studied. State Support Team (SST) personnel from a local Educational Service Center identified these three principals and schools because of the improved student achievement and the collaborative culture present.

The three principals were highly regarded for their development of a collaborative culture in their respective schools. Each has shown to improve student achievement or student growth during their principal tenures in this current or a previous school. Each principal, after speaking with the researcher, was willing to participate in the case study.

The schools were all elementary schools in the Northeast Ohio area that have documented improved student achievement or improved student growth over the last several years. In addition, there was a great fidelity to the Ohio Improvement Process, with a vibrant building leadership team and several teacher-based teams present.
Overall Research Organization

Each case was studied extensively over the second semester of the 2014-2015 school year. The research totaled nearly 40 hours of onsite data collection that included principal interviews, building leadership team interviews, teacher-based team interviews, district leadership team observations, school professional development sessions and staff meetings. Table 6 reflects the time spent at each case study school in various activities. These rich context-specific settings are ripe for qualitative research where it is important to study participants in very authentic work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent at each case setting in data collection</th>
<th>case #1</th>
<th>case #2</th>
<th>case #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal interviews</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLT meetings</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBT meetings</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff meetings</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informal/other</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>615 min</td>
<td>735 min</td>
<td>1025 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.25 hr</td>
<td>12.25 hr</td>
<td>17.10 hr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initial one-on-one interviews with each principal started the research. The initial interview questioned the principals on their beliefs about leadership and collaboration. The protocol, which is in appendix A, also had questions that asked principals about the conditions present in their schools for collaboration as well their practices that encourage collaboration. Each interview was digitally recorded, transcribed and later coded per the research questions of the study.

Subsequently, a schedule was developed for the researcher to attend monthly building leadership team (BLT) meetings and several teacher-based team (TBT) meetings
at each case study school over the course of several months during the second semester of the 2014-2015 school year. The researcher observed various teacher-based team meetings in each school to identify the breadth of the principal’s beliefs, conditions and practices. Because of the numerous TBT observations, some teams were observed on multiple occasions.

The BLT and TBT meetings were digitally recorded and transcribed as well. A rubric identifying varying levels of proficiency in the five-step process was used as the observation protocol. Additional questions that reviewed how the principals’ beliefs, conditions and practices were either present or not in the meeting were also answered by the researcher during the observations.

Other activities were identified to be fruitful for observation as this research was being completed. In all cases, an observation of a staff meeting became an apparent rich opportunity to observe the principal in a leadership setting. In one case, the researcher was invited to the district leadership team (DLT) meeting. At this district level meeting, the case study principal and a teacher from the building participated in larger district coordinated activities on the Ohio Improvement Process. This district-level meeting additionally shed a different light on the principal’s work at the case study school. In another setting, the researcher observed a few hours of the teacher professional day activities that were coordinated by the case study principal and the building leadership team. These activities provided rich data that textured the data from the interviews and team meetings. In each case study, there were informal data collection opportunities that emerged throughout the multi-month research time. These arose at various times in the case settings.
The research concluded with a follow up interview with each case study principal. In this interview, questions were asked to gain clarity on the principal’s beliefs, conditions created and leadership practices observed during the research. McNamara (1999) indicated that qualitative interviews were useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences. Additional themes that materialized during the process were also questioned and probed more deeply. During the research, a fourth theme of principal technology usage emerged from the findings.

The data collected from the three settings will be presented individually in narrative format. Within each case, the principal’s interview data will be first presented and organized around the three research questions as well as themes that emerged from the research. Subsequently, the data collected from the observations whether building team, teacher team, district team, staff meetings, and/or informal settings will be presented. In each case study instance, observations that support the conditions from the principal interviews will be highlighted.

**Qualitative Data Collection Procedures**

In the qualitative study, a case study approach consistent with Yin’s (2003) research was used to examine the collaborative leadership of three Northeast Ohio principals. These principals have been identified to have built a collaborative culture within their schools and have shown improved student achievement and student growth during their tenures as principals. The aforementioned research questions framed the interviews, observations, and interactions of the researcher within each case study setting.

Qualitative data collection procedures began after the first interview with the principals in their schools. The three initial interviews were digitally recorded and
transcribed verbatim in order to document the responses and reactions to the questions. After transcription, the interview was coded accordingly for words, texts segments or sentences that referred to the principal’s beliefs, conditions set, or practices that encouraged the rich collaborative culture within their school. These coded text segments were then entered into multiple page Excel matrices that were created specifically for this research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The Excel file had an individual sheet for each case study that had the research questions across the top and the data collection sources down the left hand side. The segments were then placed in a cell that corresponded with the respective question and source. Pertinent text segments not relating to a specific research question were given placed in cells in an untitled column.

The researcher attended several Building Leadership Team meetings in each case study setting. These meetings were always attended by the principal and frequently facilitated actively by the school leader. Typically, each BLT had a representative from all grade levels and areas, so this meeting was valuable to identifying traits of the principal’s collaborative leadership.

Each BLT meeting was digitally recorded and notes were taken on an observation form that is shown in Appendix C. The form is a rubric that identifies various levels of BLT functioning. This proved helpful in identifying elements that were particularly successful during BLT meetings. The researcher additionally identified the principal’s beliefs, conditions and practices were evidenced in this meeting. The researcher scripted notes from the meeting on the back of BLT meeting protocols. This helped identifying the large topics of discussion that was shared at the meeting. When a particularly fruitful
conversation ensued, the researcher took note of the specific time on the digital recording in order to go back and capture those exchanges verbatim. In order to capture the important elements form each meeting, the notes were transcribed and entered into the data matrix within two days. This helped the researcher capture the text segments and dialogue in the proper context.

At each setting, several teacher-based team (TBT) meetings were observed by the researcher. A similar procedure was followed with each of the TBT meetings at the three settings. The meeting was digitally recorded and notes were kept on a paper protocol by the researcher. The protocol was a rubric that was derived by the researcher a few years ago from OLAC materials. It identified behaviors that were particularly successful during TBT meetings and had several probing questions that related to the building principal’s beliefs, conditions and practices and how they were visible in this meeting or not. Specific dialogue or conversations were either hand recorded or soon after transcribed from the recording to capture their essence relative to the three research questions or emerging themes.

Teacher-based Teams (TBTs) brought a unique aspect to the research as none of the case study principals attended the TBT meetings that were observed by the researcher. The researcher was observing for elements, though, that were consistent or not with the principal’s beliefs, conditions, and practices that were articulated in the opening interview. These meetings showed how deeply rooted these elements were within the school’s collaborative culture.

As the analysis of qualitative research begins upon the collection of data, other data collection possibilities emerged that could not be ignored (Yin, 2003). The staff
meetings for each building became a fruitful data collection opportunity for this research. A general staff meeting time was identified by the researcher from each case study principal and was attended by the researcher. Another such opportunity was a professional development in-service day that was attended in part by the researcher. As rich, targeted professional development was identified as crucial by all case study principals, this opportunity produced some significant data. As teacher-based and building-based leadership teams were the initial focus, the researcher was invited to a district leadership team of one of the case study’s.

**Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis for this case study focused around the three aforementioned research questions.

The analysis of the data collected followed a model of building understandings in the individual setting first, and then drawing cross-setting conclusions from the three school settings combined (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative data analysis requires researchers to dig deep to collect data and then study it from several angles to construct a meaningful picture (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In order to study the data from the case studies, the qualitative data needed to be coded properly. Coding is defined as “the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (Creswell, p.251). The transcribed interviews, and the transcribed notes from the teacher and building teams were coded around the broad themes from the research questions: the principal beliefs, the building conditions in place to encourage collaboration, and the principal practices that make collaboration successful. Some additional themes emerged as the text segments were further reviewed.
Creswell (2007) suggested a detailed coding process that was outlined in chapter three and it was followed for this case study. The actual coding is as follows:

1. The transcribing process. Each meeting, interview, in-service, staff meeting was digitally recorded and transcribed. Hand-written notes were also taken at each data collection “event” in order to capture specific comments or significant data presented.

2. Read, reread and bracket the transcribed notes. Each data collection “event” was reviewed closely within 48 hours. This was done in order to keep data “fresh” for analysis. It additionally allowed the researcher to not get behind the data analysis. The notes from each “event” were bracketed and coded according to their relevance to the three research questions. Text segments and observation notes that were significant that did not fit a specific research question were bracketed for further review.

3. Arrange text segments and observation notes. Bracketed text segments and notes were then written into the data collection matrix under the appropriate research question theme. Notes and text segments that had no theme were placed in additional columns.

Additional data collection “events” and themes emerged as expected through the research process. The aforementioned staff meetings became an additional data collection event that provided data from each of the case studies. The staff meeting became an additional data collection event that was given its own row.
Other informal data collection events such as building observations, a district leadership meeting, and staff in-service activities were included in the ‘Other” category as they were not consistent across cases.

The data collected was reviewed primarily through the lens of the three research questions: the principal beliefs, conditions created, and the principal practices. Other themes, though emerged from the research. The theme of “Technology” emerged after several observations of building and teacher meetings in all settings. There was a general pervasive use of technology on all settings for the purposes of data organization, accountability, and communication among levels. All principals spoke about how technology was used in their collaborative structures that were present in their schools.

**Qualitative Data Themes**

The three research questions delineated the three main themes that emerged from the data collected over the second semester of the school year in the three case study settings. These themes were principal beliefs, principal conditions established, and principal practices. All of these were relative to the development of a collaborative culture in the respective settings.

Additionally, technology emerged as a theme from the data collected as its use was pervasive among the cases and was instrumental in how the collaboration was facilitated.

Sub-themes emerged from these larger research question themes as the data was collected and organized. The researcher constantly reviewed the data within the matrices to identify these additional themes. Upon the last data entries did the final sub-themes finally emerge from the work. These themes and subthemes are seen in table 7.
Table 7

*Themes and sub-themes from research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Principal Beliefs</td>
<td>1.1 Leadership</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1.2 Collaboration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.3 Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Principal Conditions</td>
<td>2.1 Collaboration Time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.2 Shared Leadership</td>
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<td>2.3 Data Usage</td>
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<td>2.4 Expectations</td>
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<td>3. Principal Practices</td>
<td>3.1 Celebrations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.2 Communications</td>
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<td>3.3 Empowerment</td>
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<td>3.4 Knowledge of Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Technology</td>
<td>4.1 Usage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 Accountability</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Categorical data from a single case study was studied initially. This allowed the researcher to identify themes and sub-themes from each case study. The next three sections will identify the specific data elements that were identified from each case study and within each sub-theme.
**Case Setting #1**

This case school is an elementary school serving 376 students in grades kindergarten through 4th grade. The two most populous ethnic groups are white at 90.4% and Hispanic at 5.1%. The economically disadvantaged rate of the student body is 20.6%. Students with disabilities make up 12.7% of the students and English language learners comprise 2.8% of the students.

The researcher spent nearly 11 hours of time at this setting collecting data. The data collection in this setting included principal interviews, building leadership team meetings, teacher-based team meetings, a staff meeting, and various informal observations.

**Principal Beliefs.**

This principal had a very personable and collegial manner in which she ran her building. Her beliefs followed the notion that the team will succeed and make better decisions than individuals working in isolation. The principal had some strong beliefs on what should happen within the school and these were evidenced in several ways.

**Leadership.** School leadership was exemplified by a few comments on trust, knowledge, and support from this principal. In the initial interview, the principal said, “Leadership is knowing what is going on in your school.” This will further be supported by the Knowledge of Practice data collected under the practices theme.

Additionally this principal said, “Principal leadership is getting teachers the resources they need to be successful." This support also paralleled another comment by this principal, “As a principal I need to trust their professional judgment.”
The principal exhibited a very participatory leadership style. During one BLT, the group divided among themselves in teams to provide feedback. She placed herself directly into a team and was very engaged in the work.

This principal also indicated in the initial interview, “Leadership needs to be collaborative, I believe in group think.” This collaboration is the second sub-theme in the belief section.

**Collaboration.** This principal commented during the first interview, “I am the educator today because of the great mates I have worked with.” This belief and feeling was further reinforced in other comments and actions. At one of the BLT meetings, it was noted by this researcher that the team members spoke more to each other than rather than to the principal. In addition, the BLT worked in pairs on providing feedback to the TBTs in their school. This also showed the collaboration. At another BLT meeting, the principal spoke about using staff meeting time to collaborate. The comment at the BLT was, “I want to give you (the teachers) some time to discuss this at our next staff meeting.”

“I believe in sharing the planning” this principal said in the initial interview. The teachers in one TBT supported that statement with their work on planning a specific grade writing lesson together. All teachers participated actively in the development of this lesson and the scoring rubric for the assessment commonly given.

The school’s TBT structure exemplified the collaborative structures. There were established times for TBTs to meet. The principal was aware of those and teams rarely strayed from that schedule. In addition within the TBTs, teachers articulated the collaborative spirit. At one TBT meeting after one member asked who should be the
facilitator of the meeting, one member said, “All of us.” To that end, another teacher added, “That is true.” All teachers participated actively within that meeting exemplifying the collaborative spirit.

