CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Educational partnerships are forged by independent organizations to meet specific

mutual interests or needs (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Trubowitz & Longo, 1997).

Karwin (1992) indicates that the emergence of the numerous partnerships that exist

between colleges and universities and public schools show that they are an efficient and

effective means to provide quality educational services to constituents. Additionally,

educational institutions can share needed physical, human, and fiscal resources they do

not possess independent of each other. A collaborative effort between schools and

universities brings together support and skills that neither partner possesses as a singular

institution. In educational partnerships that are successful, each partner gains from the

interaction. In this way, the expertise of one partner creates opportunities for the other

while enhancing their own experience (Mariage & Garmon, 2003). True partnerships are

described by John Goodlad (1988) as "symbiotic relationships" that have mutual

interdependence and reciprocal benefits. Each partner brings something unique to their

interactions around a related purpose and, as a result, each gains a new perspective or

understanding about their own work and that of others.

Fullan (1993) goes even further when he says that schools and universities should

collaborate to successfully address problems of mutual concern; anything less than that is

inadequate. Further, Fullan, Erskine-Cullen, and Watson (1995) feel that because most

institutions cannot make a difference in isolation, educational partnerships are essential. The intent of collaborative efforts is to form partnerships that equally benefit both partners' vested interests while simultaneously sharing valuable resources (Trubowitz & Longo, 1997). These benefits are shaped by the ways their areas of expertise differ from each other. When people from different institutions collaborate, the differing perspectives and knowledge brought to the partnerships provide opportunities and challenges for professional growth for all involved (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Linn, Shear, Bell, & Slotta, 1999).

A school-university partnership is an effort for schools and universities to work together to simultaneously improve student achievement and teacher development. Although schools and universities have distinctly different cultures, each has overlapping interests and offers benefits to make each more effective (Goodlad, 1994). School partners each play unique roles in contributing to the effectiveness of the partnership, its culture, and learning (Goodlad, 1994; Holmes Group, 1995; Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988).

Background

Beginning in September 2001, the Oak Park School District, a small, urban school district in southeast Michigan became involved in a collaborative educational partnership with Western Michigan University, a large Midwestern state university. The Oak Park School District, which had an enrollment of 4,142 students which is comprised of 47.5% of at-risk students, sought professional development to meet these students' needs. The university and the school district designed a unique program to address the needs and conditions of the small, urban school district and to assist the teachers of the district to grow professionally to more effectively meet the educational needs of their students. As

research indicates, Black, Hispanic, and Native American students have much lower average levels of academic achievement than Whites and Asians by traditional measures, such as grades, standardized test scores, and class rank (Bridglall & Gordon, 2003; Viadero & Johnston, 2000). The Oak Park School District has a student population made up of almost 90% Black students, almost half of which are economically disadvantaged and do not attain high levels of academic achievement (School Matters: A Service of Standard & Poors, 2005). To address the need to improve student achievement, the purpose of the program was to assist staff members, including administrators, counselors, teachers, and administrative assistants, in the pursuit of the best practices in effective instruction and curriculum development to enhance student achievement (Muchmore, Cooley, Marx, & Crowell, 2004). Additionally, the program provided the staff members with the knowledge and educational theory needed to serve as the foundation for the development of their roles as educational leaders throughout the district.

The program was designed and delivered as an ongoing professional development experience rather than the time-bound courses in traditional university programs (Muchmore, Marx, & Crowell, 2002). The district's educators that participated in the educational partnership formed a cohort. In general, this indicates that the group of participants worked together to achieve their common goal as they progressed through the program. Specific to this case study, *cohort* was the term used by the administration and staff of the Oak Park School District to describe the field-based master's, specialist, and doctoral program and its participants as well as the participants as a collective group (Marx, 2001). The courses were taught as off-campus classes by Western Michigan University professors in various school sites throughout the Oak Park School District. The cohort participants discussed the knowledge gained in the university classes and then

applied them in the schools and classrooms throughout the district. When a cohort member successfully completed the program, he or she was awarded a master's, specialist, or doctorate degree or a combination of these degrees in educational leadership, depending on their educational background and coursework.