The collaborative structures extended into other activities. At a staff meeting, the principal requested grade level team members work on class cards together and make decisions together.

**Instruction.** The principal’s beliefs about instruction were exhibited in the words and actions of both the principal and others.

During an interview, the principal indicated that quality instruction was “engaging” and “active”. The principal indicated it was easily recognized when performing classroom walkthroughs.

The BLT provided meaningful feedback to the TBTs in the school. This was shown when the members of the BLT spoke at one of their meetings about how it could provide instructional strategies to the TBTs as opposed to just feedback on how they completed the TBT form. When members of building level teams are talking about instructional strategies, it speaks highly of the quality of instruction within that school.

Teacher-based teams exemplified the high level of instruction in the case school. In one TBT meeting, team members agreed upon what was needed to be done for pre-assessing the standard. Additionally, the same TBT discussed in detail the level of rigor of the learning standard. These are deep level instructional issues that effective TBTs should have regularly. In another TBT, members shared strategies for teaching poetry from each of their classrooms.
The principal encouraged and spoke of project-based learning experiences at a staff meeting. She encouraged the use of PBLs in order to deepen the student learning and increase student engagement particularly as the weather turned warm towards the end of the school year.

**Principal Conditions**

**Collaboration Time.** The principal indicated in an opening interview that “common planning time was provided for all teachers, and that (common planning time) was critically important.” There were discrete times for TBTs to meet and the schedule was already established upon the researcher beginning his work at the school. On one morning, the researcher came to observe a TBT before school. A couple of team members were absent, so the principal asked if another grade level was acceptable. The other grade level was scheduled to meet, but the principal had not informed them of my possible presence. Upon walking me down to the classroom, the team was starting their meeting on time with no administrator present.

The researcher observed three different BLT meetings at the case school. Each of these meetings started at the exact same time and had a clear agenda present. In each of these meetings team members worked collaboratively and the principal was an active participant in the meetings.

The researcher observed four different TBTs during the data collection stage. All TBT meetings were held at the beginning of the day before students arrived. Different teams met on different days but their schedules were consistent from week to week. This collaborative time was important. It was so important that one TBT met on the morning the team was administering the new high stakes PARCC assessments. Each team utilized
the 5-step process of the Ohio Improvement Process to collaborate and review student data. The collaboration was evident from one teacher’s comment, “we are beginning our second cycle in today’s meeting.” This simple comment indicated that the all team members were working together and that the collaboration time was being utilized effectively. This was further exemplified when at another meeting the team members reviewed feedback from the BLT on their collaborative work, “They (BLT) suggested we unpack the learning standard to having students write an interrogative sentence.” This showed the quality of the collaboration among team members.

**Shared Leadership.** The principal had established some shared leadership conditions and these were seen in words and deeds.

In an opening interview this principal said, “Problems and issues must be solved based on what the team desires are.” This was evidenced through a couple of circumstances observed by the researcher.

At two different observed TBT meetings, a shared leadership approach was evidenced by the teacher actions. Each team determined time expectations for instruction, post-assessment administration, and when the data would be submitted on their team protocols. These teams discussed and made these decisions without administrative guidance but certainly under the expectation that these actions would be completed.

The researcher observed a staff meeting facilitated by this case principal. At that meeting, the agenda identified numerous committees that were facilitated by teachers in the building. Each of these committees and the teachers guiding them reported out to the
staff during this meeting. The tenets for shared leadership were clear and acted upon by this principal.

**Data Usage.** In this school, both quantitative and qualitative data had great worth and were reviewed frequently.

In the initial principal interview, the principal indicted this about data usage, “I always look at data results. Data helps people look within or point the finger somewhere else.” The data this school reviewed allowed these staff members to look more closely at their students and their instruction.

In one BLT meeting, the team reviewed DIBELS benchmarking data from fall to winter. This allowed team members to see the progress students were making on reading fluency, which was a predictor of student achievement. Within TBT meetings, teachers looked closely at data. In one particular TBT, teachers broke out formative assessment results among subgroups of the classes such as English language learners and students with disabilities. Student work, or qualitative data, was reviewed alongside these scores by teachers at this meeting.

As mentioned before, feedback has been provided to TBTs from the BLT. The researcher observed both the BLT creating this qualitative data and one of the TBT reviewing this qualitative feedback at their subsequent meeting. The activity of creating and reviewing the data was given appropriate time and attention at both meeting levels. Another TBT put time and energy into the accuracy of their data by spending time determining consistent scoring. In that TBT meeting, one teacher asked her colleagues, “How many points constitutes proficient and advanced?”
**Expectations.** Principal expectations were observed through discrete comments and by actions of staff members in this case study school.

During the initial interview the principal mentioned, “I make sure that in-service days are valuable.” The principal reinforced this belief by spending time at a BLT meeting discussing elements regarding the planning of that school-wide in-service meeting.

Data expectations were articulated by the principal as well. At one of the principal interviews, it was stated, “Teachers know that 85% of our students will make a year’s growth per their DIBELS data.” School-wide data on this benchmarking tool was reviewed at one of the BLT meetings observed by the researcher.

In that same interview, the principal indicated, “Everyone passes the test.” In a follow up question by the researcher, the principal reinforced this notion by stating, “Teams use the DIBELS data to predict who will pass the high stakes test or not. Monthly Response to Intervention day is a time when teams review that data to determine what is being done for students not on track to pass.”

Teacher expectations were articulated as well. When the researcher asked about how the principal encouraged reluctant teachers to collaborate, the response was “I told this teacher that I don’t want her students to miss out on the opportunities she was reticent to involve herself in.”

**Principal Practices**

Several distinct principal practices emerged through the interview and observation process in the four sub-themes.
**Celebrations.** During the initial interview, this principal shared a couple of comments regarding celebrating school success. First, the principal indicated, “I start every staff meeting with celebrations. There are personal celebrations, then, it moves to successes around the school.” The principal added to this by saying, “I do not pinpoint teachers with these successes.” The principal indicated this as some staff members do not like to be singled out among their colleagues so celebrations were centered on student success within classrooms.

At a staff meeting observed in this school, the agenda did begin with celebrations. One teacher shared a personal celebration. Another teacher shared some student success relative to end of the year benchmarking with DIBELS. Teachers and staff members who had previously taught these students enjoyed hearing the success story. The principal shared how much progress this student has shown as well.

**Communications.** The principal used the BLT and staff meeting to demonstrate her communication practices.

The BLT meeting had a detailed agenda developed by the principal each time the group convened. Within the meeting, the principal communicated as a team member, not necessarily as principal. This was exhibited by the principal teaming up with a teacher to provide feedback to one of the other TBTs during one meeting.

The staff meeting observed also had a clear and detailed agenda. This agenda had sections that displayed the types of communication this principal practiced. Sections included *celebrations, rumors, questions,* and *concerns.* When staff member questions came up during these last couple sections, the principal answered openly and honestly each question. In a follow up interview, the principal told the researcher that “nothing
was off the table” in terms of questions. The principal, however, would not answer issues that did present legal constraints.

The principal articulated some communication practices during the initial interview as well. For instance, the principal noted, “I like to run changes through people ahead of time, so when it comes in front of the group there is someone with an understanding.” The principal followed up this comment with, “I like to have conversations with my staff members.” When the researcher probed further on this comment the principal added, “I meet with teachers in their rooms to have quick courageous conversations.”

**Empowerment.** This principal practiced empowerment with the staff members in this case school. It was evidenced from interviews and actions.

Teachers within the school have specific roles and responsibilities whether official or not. In the opening interview, the principal noted, “I have point people in my building for specific items like special education and professional development.”

In the initial interview, the principal said, “I give teams guidelines, empower them, and let them go. I will check in from time to time as well.” In the follow up interview, the principal indicated, “I review the online TBT protocols before a BLT meeting to understand where each team is in the five-step process.” This empowerment was further reinforced during the opening interview when the principal noted, “If an individual teacher has come to me with a problem, I ask what his/her teammates think or has he/she worked it out with these teammates.”
At the BLT meeting, this principal was less facilitator and more of a participant. The researcher noticed how the principal teamed with others in the meeting, and shared the facilitation of the meeting greatly.

In the four TBTs observed by the researcher, the principal did not attend any of them. The principal did walk in briefly to one TBT while it was going on and then left after just a few moments.

At the staff meeting, the principal discussed a common end of year activity, class lists. The principal empowered her teachers to develop these lists and determine who should teach the classes when the following was said, “Do what’s best for your grade level, give me the names of who will teach what classes.”

**Knowledge of Practice.** This principal emphasized the importance of being in classrooms.

In the wrap up interview, the principal said, “I need to be in classrooms in order to know what teachers are doing.” This was furthered by the comment, “I ensure quality instruction is happening by walkthroughs, and checking in with teachers (in their classrooms).”

The principal provided a specific on this topic of walkthroughs. The principal said, “Being in classrooms allows me to know are we doing leveled readers, are we teaching vocabulary or just spelling.”

Outside of classroom visits, the principal noted the TBTs as a place for gaining information on teacher practice. In the opening interview, the principal noted, “I try to visit two to three TBTs per week. It may be just a drive by, depending on my schedule.”

**Technology**
In this case school, technology was used by a majority of staff members including the principal.

**Usage.** The members of the BLT used technology extensively in their meetings. The BLTs used Google Docs or the Sites program for housing the team meeting protocols. These technologies allowed the different BLTs to review TBT forms, and the DLT to review BLT forms. At the first BLT meeting, five of the seven members had computers and they were used throughout the meeting. At a second BLT meeting observed, again a great majority of the staff members used computers at the meeting. During that meeting, the BLT reviewed TBT forms and protocols that were accessed through the technology.

The TBT meetings reflected less technology usage. At one TBT meeting no computers were present and used. Although the team was active in the five-step process, no online TBT protocol was accessed or completed. At another, all members had computers open to the forms, but no recorder was selected and hence no information was recorded into the online forms during the observed time.

During the follow up interview, the principal informed the researcher that she would provide direct technology support to a TBT that was having difficulty completing the forms.

**Accountability.** The school district of this case school mandates a specific program for submission of the BLT and TBT forms. Regardless of what they did during their actual collaboration or five-step process time, TBTs were required to complete online forms and submit for BLT review.
During one of the observed BLT meetings, the member reviewed each TBT protocol and provided specific feedback to each that was on a district-created checklist. As noted before the principal indicated she reviewed TBT forms typically before the BLT meeting to get an understanding of where each TBT was in the five-step process.

**Case Setting #2**

This case study elementary school serves 738 students in grades kindergarten through 4th grade. This school had multiple classrooms that provided STEM focused instruction as well as general education. Student demographics includes white students making up 81.9% of the population, Hispanic comprising 9.2% of the population, black students 3.9%, multiracial 3.2% and Asian/Pacific Islander 1.8% of the student population. The economic disadvantaged rate is 28.5% for the school. Students with disabilities make up 12.8% of the population and English language learners 2.2%.

The researcher spent over ten hours of time at this setting collecting data. The data collection in this setting included principal interviews, building leadership team meetings, teacher-based team meetings, a staff meeting, a part of a staff in-service day and various informal observations.

**Principal Beliefs**

The principal had strong beliefs about instruction and collaboration.

**Leadership.** Principal leadership in this case was evidenced in various manners. This principal indicated that principal leadership “means focusing on what teacher-based teams are doing.” This directly tied into the collaborative structures present within the school. This point was reinforced when a teacher indicated at a TBT meeting, “we will
have our data ready for (principal) on Monday.” This quotation by the teacher indicated that the principal was paying close attention to the data and is clear with expectations of the collaborative teams. The principal spoke of prioritizing by the administrative team when the following was said, “my administrative team is prioritizing their time.” This highlights that their efforts need to be around what the teachers are doing and what impacts student achievement.

The principal’s leadership was directly tied to the teachers work in the school building. This case principal had some strong feelings about teachers and their effectiveness particularly in their unique environment, “If a teacher does not have a connection with his/her students, particularly in an urban environment, he or she will not do well.” Additionally, the principal spoke about teacher efficacy when she said, “Good teachers have a positive outlook and they persevere” and “If teachers do just enough to get by, they are never going to motivate students.” She later indicated her role in leading teachers by saying, “I feel it is my obligation (to students) to have courageous conversations with teachers” and “If you care about the kids in your building, you have to set your comfort aside.”

Collaboration. In order for principals to lead collaboration structures, they must have strong beliefs about collaboration and its impact on student achievement. This case principal indicated, “I tell teachers that collaboration is the most important thing they do. This principal alluded to collaboration as an underpinning of all problem solving when it was recorded, “I tell teachers we must solve things together; so if there’s an issue, let’s figure it out.” This shows the overall commitment and belief in collaboration as a problem solving function.
In terms of student achievement, this principal said, “The teacher-based teams are purposeful if they are discussing student achievement.” In teacher-based teams this was evident as the data collected showed TBT members taking on discrete roles in the meetings and openly sharing work, student data, strategies and activities.

The commitment to collaboration was also seen at the in-service day. The activities were set up with tables for teams to meet and collaborate together. One of the activities on that day was for building leadership team members to share feedback to the teacher-based teams on their work to data. This showed a clear commitment to the collaboration and that it is was worthwhile to share feedback on their functionality openly with the others on the team. This was evident through building leadership team as they reviewed feedback from the district leadership team before proceeding with the five-step process in their regular meeting. The district has shown a commitment to collaboration and providing feedback to teams at all levels on their work in this collaboration processes.

A commitment to collaboration is evident cross the district, but the principal and teams seem to take pride in their work. This is evidenced by a comment from the principal, “When (the two teachers) and I went to the district meeting, we saw that our building forms were not available. That concerned us as we want to shine because we have shined all year.”

**Instruction.** The principal beliefs extended to instruction. Some principals are not comfortable with discussing instruction, but this principal was clear and confident on her beliefs and that was evidenced through many observations.
The principal in this case seemed well read on the research associated with strong teaching practices and this came out in her words and actions. In the initial interview she said, “The most powerful teaching strategies are a combination of student feedback and student rapport.” This principal added, “Feedback to learning is huge. When teachers do not give feedback, they do not know where they are going next.”

Quality professional development is seen as an essential underpinning of quality instruction within this school. The principal said, “We take in-service days here seriously.” And also, “You have to do PD well.” The researcher attended the morning of a PD day at this school and it was an engaging, well-prepared event for the teachers that focused on instruction and what each is doing in their classrooms. The principal started the day, but most of the day was teacher led and there was great amount of teacher accountability within the activities.

The combination of providing feedback and quality professional development were observed in multiple BLT meetings. On two occasions, BLT members reviewed feedback from the district leadership team in order to improve their work. BLT members provided specific feedback to TBTs at the in-service day observed. The researcher also observed two different TBTs when they reviewed the written feedback that the BLT provided them. Providing timely quality feedback was certainly in the fabric of the school.

Various other instructional practices were evidenced through the extensive research at this case study school. One TBT observed was crafting “I Can” statements in order to provide clear expectations for students on the lessons. One TBT wrote in its TBT protocol, “The learners will be able to…” when creating goals for students. Another TBT
reviewed student data and attributed some of their shared practices to the improvement in the data. The BLT spoke about how individual TBTs are unpacking standards, or identify the specific learning outcomes for students, during their meetings.

**Principal Conditions**

Principals establish specific conditions that put a collaborative system in place and encourage a collaborative culture. Through the observations, four specific sub-themes emerged in this area and produced compelling qualitative data to the research questions.

**Collaboration Time.** This schedule held true through the length of the research with only one cancellation due to a field trip. Teams had a clear collaboration meeting schedule and the TBTs observed by the researcher started their work in their common planning time.

**Shared Leadership.** This principal established some conditions that contributed to shared leadership paradigm at this school. This shared leadership is an underpinning of the Ohio Improvement Process and allows teachers and staff to be a part of decisions and leading the learning community.

This principal did not feel as she had to be the provider of all information, professional development or feedback to teachers. During the initial interview she said, “Our own teachers help facilitate the PD with our district coaches.” Additionally it was added, “At staff meetings I have teachers present to other staff members.” In terms of communication, it was added, “If we have information to get out to teachers as a BLT, I have other teachers send it out.”
The BLT exhibited a great deal of shared leadership. Although the principal facilitated the BLT meetings observed, some members took on other roles such as recorder, timekeeper. Most others participated actively and freely during the meeting. The principal said, “We (BLT members) each have our own piece or responsibility.” One teacher added this at the same BLT meeting, “I like that everyone has their own part, I don’t feel overwhelmed.”

As the principal stated, teachers share feedback and send emails to other staff. A teacher provided this at a BLT meeting, “I wrote his email, I want to give the kindergarten team two thumbs up. We (the BLT) like how you used the TBT form, boldfacing the specific standards you are assessing. We also like how you wrote down on the top of the TBT form to indicate the (five-step process) cycle was complete.”

As noted before, the in-service day was well crafted and focused on instruction. The teachers had much to do with the content as well. The principal noted during an informal time, “I ask teachers, what this school needs to be for kids. It is our job to make this school great.” The principal further added, “The PD is what the teachers have asked for.” Teachers provided topics and presented on technology applications and TBT elements on the school in-service day.

**Data Usage.** While observing this case study school, a great deal of quantitative and qualitative data was created and reviewed by teams. The principal created conditions where teams were reviewing these data sets on a regular basis.

One teacher at a BLT meeting started a conversation with, “While I was looking at first grade data over the weekend…” This teacher did not teach first grade, though, showing her dedication to reviewing other data sets that help the building. This also is
evidence of the shared leadership across the building that was mentioned in a previous section.

At a TBT meeting, members reviewed formative student data on sequencing. Teachers were making instructional decisions directly based on the student data reflecting their understanding of this skill. A teacher at a different TBT meeting indicated, “The power of our TBT is analyzing student work together.” In many cases at TBTs observed, teachers brought student assessments and work to reference their comments on data.

**Expectations.** The principal has clear expectations that the collaboration and work that teachers do will be meaningful.

The first time the researcher observed the BLT, he could not help but notice the prominent poster that outlined the group norms. This poster within the meeting room identified typical norms for collaborative conversations. These were followed by all participants in all BLT meetings from that day forward.

The principal noted in the initial interview that it is important to follow up with teachers after walkthroughs. It allows the teachers to know what the principal is looking for and what the principal is looking at while that walkthrough occurred. The expectation of learning between teachers is expected as the principal said, “Our teachers like to learn from each other, and I want to create conditions for them to do so.”

As noted in the beliefs section that feedback was a priority, it is further seen as an expectation for teachers to provide feedback to each other. The principals said the following at one of the BLT meetings: “Finish off this grid (in the BLT form), I want us to give our teams feedback.” As the BLT diligently completed protocols during their meetings, TBTs were expected to complete their protocols in the same manner.
TBTs were expected to enter their team notes on a district-approved software that allowed the BLT to review this work at any time. Internally, TBTs had expectations of each other on entering data into their respective forms before formally meeting. In one TBT observed, team members agreed on the rubric, grading and data being entered by the following Friday. In TBT meetings, the expectation was that the Ohio Improvement five-step Process was followed predominantly. Although the TBTs observed were at various steps in the five-step process, they were always moving forward. Even though the principal did not attend any of the TBTs observed by the researcher, teams knew the expectation of collaborating around student work and the utilizing the five-step process.

**Principal Practices**

In this case school, there were specific actions and activities that encouraged the collaborative culture and contributed to the collaborative systems in place.

**Celebrations.** This principal was very purposeful in the rituals that supported teacher instruction.

The principal spoke about a common manner to celebrate and acknowledge positive teaching practices in the school. During the opening interview, this principal said, “I write something in (my weekly newsletter) about the positive teaching practice I see, or I put a note in the teacher’s mailbox, or on a walkthrough sheet.” This weekly newsletter did not simply provide information, but was a tool to acknowledge and celebrate good instruction, which was a focal point of the principal’s efforts.

This principal also empowered the teachers and staff to feel appreciated with small gestures. She noted that on Valentine’s Day, each staff member was given a candy bar and a note that they were her sweethearts.
At the start of the in-service day observed by the researcher, the principal shared two videos about the power of teachers and how they can impact students. These videos were complemented with words of gratitude for their work in the building. There was a sincerity and appreciation in her voice and message.

**Communication.** Direct communication with teachers about their instruction or involvement in the work was a theme of this principal. This principal indicated in the initial interview, “In evaluations, I have honest conversations about things I see in the classroom.” In addition, “I have courageous conversations with teachers.” These practices reinforce some the principal comments made in the belief section. The principal believed it was her obligation to the students to have these courageous conversations with her teachers. A topic of that communication relates to the collaborative efforts of the teachers. This principal indicated, “I address teachers who do not want to collaborate by talking to them about its importance and by peer pressure.” In addition, the principal noted that articles about honest conversations are shared with staff members, she attempts to model those conversations, and that examples of successful people are provided. The principal further noted in an interview, “I spend a lot of time talking to teachers.”

Communication through email is important as well such as when the principal opened a BLT meeting with, “Please pull up the email I sent all of you this morning.” This had pertinent information to the meeting agenda. For that same meeting, the principal sent the agenda and supporting documents to all BLT members on Saturday night for the Monday morning meeting. The BLT meetings always have an agenda, have specific purpose and her practices reinforce their importance to the buildings work. In
another instance the principal said, “I’ll send the data chart out by Friday.” This showed her commitment to the team, her responsibility, and placing herself on a timeline.

The weekly newsletter was noted as a positive communication vehicle by staff members. A couple of BLT members indicated at a BLT meeting that they appreciated the reminders in the weekly newsletter.

Empowerment. The principal in this case study empowers teachers to make decisions relative to the work of improving the instruction in the school.

The district provides two hours of paid time per month to members of the BLT to do the work of leading the collaborative culture. Typically, one hour of the month is in a BLT meeting. The other hour is at the discretion of the individual BLT members. The principal noted in an interview with the researcher, “I trust they will do the work for their teams.”

Knowledge of Practice. The principal has a great understanding of the teacher instruction and their practice within the school. This contributes greatly to the collaborative culture and high student achievement. When a principal is aware of the work being done by teachers it places a tacit accountability on the teachers for that work to be high quality.

Keeping apprised of the work of TBTs is important to student achievement. During the opening interview, the principal said, “I follow up with teachers, I read protocols, I ask questions.” These are typically online and that usage will be covered in the subsequent section. The principal said, “I access what the TBTs are doing online, and during walkthroughs I can see if the strategies they are putting down on TBT forms are actually being implemented.” The principal indicated it did not stop there as, “after
walkthroughs, I send out the walkthrough sheet to teachers and ask questions about things I did not notice in their walkthrough.”

Knowledge of practice and the professional development provided is also critical. High quality PD without follow through can be fruitless. The principal said, “When I go into classrooms, I see if they are implementing the strategies learned in the PD.”

**Technology**

In this case study, the principal utilized technology in order to communicate asynchronously, keep apprised of team work, and send feedback to teachers. It worked in a two-way manner between the principal and teachers.

**Usage.** At each BLT meeting, the researcher observed that nearly all team members brought and used a computer during the meeting. It allowed the members to access the BLT document, access files for review, or pull up emails that the principal sent prior to the meeting.

During the in-service day, one of the teachers presenting to the staff utilized technology to get instant feedback from teachers. The teachers used their phones to text response to survey questions. This was also an example of how the professional development was targeted and teacher-centered. The teacher trainer asked participants what part of the training was most useful and what they wanted more training or information.

**Accountability.** At TBTs, at least half of the teachers had computers in front of them to record their team work on the district-mandated program. Only one TBT seemed to be “technology challenged” and did not have a computer available.
This school had fifteen different TBTs that made it very difficult for the principal and the intern to attend all of them. Technology and specific district program allowed the principal to stay apprised of TBT meetings easily. The principal noted, “If I can’t make it to a meeting, I check in with the two teacher leaders on the team, I also go online and check their form.”

At BLT meetings, the members review TBT forms that have been submitted and provide feedback to the teams. If TBTs are not submitting the forms or they are incomplete, the BLT and principal will notice that.

**Case Setting #3**

The case study school serves 483 students in preschool through 3rd grade. Student demographics are as follows: Black students 75.4%, white 13.8%, multiracial 7.1%, and Hispanic 3.1%. The economic disadvantaged rate is 63.1% for the school. Students with disabilities made up 19.1% of the student population.

The researcher spent over 17 of hours of time at this setting collecting data. The data collection in this setting included principal interviews, building leadership team meetings, teacher-based team meetings, a staff meeting, district-leadership team meeting and various informal observations.

**Principal Beliefs.**

**Leadership.** This case principal spoke passionately about her craft and articulated her leadership beliefs through interviews and showcased them through observations by the researcher.
In an interview, the principal noted the following: “I’m passionate in my work as principal”, “I usually don’t bend the rules”, “I don’t like surprises”, “Leaders are role models, they are visible and present”, “Decisions should be based on students”, and “Support your teachers, your students, and other stakeholders like parents.” These exemplified the principal’s leadership beliefs.

At the start of all BLT meetings observed, the principal provided time to discuss and hear building issues and concerns. In the observed meetings, items such as discipline, teacher coverage, and class rosters were discussed in this opening section of the BLT agenda. Additionally, during the BLT meetings, the principal seemed to listen to her teachers and their concerns. In one of those meetings the principal said, “Let me hear what you want.”

The principal’s leadership beliefs relative to the staff members and their relationship with the students was also articulated. In the follow up interview the principal noted, “It is important to connect with kids. We need to show kids we care about them. We should avoid escalating situations in classrooms with them.” At a BLT meeting the principal acknowledged, “I have felt we are not connecting with kids as well as possible.” During a staff meeting observed by the researcher, the principal made a related comment, “The research will indicate that it’s all about the relationships you build with students.”

In addition the principal said she required consistency among teachers on school decisions.”
Collaboration. “Collaboration is one of the most important things we do.” This case principal made this remark in the opening interview with the researcher. There was a large amount of similar data collected during interviews and observations.

The principal also noted in this initial interview that “collaboration is open and honest dialogue” and that “Collaboration begins with respecting one another.”

The principal acknowledged that collaboration was not easy and takes time to foster. In the opening interview the principal said, “It takes a great deal of time and energy to build collective capacity (with teams).”

During the observations, the BLT meetings reflected open collaboration. The BLT meetings, which the researcher observed, had between seven and nine staff members in attendance each time. All staff members participated actively in these meetings that were facilitated by the principal.

The researcher observed many TBTs as well. During one TBT, all five members participated and collaborated openly. In another, eight members attended the TBT. Five of these eight were active and collaborated openly and honestly about student data. In yet another, all members of a small TBT collaborated freely on the five-step process. In this meeting, here was new member as of that week and that staff member was already an active participant collaborating on the team. In another meeting, the members of the TBT collaborated on the timing of the pre-assessment and when they would all have the data ready to review.

During one of the BLT observations, the principal said, “The team dialogue raises the level of awareness to the intricacies of the (instructional) work.” The principal beliefs about this instructional work follow in the next section.
**Instruction.** This case principal shared her beliefs about instruction through interviews, and from observations of various team meetings and a staff meeting.

“Quality instructions are lessons based on data. The instruction is purpose based on data,” said this principal in one of our interviews. Additionally, this principal added, “Quality instruction is when the teacher sets the stage, there is conversation among students, and hands-on learning.”

Some observations from TBTs furthered these articulations from the principal. In the first TBT observed, all teachers openly discussed the learning standard that was being formatively assessed. In another TBT, the teachers shared on why they believed students made progress on the standard or not. In addition in this TBT, the teachers discussed the percentage of students with disabilities that were proficient on the formative assessment. In a third different TBT, the teachers discussed student strengths, student weaknesses, learning standard, and teaching strategies. In that same TBT, a teacher with a classroom of gifted students spoke about how a strategy worked with her students as she had taught the skill prior to the regular classes. In a fourth TBT, the teachers there also shared strategies they each had used in their classrooms on a specific concept. In a fifth TBT, teachers shared how they graded a common assessment that given to the students a few days earlier in all classrooms.

Math instruction was a main topic during the second staff meeting observed at this school. The group discussed math benchmark data, resources, and the new standards.

**Principal Conditions.**

**Collaboration Time.** The principal dedicated clear collaborative time for the teachers to meet in their TBTs and to follow the five-step process around student data.
In the initial interview, the principal shared the TBT schedule and she added, “Time is set aside for collaboration and I have given up staff meeting time in order for TBTs to meet.” In fact, on the first Monday of each month, the school had 90 minutes for the principal to conduct staff meetings and other related work. The first 40 minutes were set aside for TBTs to meet and then the teachers had five minutes to come to another room where a staff meeting was conducted until 5:15 p.m. TBTs used this first 40 minutes efficiently as the researcher observed two different TBTs that were held prior to the all staff meeting.

There was non-student contact time at the beginning of the day that was also set aside for TBTs to be meet. Each team selected different mornings to hold their TBTs. The researcher observed two morning TBTs. They started on time with no prompting or attendance by the principal.

Within the collaborative time, TBTs were required to follow the five-step process. Each TBT attended followed the five-step process. But, some teams completed more steps than others in a given meeting depending on where they were in the pre-assessment, data review, and post-assessment process.

The collaborative time was just that in many cases. As teams complete a Google Doc while following the five-step process, multiple teachers can be entering data into the documents at the same time. On one occasion when that exactly was happening, one teacher joked that, “It is like driving down the road, and you can cut someone off.”

**Shared Leadership.** The principal created favorable conditions for shared leadership. It was particularly evidenced with members of the BLT.
The BLT meetings produced favorable conditions for shared leadership to be visible. The members of the BLT provided feedback to TBTs on their work at two of the observed meetings. This was the work of all members of the BLT and not just the principal as administrator. At another BLT meeting, the principal said, “I want to provide you information as team leader.” This principal was purposeful in the use of the “team leader” term, and used it multiple times in each BLT meeting observed.

Members of the BLT and staff had other responsibilities and leadership responsibilities. At one BLT, the principal indicated to a couple teachers, “You guys are taking care of the feedback on the report card.” The teachers did not resist that acknowledgement in either word or expression.

At a staff meeting, the principal had an administrative intern share the most recent benchmarking data to the staff. Even though this was a significant data point, the principal allowed this intern to compile, organize and share with the staff for ten minutes of the staff meeting.

The researcher was provided the opportunity to observe a district leadership team meeting also for this case school. This gave the researcher a unique look at the doings of the district on the five-step process and instructional leadership. Upon entering the meeting, the researcher had difficulty identifying the administrators from the teachers in the room. The sharing of the leadership roles and varied comments from all participants made it challenging to identify the teachers from the administrators in the three-hour meeting.

Data Usage. This school and principal reviewed three types of data during the observations and interviews. The formative assessment data from TBTs, the benchmark
data on all students progress in reading and math, and qualitative data that were feedback to TBTs from BLT members.

The researcher observed five different TBT meetings over the several months of data collection. In each meeting, the TBT reviewed formative assessment data on an assessment that was commonly given by the TBT members. In one of those TBT meetings, the members discussed the percentage of students who were proficient and not based on the results of the common assessment. Teachers in three of the five TBTs also had student work to complement the overall class data. In four of the five TBTs, at least one team member was entering data into a Google Doc during the meeting. In some cases, the formative assessment data was entered into the Google Doc prior to the meeting and the meeting time was spent reviewing the data and entering some strategies and qualitative data into the Google Doc.

As noted before, the BLT provided feedback to the TBTs based on their review of the TBT protocols. In one TBT meeting observed, the team was reviewing feedback provided to them from the BLT. The researcher had observed the BLT meeting prior, so it was interesting to see the progression of the feedback back to the TBT level from the BLT.

In addition, the researcher observed a DLT meeting in this district. DLT members reviewed BLT protocols of the district schools and provided feedback to each of them during their meeting. This mirrored the process at the building level.

During one of the staff meetings observed, the administrative intern shared the student benchmarking data on the district-approved screener. This data showed the
percentages of students who were at benchmark in reading and math per the screening assessment.

**Expectations.** During the interview and observation process, it became clear that this principal had some expectations for her teachers. In addition, there were expectations for the type of work the TBTs would complete during their scheduled meetings.

Collaboration and teaming were expectations of the principal. The researcher observed five TBT meetings, three at 8 a.m. and two at 3:45 p.m. Each of these meetings started relatively on time with no principal in attendance or prompting evident. These meetings occurred on one morning when the principal was not even in the building due to other meetings.

Within the school there were expectations on how the meetings were to be conducted and what data should be present in order to attend to the professional conversations. The Ohio Improvement Process, or five-step process, was a district directive and the principal described it as a “non-negotiable” for TBTs to follow it. Although compliance was non-negotiable, the principal wanted the process to be meaningful and added at a BLT meeting, “I try to be as flexible as possible. I don’t want people doing the five-step process just for doing it, but because it is meaningful and effective.”

The principal noted in the initial interview, “Teachers are asked to place team data in a Google Doc before the (TBT and BLT) meeting.” For the BLT meeting observed, TBTs needed to enter data into their forms and submit for the BLT to review. At one of
the BLT meetings observed, all but one of the TBTs entered their data into the form for the BLT to review.

The TBTs articulated some expectations between their members during observed meetings. At one TBT meeting, all members agreed to provide instruction, give the post-assessment and enter the assessment data by a specific date. In another meeting observed, the team members agreed on several items such as giving a common pre-assessment, grading the assessment by a specific date, and recording the data in the TBT document before their next meeting.

At one of the staff meetings observed by the researcher, the principal took a moment to share TBT expectations for the remainder of the school year. The principal said, “By May 1, one more five-step process should be completed by all teams.”

**Principal Practices**

**Celebrations.** This principal took time to recognize and celebrate student and teacher success. Staff meetings and even BLT meetings were times when these recognitions were most prevalent.

The researcher observed two staff meetings at this school. In both these meetings, the first agenda item was “shout outs.” This was reserved for the principal to give praise to someone from the building. Other staff members could also “shout out” a colleague in the building as well. In one meeting, these “shout outs” included recognizing the PTA Educator of the Year, reading a thank you note from a parent, and thanking substitutes for their support during testing time. In another meeting, it included a personal thank you from the principal to the staff and a story about a graduating senior receiving a scholarship that attended this school as an elementary student. The principal also had a
routine where a $25 gift certificate was raffled off at the end of the meeting. The teachers at the staff meeting put their names on a ticket at the start of the meeting and the drawing was held at the end of the meeting.

During one of the staff meetings, the principal spoke about an upcoming presentation that was being prepared for a Board of Education Meeting. The principal indicated that there would be mention of the high achievement scores that the school was not given much recognition for when they were released in the fall, “I want to toot our horn because I don’t think you ever received the recognition from last fall’s scores.”

The principal told stories that emphasized a teacher’s impact on students and their successes. One story was of a current Ohio State Buckeye football player, who attended this elementary school. Another story chronicled a student letter that the principal’s spouse received from a student upon graduation. The letter indicated the personal connection the teacher made with the student during their time together at school.

During a BLT meeting, the principal announced that the school had received $1000 from a local business for the largest participation in a community 5K race. The principal shared that with the BLT, so that that group could start considering how they wanted to use that money for initiatives within the building.

**Communications.** From the observed elements, the principal displayed very open communication practices with the staff members in the building. Accessibility and visibility were underpinnings of the communication practices articulated and observed.

In the initial interview, the principal shared, “Being a good listener, being available to my teachers is important.” The principal added, “(the teachers) know I am not out to get them, as I want to be a role model and be visible.” Other comments from
the principal in interviews include, “(I) value experiences, respect teachers, have an open door policy and have open lines of communication.”

The principal said in the second interview, “I need to be accessible to my staff.” Additionally, in that interview, the principal said, “It is important to talk to people and greet them.”

The researcher attended several after school meetings at this school. In at least half of these occasions, the principal was in the main hallway talking with teachers, students, or parents. In the case of the student, the principal addressed the student at his level, and in spite of the student’s difficult day, the principal spoke about how tomorrow was going to be a good day and “a fresh start” for the student.

**Empowerment.** The principal empowered her teachers in various manners. This was articulated and demonstrated in meetings observed.

In the initial interview, the principal shared, “I allow autonomy to teams under the required elements and contract language.” The principal empowered teachers to solve issues at their level as well, “I allow the teams to decide how to solve their issues.” As noted before the five-step process was mandated to all TBTs, observations of TBTs supported this statement by the principal.

The principal did not attend any of the TBTs observed by the researcher, but she checked their online documents through Google Docs frequently. The BLT representative on each TBT, though, was the most active and many times the facilitator of the TBTs.

During the interview, the principal provided an example of how she empowered her staff on instructional decisions. She noted in the second interview, “Teachers asked me about looping next year, some asked about pairing with another teacher because one
will teach reading and the other math. I am definitely open for anything if it works in our schedule.” Additionally, in one of the BLT meetings observed, the principal shared with the teachers present, “I put out there the Title I money and asked what teachers needed, but only a few got back to me and they got what they requested.”

During BLT meetings, the principal used language that was empowering as well. In three of the meetings observed, the principal referred to the BLT members as “teacher leaders.” In one particular meeting, the principal said, “As teacher leaders, you need to ask questions of what they (your teammates) are doing when students are making growth or not.”

**Knowledge of Practice.** The principal provided examples of how she understood what was happening in classrooms with teacher practice.

In the initial interview, the principal shared that she did several walkthroughs of classrooms for evaluative or non-evaluative reasons quite frequently.

As noted before, the principal did not attend many of the TBT meetings, but reviewed the TBT forms quite frequently on Google Docs. During the BLT meetings, when members provided feedback to these protocols, it became evident to the researcher that the principal reviewed all these protocols before the meeting.

In the opening interview, the principal did note, “I do not collect lesson plans.” No clarification was provided and the researcher did not probe further.

**Technology**

Technology usage was evident throughout the school. The principal spoke and demonstrated how the technology is used for instruction and to increase effectiveness and communication.
Usage. Technology usage was quite extensive during BLT and TBT meetings observed. In the BLT meetings observed, nearly all members brought and used a computer during the meeting. Typically, BLT members reviewed TBT documents online and entered data into the BLT protocol. On average, seven or eight staff members attended BLT meetings and usually only one or two members did not utilize technology during the meeting.

In TBT meetings, technology usage was less prevalent. On average, about half of TBT members had technology. At all meetings observed, there was one member who recorded information and data into the TBT Google Doc.

The principal expressed that technology acquisition was a priority during her principal tenure, “I made getting technology into my building a priority.” She later shared, “Technology use in the classroom is a balance.” Additionally, she said, “I don’t expect to see (technology used) every day.”

At the one DLT meeting observed, every DLT member from teacher, principal to district administrator had a computer or tablet available.

Technology, though, was considered an effective communication device. The principal noted, “Technology has made communication with staff and parents, much easier, and allows greater frequency of it.”

Accountability. Technology has allowed this principal to review what TBTs are working on during their five-step process meetings.

As stated before, the principal did not attend many TBT meetings in person. The TBTs are required to enter their data into the Google Docs. The principal and BLT members accessed these documents before and during the BLT meetings.
The DLT meeting observed in this district exhibited how TBTs were accountable to district leadership for their work. The district IT Coordinator used the first ten minutes of the DLT meeting to coordinate every building’s use of Google Docs. They reviewed forms, places of forms and naming conventions for consistency of use across the district.

**Summary**

Data from the three case studies have been presented in this chapter. The data analysis of the qualitative findings was accomplished by the use of matrices that helped organize the data by research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research question themes and additional sub-themes emerged during and after the data collection. The four main themes were Principal Beliefs, Principal Conditions created, Principal Practices and Technology. Thirteen sub-themes have emerged from these four themes based upon the principal interviews and observations from building teams, teacher teams, staff meetings and other opportunities afforded the researcher. Qualitative findings have been presented following the use of a comprehensive coding process (Creswell, 2003) with the support of direct quotations and personal observations. Conclusions, implications, and recommendations will be created and presented in Chapter Five to answer the research questions posed for this study.
Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Principals have great accountability to many issues today including school safety, teacher evaluation, parental concerns, and student achievement. Despite these varied responsibilities and limited time, the research shows that school leaders have a great impact on their students’ achievement. “The principals’ job is complex and multi-dimensional, and the effectiveness of principals depends, in part, on how principals allocate their time across daily responsibilities” (Rice, 2010, p.2). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified specific responsibilities that principals should be mindful that positively impact student achievement. Additionally, principals do have the ability to establish specific conditions that contribute to a positive environment in which student achievement flourishes. A collaborative culture is one of those conditions that contributes to improved student achievement. It would benefit busy principals to take time to develop this culture.

The underpinnings of the Ohio Improvement Process, Ohio’s school improvement model, are collaboration and shared leadership of the instructional program. The OIP is directly associated to the work of professional learning communities that is a research-based manner of collaboration that has improved student outcomes that are built around a collaborative culture among all staff members (DuFour, 1998). The Ohio Improvement Process, the school improvement theory this study focuses on, outlines purposeful teacher collaboration to improve student achievement. DuFour (1998) identified professional learning communities to be a proven manner of collaboration that has improved student outcomes. The successes of professional learning communities and the OIP are dependent
on purposeful teacher collaboration. Principals have been found to have a positive influence on the degree that teachers collaborate (Goddard et al, 2010).

This case study focused on three effective principals who have established rich, successful collaborative cultures in their schools. Each school has documented recent student improvement under the principal’s leadership.

Researching these schools and observing the work of these principals has great value for principals and central office personnel who select and evaluate principals. Central office administrators could find value in identifying belief structures of potential principals in their districts. Knowing the beliefs on leadership and collaboration of successful principals could frame interviews for these important school leaders. Current and budding principals could find value in identifying specific conditions and practices that could be replicated in their buildings to encourage purposeful collaboration that could improve student achievement.

**Summary of Study**

The case study was built around three specific research questions as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the beliefs on principal leadership and quality teacher collaboration of effective principals, who develop a collaborative culture for instructional leadership?

Research Question 2

What are the conditions for quality teacher collaboration that effective principals establish in their schools?

Research Question 3
What are the practices of effective principals to promote quality teacher collaboration in their schools?

It was determined that a qualitative case study would be the optimal methodology for researching the questions posed. The qualitative data collection selected for this case study lent itself best for the researcher’s strengths and the needs of the anticipated research proposed (Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative methods are designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The case study examined three selected schools and principals who have developed a collaborative culture and shown improved student achievement. The case study, which extended over several months, included principal interviews, observations of building leadership teams, observations of teacher-based teams, observations of staff meetings, a teacher in-service day, a district leadership team meeting, and numerous informal observation events.

The data collection and data analysis was concurrent. The researcher recorded nearly 40 hours of time in the three school settings over several months. A close relationship was built with each principal and a familiarity was developed among the teachers in each setting as well. As each data collection event was recorded, coded, segmented and placed into data collection matrices, the researcher reviewed the aggregate data. As the observations and interviews accumulated, the specific themes and sub-themes emerged within the three research questions. The individual case study data from each of these sub-themes was presented in chapter four.
This chapter will chronicle the cross-case analysis of the data. Specific conclusions emerged from each research question as the researcher further studied and analyzed the data across the three case settings. These conclusions will be supported with data from the respective cases as well as relevant research.

The remaining portions of the chapter will identify implications, both theoretical and practical, from this study. Subsequently a section will outline recommendations for future research. This case study has highlighted some areas that could need some greater investigation upon its completion.

**Conclusions**

Research Question 1
What are the beliefs on principal leadership and quality teacher collaboration of effective principals, who develop a collaborative culture for instructional leadership?

Conclusion 1: Effective principals believe that leadership is knowing what is going on in your school buildings.

Knowing what is happening in an organization and honestly appraising the state of the organization is a tenet of leadership accountability (Lashway, 2001). Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) loosely placed this notion in *Situational Awareness*, one of their 21 responsibilities of effective school leaders. This conclusion, though, is tied tightly with the principal’s understanding of what is going on outside and inside classrooms.

All three case study principals indicated “I don’t like surprises” in one manner or another. When probed each spoke about hearing of successes and failures from teachers before getting notice from another source.
One principal spoke specifically of the importance of visibility around the school to her leadership. All three principals mentioned walkthroughs of classrooms in some respect. Both Cotton (2003) and Marzano et al (2005) specifically mention Visibility as a tenet for effective principals. The conclusion from this research extends a bit deeper, though. Visibility for understanding and knowledge of instruction is the notion that has emerged from the research of the effective principals in this study.

As it connects with the collaborative work of the teacher-based teams (TBTs), one principal said succinctly, “Leadership is focusing on what TBTs are doing.” Each of the principals indicated that they did not attend all TBT meetings in their buildings. In fact, they spoke about attending only a couple meetings per week. Nevertheless, all used technology to monitor TBT progress through online forms. The principals utilized technology tools and programs, such as Google Docs, to review these teacher team protocols frequently and in particular before building leadership team (BLT) meetings. As one principal noted, “When I cannot make it to a meeting, I check in with two members of the team personally and review the online form.” Although all three principals felt they were not technology “pioneers”, they did in fact use technology to know what their teams were formatively assessing and to monitor their progress on the five-step process with this work.

These principals held the belief of knowing what is going on their buildings, but it needs to be followed up in practice. The sub-theme of Knowledge of Practice relates to this leadership belief. All principals spoke of reviewing the TBT forms online, but they all additionally mentioned a desire to see this work in classrooms. One principal shared that when she went into classrooms she looked for strategies learned in professional
development or read in TBT protocols. Another principal spoke of reading TBT protocols and following up with teachers on what was on the protocol. Another principal mentioned that going into classrooms helped her understand the quality of reading instruction, specifically where leveled readers being utilized or not.

This belief of knowing what is going on in the building is significant in varied settings. At a BLT meeting, one principal commented that she felt that staff members were not connecting with kids as effectively as they could. This statement could not be made and received if the principal was not visible and knowledgeable about the doings of the school. Another principal commented on a specific student’s growth in a staff meeting. This principal knowing this student’s actual growth was significant on many levels. It made teachers aware that the principal was reviewing student data and that she cared about all student growth.

The effective principals from this study concluded that leadership is not directing instruction or facilitating meetings. These three effective principals held a belief that knowing what is going on in their school buildings was essential to their effectiveness and directly associated with their students’ academic success.

Conclusion 2: Effective principals believe collaboration is the most important thing teachers do.

Two of the principals in this case study verbatim indicated that collaboration was the most important thing they do. The third indicated that her success today was due to the great teammates and educators she collaborated in her career to this point.

Goddard et al (2007) found that there is a relationship between the level of teacher collaboration and student achievement. There have been several case studies and surveys
that have pointed to this conclusion as well. DuFour’s (1998) work on professional learning communities confirms the merits of educators meeting around student data and making instructional decisions. Ohio’s school improvement model, the Ohio Improvement Process, is based on the work of DuFour’s PLCs and emphasizes collaborative structures at the district, school and teacher levels (Morrison & Magliocca, 2012).

Again a principal can believe in collaboration, but one must put specific behaviors in place that support this articulated belief. These three effective principals held this belief and it was clear through many different avenues.

Like the one principal who said she was the effective principal today because of past mates, all three principals attributed student and school success to the work of collaborative structures. One principal indicated that the more the teachers collaborate, the greater success the school has achieved. Another took pride in their collaborative work and lauded it at the district-level. This principal shared a document that organized the collaborative conversations the teams were having in her building and shared it at the district-level meeting. District officials liked it so much that other schools began replicating the practice.

The belief in collaboration was evidenced though the observations made by the researcher. In one setting, morning professional development activities were observed. The activities observed were consistent with Reeves (2010) definition of high quality professional development because of its connection to student outcomes. The gymnasium was set up with several round tables in order to accommodate the teams to work and collaborate during the three-hour session. Many of the topics were processed and
discussed actively by team members at their tables in order to enhance the learning on this morning. The collaborative structures of the BLTs at each school exhibited the collaborative beliefs held by each case principal. BLT members were active in the discussion, made decisions on future actions of the school, provided feedback to teacher teams in the building, and seemed to be uninhibited in what they shared at these meetings with the principal present.

The discrete structures and agendas for the TBTs in each school also exhibited the strong collaborative belief of the principals. Each principal valued these structures by identifying specific times during the week for teams to meet. One principal even gave half of the staff meeting time each month for teacher teams to meet. This exemplified the belief this principal placed on the collaboration among teachers. As this belief was held strong by principals, it transferred to teachers and their participation. Rarely was a teacher absent from any TBT that the researcher attended. In one setting, a substitute in her second day in the building was present at the TBT even though she had no data to share. The belief that collaboration was important transcended to all within the school.

The belief about collaboration was evidenced on how teachers worked together on instructional work. In all settings, instructional decisions were made in collaboration among teachers at TBTs. In one school, a team was providing a common writing assessment and collaborated in the development of the rubric that the assessment would be graded. In all settings, teacher team members collaborated on timelines for administering, grading and posting the assessment data on common forms. Lortie (1975) wrote of teachers working in isolation that impeded progress but the teachers in these settings certainly broke down the barriers delineated in that research.
At the district-level meeting observed in one setting, there was a time where feedback was provided the individual buildings. The case principal received feedback from several teachers from other buildings in the district on her school’s work and BLT protocols. The principal was not defensive while hearing the honest feedback and assessed the feedback positively in order to improve the work of her BLT. This receptiveness to feedback reflected the principals’ belief in the power of quality collaboration.

The principals in this study held that collaboration was the most important thing that they do in their buildings. The research has shown that it can contribute to student success, but it also brings a spirit of “togetherness” to a building when this belief is articulated and lived in all activities.

Research Question 2
What are the conditions for quality teacher collaboration that effective principals establish in their schools?

Conclusion 1: Effective principals create conditions where they share leadership with teachers for student achievement in the building.

A belief in collaboration is important but how that translates into a conditions for shared leadership within a school are just as essential. Effective principals develop an environment where shared leadership is the norm, but a contrived notion. The three principals in this research developed such conditions for shared leadership and it was observed in various events.
Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, and Hopkins (2007) concluded that the work of transforming schools by one, exceptional leader was a notion of the past and was waning in today’s educational environment. But a true shared leadership model is difficult to implement because of the complexities that in it involves such as group members understanding their roles and having clear communication (Hall, 2001). The principals in this study seemed to navigate these challenges well to create conditions that seemed natural for their teachers to lead alongside them.

Marzano et al (2005) identified Input as one of the 21 responsibilities of a school leader in successful situations. In this research it emphasizes how effective principals involve teachers in the design and implementation of important policies within a school. In the three settings, these principals not only gained input but shared the implementation liberally among the teaching staff. Cotton (2003) specifically identified shared leadership in her collective research on principals and student achievement. Cotton’s work referenced many others, including Gaziel (1995, 188-189) who found that “the delegation of authority can help in overcoming interruptions and the excessive workload, as indicated by the distribution of time of the principals at high-performing schools to that of principals at average schools.” One principal from the case study mentioned that teachers do not feel overwhelmed while sharing the work load in her building.

These principals, though, created conditions that made this shared leadership a reality within their schools. All principals while observing their staff meetings involved multiple teachers and staff members in the presentation of work, committees, and/or student data. This condition was well-established prior to the researcher’s visit as
teachers felt comfortable and willing to share in the leadership of these staff meetings on their particular topics.

One principal made the comment in one of the interviews that it was “all our jobs to make this school great.” In that same interview she spoke about that she relied on her BLT members to send emails and information to the rest of the staff. This condition instilled a responsibility typical of administrators of sending critical information to an entire school staff. She, in particular, shared the leadership of providing feedback to her TBTs with the members of the BLT. During the in-service day observed, teacher members of the BLT sat down with teams and shared constructive feedback to TBTs at the round tables mentioned in the previous section. This was an activity that would be typical of an administrator, but this principal shared that with her leadership team. In this same setting, data review was shared among teachers. At one BLT a third grade teacher mentioned that she was reviewing first grade data the evening before at home.

At another of the settings, the principal was purposeful in how she addressed her building leadership team members. In particular, she called them “teacher leaders” multiple times in the few meetings attended. She added during one of those meetings that she would provide information to them as team leaders that should be disseminated to the teacher teams. Hence, similar to the setting above, teachers shared the responsibility of sending sensitive and important information to all staff members.

In all settings, teacher team leadership was held by the teachers themselves. As noted before, the principal did not attend many TBT meetings. With that, TBT members took it upon themselves to facilitate, record and document their work. Hence a shared leadership comes with a trust in the staff members at your building. These three
principals built a trust in their teachers to do the right work and it was seen through the conditions created by these principals.

In the one setting where a district leadership team meeting was attended, the notion of shared leadership was exhibited in another manner. The researcher was unfamiliar with many of the personnel from outside the case school upon arriving at the district-level meeting. After an hour of work that featured feedback to building teams and review of district data, the researcher had a difficult time discerning who were administrators and who were teachers at this meeting. The roles were fluid among all stakeholders that by the conversation heard, an outside observer could not identify the principals and central office staff from the teachers.

The stressors of today’s educational environment are significant especially when issues include student safety, academic accountability, financial constraints, new evaluations systems based on student data and high demand for wrap around services for students and families. A true shared leadership model does not burden the school leader with all these issues alone but capitalizes on the enthusiasm of many to tackles these challenges successfully (Pearce, 2007).

Conclusion 2: Effective principals articulate clear expectations for behaviors that impact student achievement for all staff.

Principals should create conditions where clear expectations for teachers based on improving student achievement. There is a great amount of research on principals to have high expectations for student learning in their schools. Butler (1997) indicated that initiating student academic success is a good teacher’s obligation and that lowering the bar on student expectations does not create a genuine feeling of success with students. In
addition, pushing students to unnatural levels does not produce high performance. That is engineered by creating conditions that deliver learning in any way that fits, supports, engages, and energizes the child (Scheurich, pp. 460-461).

The three principals in this case study articulated clear expectations for teachers that resulted in conditions for this academic success. These expectations were observed in staff meetings, BLT meetings, TBT meetings and through conditions that were established across the three schools.

All three schools had clear expectations purposeful collaboration on a weekly basis. As one principal said it, “I tell teachers they need to share what works with students.” This quotation points directly to an expectation of collaboration within TBTs. Each grade level team in all settings had discrete times that they met throughout the week. The researcher received these times for the respective principals, so they were aware of when these teams were meeting in each school. The researcher attended a TBT meeting in one setting when the principal was not even in the building. The teachers on the team were aware of her absence on that particular morning as well. Nearly all TBTs observed started in a timely fashion even with no administrative presence. Only twice were TBT meetings cancelled that the researcher was to attend and that was for extenuating circumstances in that school district.

With this expectation of meeting was that teams would be following the five-step process of the Ohio Improvement Process. In each TBT meeting teams processed through the various steps of the process. In a late year staff meeting one principal indicated, “That by May one more five-step process should be complete.” As noted before TBT progress in all settings was documented in online forms. Teams were expected to complete the
forms and submit into Google Docs or other district-prescribed site that allowed access by the building team and principal.

At BLT meetings nearly all teams submitted the required TBT data into the online forms. Only one team in all three settings did not have the required documentation submitted in a timely fashion. In two of the settings, group norms were posted on the wall of the room that was used. These were typical group norms for these types of meetings and they were followed closely.

Principals articulated their expectations more directly in a couple settings. When asked how a principal dealt with teachers who were reluctant to collaborate with her teammates, the principal; said “I told the teacher that I don’t want her students to miss out on the opportunities she was hesitant to involve herself with.” Directly tying the expectations to student outcomes is a common theme.

In another setting student achievement expectations were clear. One principal spoke about an expectation that 85% of students be at grade level per DIBELS by the end of the year. This was a district expectation and the principal in this school made it clear to teachers that she was holding fast to that expectation as well.

Effective principals, like the three in this study, articulate their expectations though narratives. These narratives and stories allow leaders to demonstrate what is valued and expected (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). One principal put it very succinctly in an interview, “I tell teachers that their classroom is a reflection of them, and that they (the teachers) are a reflection of me.” This principal obviously had great pride in her school and wanted to present a positive image to her school.
Kouzes and Posner (2007, p. 290) shared that when leaders expect the best of others, they get the best performance from others. These three principals had clear, high expectations and these conditions contributed to high achievement in their schools.

Research Question 3
What are the practices of effective principals to promote quality teacher collaboration in their schools?
Conclusion 1: Effective principals are willing to have honest, courageous communication with their teachers.

Most people do not enjoy uncomfortable situations or interactions with other people. This extends to building principals, who typically want to have a cordial working relationship with their teachers and staff. Abrams (2009) identified 18 reasons, including waiting for the perfect moment and personal comfort, why principals can, and typically do, avoid courageous conversations. Nevertheless, teachers and staff should expect honest, open conversation from their supervisors in order to know where they “stand” in the organization. These three effective principals exhibited open, honest, and courageous conversation with their teachers and staff that contributed to the students’ success in their buildings.

All three principals said in different manners that they have frequent conversations with their teachers. The comments from interviews included, “I spend a lot of time talking to teachers,” “I have honest conversations with my teachers,” and “I talk to people.” These demonstrate a desired connection these principals want to make with their teachers as opposed to communicating through email, text, newsletter or other
means. The honest nature of these conversations accentuates this communication practice.

“I will meet with teachers in their rooms to have quick, courageous conversations” said one principal. She added that these conversations followed seeing something in a walkthrough or a teacher not participating in TBT work. This same principal used staff meeting time to address sensitive issues and have honest dialogue there. A section of the staff meeting was dedicated to “rumors, questions, concerns” which opened the lines of communication and indicated that no subject would be “off the table” for either teacher or principal to discuss. A relational trust can be built when there is honest, constructive talk between a principal and a staff member (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Another principal spoke about how she shared articles about honest conversations with her staff members. In her school, there were several examples of open, honest, critical communication. The expectations for collaboration sometimes created this honest talk. This principal indicated, “I address teachers who do not want to collaborate by talking to them about its importance.” This principal said, “I have courageous conversations with teachers” and followed it up with “In evaluations I have honest conversations about things I see in the classroom.” The honest communication does not always have to take on a conversation, though. “After (classroom) walkthroughs I send out a sheet and ask questions about things I did not notice in the lesson” said one principal.

The third principal also exhibited this honest communication. She said in one interview, “Collaboration is open, honest dialogue” as she followed up a point where she
indicated her collaboration with her teachers. She was also eager to share her beliefs within a BLT meeting discussing student data when she shared, “We are only as strong as our weakest link.” This direct connection to classroom student data was an honest assessment of how important student outcomes were to the school and articulated a sense of urgency to student achievement for all.

This same principal shared an honest reflection to her BLT when she indicated, “I have felt we are not connecting with kids as well as possible.” This sincere reflection placed teachers on notice to what the expectation was but through open, honest communication.

Effective principals practice open, honest communication with their staff members. The honest communication typically relates to instruction, collaboration and the high expectations that are a backbone to these three schools. Although none of the principals admitted to enjoying these conversations, they all saw this communication as necessary. One called it this communication and conversations as a “moral imperative” as an educator. In addition, when the success of an individual’s efforts like a principal is dependent on the contributions of others, a trusting relationship is critical (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The types of communication practices exhibited by these case principals build that trusting relationship that contributes to student success.

Conclusion 2: Effective principals take time to celebrate student and teacher successes.

There is much research to support that providing recognition to teachers and students for their successes is a powerful strategy to improve student outcomes. Cameron and Pierce (1994) indicated that symbolic recognition had a much greater effect than
even tangible rewards. Verbal praise and other forms of positive feedback impact behaviors and attitude in a positive manner (Cameron & Pierce, 1994). Bialopotocki (2006) further confirmed that recognition provided to teachers from principals positively impacted job satisfaction and subsequently built a collaborative relationship among staff members. The three principals in this case study were purposeful in their recognition of teachers and students and dedicated time for this important practice in their buildings.

The three principals in this study all spoke of the importance of recognizing teachers and student for their good work. In the opening interview one principal said, “I believe in celebrating successes.” Another principal shared in an interview, “I write something in (the weekly staff newsletter) about the positive teaching practices I see in teachers’ classrooms.” Another mentioned a “Super Star” section of the weekly newsletter. The third principal affirmed, “I share stories of success.” Each indicated that this was an important practice that contributed to the positive collaborative culture and this was evidenced firsthand during observations.

All three of the principals observed used staff meeting times for teacher and student recognition. One principal had “shout outs” at the start of her staff meeting. During the observed meeting the principal shared PTA Educator of the Year recognition, thanked the substitute support during testing and read a parent letter thanking all staff for their work. Another principal said, “I start every staff meeting with celebrations, personal and then it moves around the school.” When observed at the staff meeting, the principal acknowledged some students who had improved greatly in their DIBELS scores and the teachers responsible for that work. She then allowed others to share celebrations. Two teachers’ took that opportunity to recognize a colleague and student accomplishments
respectively. In the third setting the principal shared two videos on the power of teachers that thanked them for their work in the building. One was homemade by the building principal and the principal-intern, which made it even more special. The practice of having a dedicated time for recognition before the agenda of teaching details made teachers feel they were appreciated, had great worth and contributed to the positive culture.

Other observations of this practice of recognizing teachers and student accomplishments further the collaborative culture in each of these schools. One principal told stories of past student successes. For example, a former student was a current player on the Ohio State National Championship football team. The principal shared a story of that former student. In the same school, the principal shared a letter from a current 12th grader, who was receiving a scholarship. These types of stories recognized teachers and their long range impact that each can have to a student’s success. Another instance was a principal indicating that she was going to highlight the past year’s report card success while presenting at the upcoming Board of Education meeting. This principal indicated, “I want to toot your horn (at the Board of Education meeting) because I don’t think you ever received the recognition for last fall’s high student scores.”

Each of these principals spoke about student recognitions that were done in their schools. They were done on a regular basis throughout the year recognizing student growth, achievement, improvement and/or behavior. These recognition practices necessitated teacher input and modeled the types of practices they wanted done at the classroom level by teachers as well.
These three principals exhibited strong practice of recognizing student and teacher successes. Hodges (2015) outlined a recent Gallup study that indicated talented principals value recognition as a part of the school culture, involve them personally in the recognition, and acknowledge they are not the sole source of the recognition. These principals share those tenets when reviewing closely the recognition practices in their schools.

**Implications**

*Theoretical*

The theoretical framework of his study combined the notions of principal leadership, purposeful teacher collaboration and the Ohio Improvement Process. A few different theoretical implications have emerged from this study of three case settings with effective principals that practice the OIP and have defined collaborative structures.

The first theoretical implication involves the practice of providing feedback. One principal shared the following during the initial interview, “Feedback to learning is huge, when teachers do not give feedback, and they do not know where they are going.” This quotation aligns with Hattie’s (2009) meta-analyses work that indicated feedback to students showed a very positive effect on student learning. In terms of teachers accentuating desired student traits, this principal said, “the top teachers also teach their students to persevere.” Feedback is essential to building perseverance. For purposes of this theoretical implication, the researcher will broaden this scope to all feedback from principal, BLT, and teachers.
Feedback to teacher-based teams on their work in the five-step process was provided and observed at all three settings. In all three, BLT members reviewed completed teacher-based team protocols and gave specific feedback to teams on what they were doing well (reinforcements) and what they could improve upon (refinements). The most effective forms of feedback provide cues or reinforcements to the learner and relate to the learning goals (Hattie, p. 174). Each setting had their BLTs complete a set feedback protocol on the work of the teacher-based team. The BLT answered questions relative to the learning goals, strategies, formative assessments and targeted instruction. The teacher-based teams received discrete feedback on their functioning and their work from the BLT members that refined their five-step process work in subsequent meetings. This feedback “loop” further accentuated the relationship of the various levels of teams that the Ohio Improvement Process has as seen in figure 8. The levels of teams are interrelated because of how each supports and provides feedback to the others. The feedback evidenced in this research supports the inter-dependent three-tier team model of Teacher-Building-District teams.
Figure 6. Ohio Improvement Process. This graphic shows the inter-dependent relationship of the district leadership team, the building leadership teams, and teacher-based teams.

McNulty and Besser (2011) transfer the work of PLCs to the three-tier data team structure. Each level team from district, building to teacher has a specific purpose and function of its own. However, the teams operate in a reciprocal relationship with each other in that their success is tied to one another (McNulty & Besser, 2011).

As noted before, one setting used an in-service day to provide feedback to teacher-based teams. Individual BLT members sat down with teacher-based teams and shared the written feedback in face-to-face fashion during a dedicated 45-minute session. The BLT members shared the discussion and notes while reviewing the protocols and answering questions from teachers on their work. Sadler (1989) outlines powerful feedback that answers the questions, “Where am I going?”, “How am I going?”, and “Where to next?” The three settings researched provided this three-tier feedback to their teams that contributed to the improved student outcomes.
A second theoretical implication is the notion of focus in the work of the school and its staff members. All three of these case settings set a singular focus of collaboration around student work. One case principal dedicated staff meeting time to teacher collaboration each month. In all three settings, teacher-based teams met a specific times each week and all parties were aware of them. The focus was on the collaborative time and making it worthwhile. Schmoker (2011) indicated the importance of simplicity, clarity and priority in the instructional focus of schools. He further defined the elements of what we teach, how we teach and authentic literacy for this focus (Schmoker, 2011). Supportive research to these elements is significant to this theoretical implication, though.

“It is worth emphasizing here that implementation of the (three elements) will benefit immeasurably when teachers work in teams – that is, “professional learning communities” where curriculum and lessons are continuously developed, tested, and refined on the basis of assessment results.” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006; Schmoker, 2006)

During the extensive time at the three settings, the researcher was not aware of any additional professional development trainings for the teachers and staff of these schools. The five-step process was the basis of the professional development and the principals focused on making that process as purposeful and rich as possible. Ullman (2009) reminds educators that the success of professional learning communities is the ability to collaborate. Collaboration needs to be taught and the focus of the work. These three principals in these cases did that exactly. In addition, the “L”, which stands for learning, should not be forgotten in PLCs. Teachers and educators can learn what works in the classroom, what does not work in the classroom, what are effective instructional
strategies, what students know and do not know relative to the learning standards and so much more.

The third theoretical implication is tightly aligned to the second. The work of professional learning communities, or in this case the Ohio Improvement Process, when based on the data from common formative assessment is an effective manner to improve student achievement. Data teams, or in this case, teacher-based teams, should use assessment for learning with the purpose of collecting evidence along the way to a learning goal (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis; 2004). All the teacher-based teams in all three schools utilized the five-step process to review common formative assessments. Some teams formatively assessed math, others language arts, but all were developing, administering, and grading common formative assessments for the purposes of informing their instruction within individual classrooms. Reeves (2004) stated that the schools that showed the greatest improvements in student achievement did so through the use of common assessments.

Elmore (2005) stated that when teachers deliberately analyzed data they learned to find connections between instructional practice and student learning. The teachers in the three settings are reviewing student data on a regular basis and having professional discussions about the instructional practices gaining these results. As these three schools have seen documented student improvement further confirms the work of the Ohio Improvement Process. Boudett, City and Murname (2005) stated the importance of the time set aside for the data discussions employed in schools. The three principals in this research created conditions within their schools for these data discussions to be held.
Each school had specific times for the teacher-based teams to meet and that time was sacred to all.

Within these teams, they applied solid common formative assessment practices. The three schools observed do not match the description by Lortie (1975) of teacher isolationism that leads to student needs going unmet. In the same work Lortie (1975, p.41) added that “The monitoring of effective instruction is the heart of effective instruction.” The monitoring of effective instruction through formative assessments not only inform positive adjustments to instruction but allows teams to see that their efforts are showing student outcome dividends (Schmoker, 2011). The use of common assessments among teacher-based teams, like the ones observed in this study, makes this assessment practice even more valuable as evidenced by the improved student achievement. The researcher observed teams reviewing data from common writing assessments, four question math assessments, physical education skill assessments, and reading skill assessments. In most cases teachers brought the actual student assessments with the compiled data relative to student proficiency from the assessments to the meetings.

Hattie (2009) in his meta-analyses on student achievement found that providing formative evaluation was one of the most impactful strategies that improved student achievement. Across thirty studies it was found that formative assessment was effective across student age, frequency of measurement and student needs status (Hattie, 2009). As in the three cases, when the student data is looked upon by teachers to determine what strategies are effective or ineffective, the influences are even greater on learning. The teachers observed in these settings were willing to review the data with an open mind and
identify what strategies were producing positive results. The principal beliefs in
collaboration and the expectations for purposeful review of student data on a regular
basis created a culture in these three settings where formative assessment was an
accepted way of “doing the business” of school.

*Practical*

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) indicated that when the instructional leadership is
shared between the principals and teachers, the influence on the quality of teaching is
significant. This shared leadership is seen when the collaborative culture is developed
and nurtured by an effective principal. The three principals developed a rich,
collaborative culture in their schools and the benefits were evidenced through improved
student outcomes. There are some practical implications from this research and what the
researcher has found about the beliefs, conditions created and practices of these three
highly effective principals.

The first practical implication is how school district leaders recruit, interview and
select potential principals for their schools. There is certainly a growing need for
collaborative leadership in schools today with the growing list of mandates in front of all
educators. Teachers and principals can no longer work isolation. Identifying school
leaders with the beliefs that will foster a collaborative culture and have the skills to set
conditions and put into practice the effective actions that create this culture should be job
one.

Interview protocols should be revised in order to probe at the beliefs of potential
applicants and their willingness to create this collaborative culture. How do applicants view
their leadership and how do they prioritize collaboration with and among teachers? Their
initial answers will produce a first filter for applicants. If applicants answer favorably, probing on what conditions they would create to encourage meaningful collaboration should be next. Additionally it would be important to present scenarios to potential principals about how they would address teachers who are reluctant or unwilling to collaborate with their colleagues.

Potential principals in the interview, screening process should be questioned about their use of time. Graham (1997) found in a survey of over 500 principals that a majority of their time was spent in “administrivia” or managerial duties. A superintendent wants a principal to handle day-to-day operations but to know that his/her primary role is instructional leader of that school. How a principal candidate views time in the classroom relative to managerial operations is telling to their commitment to the instructional leadership. Hopefully a potential principal sees themselves as an active participant in the professional development of the school and teachers. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that schools where principals promoted and participated in the professional development showed greater gains than those that did not have such active school leaders. The three principals in this study facilitated and participated actively in the work their teachers were involved in professionally.

The three principals in this case study had clear expectations of their teachers. Robinson et al (2008) speak about the positive effect principals have when they have clear goals and expectations for their staff around instruction. Probing applicants on the expectations they would create for the teaching staff will identify priorities and understanding for interviewers trying to select the single most important person in a school learning community.
This practical implication should be extended to how central office administrators evaluate principals. The criteria used to select should transfer to the evaluation process as well. Additionally these tenets should be incorporated into ongoing professional development of principals at the district level. Central office staff and superintendents should be mindful of providing training to principals on developing a collaborative culture within their schools. Training that helps develop the conditions for an effective collaborative culture like the ones in this study, could potentially produce positive gains in student outcomes as well.

A second practical implication is for the development of more robust and targeted principal pre-service programs. Specifically training that works with future school leaders on the importance of collaborative culture, shared leadership and creating conditions that can promote this healthy school environment. Typically principal pre-service programs are rich with school law, evaluation, policy, and special education leadership topics. These are all critical given the complex nature of the position. Nevertheless, training dedicated to developing shared leadership culture where student data is the focal point would be highly beneficial. The researcher recalls a single course in group dynamics in his pre-service work, but a richer training in the creation of conditions that encourage a collaborative culture across all staff members would pay dividends in the climate and the student achievement of a school.

**Recommendations**

1. This case study was limited to three elementary school settings and their principals. A recommendation for future study would be a study with one elementary principal, one middle school principal, and one high school principal.
The current study allowed a greater depth of understanding of the beliefs, conditions and practices of an elementary principal building that collaborative culture. The three different levels of principals, though, could provide deeper context on the nuances among the levels, but the cross case study analysis would provide some interesting data on similarities among the three that would be replicable for all principals intending to create a healthy collaborative culture in their schools.

2. This case study observed these three schools and the principals over a several month period in the second semester of the 2014-2015 school year. It would be interesting to develop a longitudinal study of these three settings and the principals over several years. The researcher would gain valuable data on the focus of learning goals and the collaborative culture over several years. Additionally the researcher would get an understanding of how these principals work with new staff members and indoctrinate them into the collaborative culture of their schools. This is important as any principal has turnover year to year, but sustaining a focus is critical to continuous achievement and growth.

3. This case study focused on three elementary schools in Northeast Ohio. As the Ohio Improvement Process is used in nearly 50 school districts, a more state-wide research of schools would be beneficial on many levels. It would help the researcher understand the “consistency” of implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process across the state. It would make the results more generalizable to a greater region if collected across a greater area as well. The expansive nature of the state of Ohio makes this recommendation difficult and
perhaps even impossible to a single researcher. Nevertheless, it could produce interesting findings that could potentially impact future implementation of the Ohio Improvement Process across the state.

4. This case study focused on the beliefs, conditions created and practices of effective principals creating a collaborative culture. As noted in the implications, a recommendation would be to study principal pre-service programs in the state of Ohio. If the Ohio Improvement Process is the state adopted school improvement model, then one would expect that there is some mention and training in this model in these pre-service programs. Additionally if the model’s underpinnings is the collaborative culture within a school, then how much training within these programs is provided on exactly these topics and skill sets. The research here and noted has shown that the principal role has changed dramatically in the last forty years at least since Lortie (1975) spoke of teacher isolationism. A recommended study of Ohio’s universities principal pre-service programs would identify if the principal skills necessary for success in 2015, such as shared leadership, building collaborative culture, and creating positive conditions for teacher collaboration, are present in these programs.

5. This case study focused on the beliefs, conditions created and practices of effective principals creating a collaborative culture. A recommended study would be of three schools and principals, which implement the Ohio Improvement Process, and that are seen as ineffective and have actually shown decreases in student growth and /or achievement in the last several years. This complementary study would perhaps identify principal beliefs, conditions created, and practices
that discourage teacher collaboration. This study would correlate with the formative assessment research presented in this study that indicates learners want to identify what produces positive results and, at times, negative results. This potential study could shed a brighter light on the findings from this study.

Summary

In conclusion, the case study research of three effective principals and the collaborative cultures within their schools achieved the outcome of identifying the principal beliefs, conditions created, and practices that contribute to the improved student outcomes in these settings. Findings emerged from four major themes and thirteen sub-themes. These included principal beliefs on collaboration, principal conditions created for shared leadership, principal communication practices and principal usage of technology. Single case, then multiple case analysis was completed by the researcher with several themes emerging across the cases. These included that effective principals believe they should know what is going on in their schools and that effective principals articulate clear expectations for staff on behaviors that impact student achievement. Findings were consistent with research on principal leadership, teacher collaboration, and other past educational research. Future challenges include preparing potential principals with these new-age skill-sets in order to be successful in the Ohio principalship. Further study is recommended across all levels of K-12 education in order to identify even clearer principal beliefs, conditions and practices that create a collaborative culture and contribute to improved student outcomes.

Final Thoughts
This research and case study has been invigorating for me both personally and professionally. My growth as an educator can be attributed in great part to the relationships and collaboration experienced with many colleagues in several school districts. Although, that growth got off to a slow start. In my first couple years of teaching I taught five different grades of English/language arts and was a member of two-person department. Unfortunately there was never time for us to collaborate about anything, no less student data. My growth as a teacher was slower than desired. The researcher’s first couple of years was Lortie’s (1975) conclusion of teacher isolationism exemplified in a small suburban district in northeast Ohio.

Twenty-six years later as a leader of a school district, this researcher wants better for current educators and students. Student achievement and growth is attainable in rich, collaborative settings with purposeful leadership. In my current role, effective leadership of principals is not only essential but crucial. This research has provided the researcher with documented conditions and practices by effective principals that create a collaborative culture that results in increased student achievement. These can be developed in current principals under my supervision. In addition, the research has identified some clear beliefs that will be desired in my future principal hires.
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Appendix A

Initial Principal Interview Protocol

The questionnaire protocol will cover two broad categories: principal leadership and fostering a collaborative culture.

Warm up question

1. Tell me about your educational career and how you came to be a principal in this district.

Principal Leadership questions

2. What does it mean to you to be an “instructional leader”?  
   a. What gets in the way?

3. What other beliefs do you hold about your principal leadership? How do you put these beliefs into action in your building?

4. How can leaders create positive change to improve teaching practices and instruction in the classrooms?  
   a. How do you motivate teachers, especially ineffective teachers, to improve?

5. What are your most important leadership practices you implement?

6. What student achievement or growth goals do you have for your school, teams, teachers?

Collaborative Culture questions

7. What core beliefs do you hold about teacher collaboration?

8. What is your definition of quality teacher collaboration?

9. What practices do you implement in order to promote quality teacher collaboration?

10. How do you as principal develop a collaborative culture and the collective responsibility in your school?  
   a. What conditions do you set or have established that encourage, promote, ensure that this collaborative culture is sustained in your school?
11. Tell me about the collaboration in your building. How often do teacher teams meet in your building? How often do you participate/attend their meetings?

12. Explain the Team structures in your building and how they communicate with each other.

13. How do you encourage teachers to collaborate who are hesitant or resistant?

Wrap up question

14. Is there anything else you want me to know that I did not ask you about?
### Appendix B

**Teacher Team Observation Protocol**

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<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Team meets weekly.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Team works collaboratively based on defined group norms.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Roles/responsibilities are defined and interchangeable among team members.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Team forms, agendas, &amp; protocols guide the critical work of TBTs.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team meets 2 to 3 times a month.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team members work collaboratively.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Roles/responsibilities are static at each meeting.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team forms, agendas, &amp; protocols used for reporting and documentation only.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team meets once a month.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Group norms are not consistently followed.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Roles/responsibilities are loosely defined.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team demonstrates inconsistent use of team forms, agendas, &amp; protocols.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team meets less than once a month.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team members share and collaborate little with each other.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Roles/responsibilities are not clear.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>No clear data form/protocols.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STEP 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collect and Chart</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Assessment Data</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Data is assembled and organized prior to meeting based upon agreed performance criteria.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Results include number, % and names of students at multiple performance levels.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Common pre-test/formative results are disaggregated by teacher and standard(s), and analyzed deeply.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Data includes student work samples to illustrate common strengths, misunderstandings, or challenges.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Data is assembled prior to meeting</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Results included number/% of students who are proficient.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Common pre-test/formative data is used.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Results are analyzed by teacher.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Not all teachers bring data to meetings.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Common pre-test/formative data is used inconsistently.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Proficiency level defined but not agreed on by all team members</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Team results are analyzed as a whole.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Data is not assembled.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A common pre-test/formative assessment is not used.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proficiency level is not defined</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Group results are not analyzed</strong></td>
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<td><strong>STEP 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Analyze Student</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Work Specific to the Data</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inferences of strengths and needs are based upon collaborative analysis of student work.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths and needs identified are attributed to factors within the teacher’s control.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Needs are prioritized only for students with disabilities.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths and needs identified are attributed to factors within the teacher’s control.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Needs are prioritized only for students with disabilities.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identification of strengths and needs is evident yet inconsistent.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Performance group data is analyzed but not prioritized.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identification of strengths and needs is nonexistent.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Blame for performance is attributed to factors out of school and/or teacher control.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Performance group data is not analyzed.</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### STEP 3
#### Establish Shared Expectations for Implementing Effective Changes in the Classroom

- **Select Instructional Strategies**
  - Shared strategies are research-based and directly target the prioritized needs identified during the analysis.
  - Shared strategies are prioritized for impact on student achievement.
  - Strategy descriptions are specific enough to allow for replication (implementation steps, frequency, duration, resources).

- **Establish Goals**
  - SMART goals are established for each performance group.
  - Goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely.

### STEP 4
#### Implement Changes Consistently Across ALL Classrooms

- **Determine Results Indicators**
  - Indicators describe teacher and student actions that will be seen if the selected strategies are implemented.
  - Results indicators are created for each selected strategy.

- **Teachers evaluate effectiveness and impact of strategy implementation based on common post-assessment data.**
  - Teachers discuss continuation, modification, or abatement of the selected strategy(s).
  - Strategies with the desired impact are documented, shared & duplicated.
  - Course correction is discussed if student achievement does not improve.

### STEP 5
#### Collect, Chart, and Analyze Post-Assessment Data

- **CFAs are analyzed inconsistently.**
  - Strategy effectiveness/impact is evaluated inconsistently.
  - Strategies with the desired impact are occasionally documented, shared & duplicated.
  - Course correction is discussed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher’s Reflective questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe the principal’s role if at all in the Teacher-based team.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does the work of this TBT reflect (or not) the principal’s beliefs of collaboration stated before?

What conditions established by the principal are reflected in the TBT work in this meeting?

What specific practices of the principal are reflected in the TBT work in this meeting?

Describe/characterize the engagement of each participant in this meeting.

Describe the accountability measures shared within the teacher team meeting.
## Appendix C

### Building Team Observation Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps/Level</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>o Principal does not attend meetings&lt;br&gt;o Limited team membership&lt;br&gt;o Roles/responsibilities are not defined or used during meetings&lt;br&gt;o Group norms have not been established&lt;br&gt;o No clear data form/protocols used by teams.</td>
<td>o Meets less than monthly and does not have a meeting schedule&lt;br&gt;o Team members attend some meetings&lt;br&gt;o Limited team membership&lt;br&gt;o Roles/responsibilities are loosely used/defined.&lt;br&gt;o Group norms are not consistently followed&lt;br&gt;o Inconsistent use of team forms, agendas &amp; protocols.</td>
<td>o Meet monthly with subsequent meeting dates set at each meeting&lt;br&gt;o All members, including principal attend all meetings&lt;br&gt;o Membership on team includes a representative from each grade level/department and special education&lt;br&gt;o Principal facilitates the meeting&lt;br&gt;o Roles/responsibilities are static at each meeting&lt;br&gt;o Group norms are followed and randomly checked for effectiveness&lt;br&gt;o Team forms, agendas &amp; protocols used for reporting and documentation only&lt;br&gt;o BLT protocols are reported to DLT</td>
<td>o Meet monthly and schedule is created at beginning of school year and shared with all building staff and DLT&lt;br&gt;o All roles are rotated to build capacity of BLT members&lt;br&gt;o Group norms are followed and monitored for meeting effectiveness&lt;br&gt;o Team forms, agenda, &amp; protocols guide the critical learning during the BLT meeting&lt;br&gt;o BLT reports to DLT with specific strengths/needs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| **Step 1** | o Data is not assembled<br>o Few TBT protocols are submitted<br>o District/school plan indicators are rarely reviewed<br>o TBT rubric is not used<br>o Topics other than student achievement and TBT functioning are discussed | o Data is inconsistently assembled and analyzed before meeting<br>o Not all TBT protocols are submitted to BLT<br>o Sometimes district/school plan indicators are reviewed<br>o Loose understanding of TBT rubric | o Team members have reviewed data prior to meeting<br>o TBT protocols are reviewed<br>o District/school plan indicators are reviewed according to district calendar<br>o Sub-group data is analyzed only for students with disabilities<br>o BLT agrees to what TBT rubric indicators look like | o TBT protocols are reviewed for half the meeting and district/school plan indicators are reviewed for the other half of the meeting<br>o Sub-group data is analyzed for students with disabilities, students economically disadvantaged, and others (eg: district performance groups) |

<p>| <strong>Step 2</strong> | o TBT strengths and areas of concern are not identified&lt;br&gt;o Strengths and areas of concern with district/school plan indicators are not identified | o TBT strengths/areas of concern of 5-step process implementation are sometimes identified&lt;br&gt;o Patterns and trends of 5-step process across TBTs are sometimes identified&lt;br&gt;o Strengths/areas of concern | o TBT strengths/areas of concern of 5-step process implementation are identified&lt;br&gt;o Patterns and trends of 5-step process implementation across TBTs are identified&lt;br&gt;o Strengths/areas of concern with district/ school plan | o Strengths/areas of concern are identified and evidence for causes of strengths/concerns are identified |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th>Most dialogue is about management concerns or individual student concerns</th>
<th>Feedback on the 5-step process is general and not specific to components of the TBT rubric</th>
<th>Feedback is provided to TBTs on implementation of 5-step process, connected to the TBT rubric</th>
<th>Feedback is provided to TBTs connected to the 5-step process and connected to key vocabulary, such as: assessment literacy, research/evidence based instruction that defines your Instructional Framework, high quality professional development, data analysis, learning standards and curriculum, differentiation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-wide activities are recommended but may not be connected to TBT or district/school plan data</td>
<td>School-wide strategies (eg: professional development, coaching, etc.) to address TBT/district/school plan indicators’ strengths and areas of concern are identified</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>Implementation plan is not developed</td>
<td>Implementation plan and communication is discussed without specificity (eg: communication and monitoring actions are not developed)</td>
<td>Specificity about implementation of step 3 is developed for communicating with TBTs and implementation of school-wide strategies</td>
<td>Implementation and monitoring is understood with evidence by all appropriate stakeholders in the school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BLT work is not communicated to stakeholders</td>
<td>Responsibility for actions lies with one or two people</td>
<td>Multiple ways of communication are implemented</td>
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<td>Responsibility for actions extends beyond the principal</td>
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<td>Monitoring process is identified</td>
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<td>Step 5</td>
<td>Discussion is not connected to data</td>
<td>Data is sometimes revisited</td>
<td>Data is revisited at defined schedule</td>
<td>Causes for success or areas of concern are identified and degree of implementation is discussed and verified</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Successful and unsuccessful strategies are sometimes identified</td>
<td>Successful/unsuccessful strategies are identified with evidence</td>
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</table>

**Researcher’s Reflective questions:**

Describe the principal’s role if at all in the Building Leadership Team.

How does the work of the BLT reflect (or not) the principal’s beliefs of collaboration stated before?
What conditions established by the principal are reflected in the BLT work in this meeting?

What specific practices of the principal are reflected in the BLT work in this meeting?

Describe/characterize the engagement of each participant in this meeting.

Describe the accountability measures shared within the teacher team meeting.

How did the principal directly or indirectly lead the actions of the Building Leadership Team?
Appendix D

Principal Informed Consent Letter

December 16, 2014

Dear Colleague,

As a principal in a high performing building, you realize that many factors contribute to the success of the students in your school. You and your school have committed to a collaborative culture and have documented student achievement to show for your efforts. In order for these collaborative systems be successful, principals and teachers must work together to produce the proper conditions to make these professional learning communities successful.

I am conducting this research for my dissertation as a student at Concordia University-Chicago. The purpose of my study is to explore how effective leaders in these schools lead collaborative cultures in their schools. Through an initial and culminating interview, I want to gain the principal perspective on leadership and collaboration beliefs, the conditions established for these collaborative teams to be successful and the principal practices to encourage and facilitate this system. In addition, I want to observe your building leadership and a teacher-based team once a month for a four month period. All interviews and meetings will be audiotaped as the data will be used to determine the findings that are potentially valuable for schools and administrators across Ohio.

Your participation in this research is, of course, voluntary. Your confidentiality and anonymity are assured. Please understand that the collected data will be limited to this research, as authorized by Concordia University of Chicago, although results may ultimately be presented in formats other than the dissertation, such as journal articles or
conference presentations. You also have the right to express concerns to me, my committee chair Dr. Paul Sims at paul.sims@cuchicago.edu or (708) 209-3521 or the CUC Institutional Review Board at IRB@cuchicago.edu.

I appreciate greatly your participation in this research. The initial interview and the culminating interview should take approximately 30 minutes each to conduct.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study! I genuinely appreciate your time. Please sign and date below to indicate your understanding of this informed consent.

Sincerely,

Mark G. Gleichauf, Ed.D. Candidate

Concordia University-Chicago

Crf_gleichmg@cuchicago.edu

Participant ______________________________ Date___________
Appendix E

Teacher Informed Consent Letter

December 16, 2014

Dear Colleague,

As a teacher in a high performing school, you realize that many factors contribute to the success of the students in your school. Your school and principal have committed to a collaborative culture that centers around using student data to inform instructional practice. In order for these collaborative systems be successful, principals and teachers must work together to produce the proper conditions to make these professional learning communities successful.

I am conducting this research for my dissertation as a student at Concordia University-Chicago. The purpose of the study is to explore how elementary schools and leaders in these schools lead collaborative cultures in their schools. In order to do so, I desire to observe the building leadership and teacher-based teams within your school over a four month period. My population is successful schools like yours with an effective collaborative structures and leadership.

Your participation in this research is, of course, voluntary. Your confidentiality and anonymity are assured. Although building leadership and team meetings observed will be audio-taped, teacher and staff member confidentiality will be ensured. No school, principal or teacher will be named in any document associated with this study. Please understand this data will be limited to this research, as authorized by Concordia University of Chicago, although results may ultimately be presented in formats other than the dissertation, such as journal articles or conference presentations. You also have the
right to express concerns to me, my committee chair Dr. Paul Sims at paul.sims@cuchicago.edu or (708)209-3521 or the CUC Institutional Review Board at IRB@cuchicago.edu.

I appreciate greatly your participation in this research. Thank you for your interest and participation in this study! I genuinely appreciate your time.

Please sign and date below to indicate your understanding of this informed consent.

Sincerely,

Mark Gleichauf, Ed.D Candidate
Concordia University- Chicago
Crf_gleichmg@cuchicago.edu

__________________________________________  __________
Participant’s name                                      Date