Purpose Statement

A major public policy issue for elementary and secondary schools is the quality of teaching and the professional development needed to best address teachers' learning, teachers' practice, and student achievement (King & Newmann, 2000). As a result, many schools of education at universities have begun to focus on effective teaching methods and professional development (Maeroff, Callan & Usdan, 2001). Partnerships between universities and school districts are one innovative response to address the need for improvement in the focus and effectiveness of professional development for educators. As educational partnership projects involve more than the imparting of knowledge and the earning of degrees, this case study includes an examination of the project history, background, practices, and lessons learned from the perspective of the participants from the school district in an educational partnership with a university. The purposes of this case study are to describe the process by which staff members of the Oak Park School District participated in an educational partnership with Western Michigan University as well as the changes that occurred in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as a result of their participation.

We know that universities and school districts have formed professional learning collaborative groups in order to assist teachers in increasing the levels of student learning (Moriarty & Gray, 2003). We also know that teachers' beliefs, practices, and sense of

efficacy can be influenced by participation in a collaborative program between a university and a school district (Welch & Sheridan, 1993). However, educational research has not investigated to a great extent the *design and process* of educational partnerships between universities and school districts or the impact of the relationship on the participants and the school district. Therefore, the purpose of this case study is (a) to describe the process by which the staff of a school district participated in an educational cohort partnership with a university, and (b) to explore how the participants of the collaborative effort between a university and a school district describe the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy.

Research Questions

Qualitative research questions are open ended, nondirectional, and evolve as the researcher considers and reconsiders the broad themes of their study (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1996). Additionally, in qualitative research a primary or central question is usually broad and general and then is followed by a series of subquestions that give direct implications for data analysis. These questions become the topics explored in the data collection (Creswell, 2003; McMillan, 2000; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Creswell further suggests that the central question be overarching and stated as broadly as possible to convey an open and emerging design, which is indicative of qualitative research. Keeping these guidelines in mind, the following is the primary or central question that would be applicable to this study on the collaborative effort between the Oak Park School District, a small, urban school district, and Western Michigan University, a large, Midwestern state university:

Primary or Central Research Question: How do the participants of an educational partnership between a large state university and a small, urban school district in southeast Michigan describe the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as a result of this partnership?

In order to narrow the focus of the qualitative study but leave open the questioning process and its potential, a series of five to eight subquestions usually follows the primary or central research question. These subquestions then become the topics that are specifically explored in the various methods of data collection in the qualitative study (Creswell, 2003). In an effort to narrow the focus of this case study, the broad, general primary or central question (or both) that was previously stated was further addressed with the following series of subquestions:

1. What formal and informal learning did the participants of the cohort experience to develop the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy?

2. What barriers did the participants encounter in the process of bringing about changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy?

3. How were the participants of the cohort able to bring about changes in the district?

4. From the participants' perspective, what impact has the partnership had on their classroom or school or school district or all three?

5. How did participation in the cohort prepare the participants to better address the challenges of the school district?

Methodology Overview

This narrative account was conducted in the Oak Park School District using the techniques employed in qualitative research (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The naturalistic data collected included careful descriptions of people, places, conversations, and artifacts through sustained contact with individuals in the targeted school district. As the researcher and a member of the cohort group, I served as the investigator in the collection and analysis of the data that were used in this case study. In this way, I was in the role of a participant observer who made firsthand observations of activities and interactions and sometimes personally engaged in the activities (Patton, 2002). The data were collected by asking open-ended questions while conducting individual interviews and focus group sessions with key participants of the collaboration as well as through the distribution of questionnaires to all participants of the program from the Oak Park School District over a period of over 6 months. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002).

The study attempted to examine the elements of change in an urban school district, as it is understood by those who were directly involved in the change process. The subject of the study focused on the changes that occurred in the individual participants, their classrooms, buildings, and the district as a whole as seen from the perspective of the Oak Park School District's participants of the educational partnership. While preparing this case study, I was concerned with the participants' perspectives to understand the change process from the subjects' point of view. The perspectives of the participants and the significance of their responses are represented as accurately as possible (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002).

The District: A Descriptive Overview

The Oak Park School District is located in a small suburb that is adjacent to Detroit, the largest city in the state of Michigan. The school district is approximately 5.5 square miles, with a population of almost 30,000 individuals. The district has students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. According to data from Standard and Poor's School Evaluation Report, the school district is comprised of the following: 91% Black, 7% White, 0.5 % American Indian/Alaskan Natives, 1% Asian or Pacific Islanders, and 0.5% Hispanic, respectively. The enrollment distribution by student characteristics is as follows: 52 % economically disadvantage, 45.8% receiving free lunch, 6% receiving reduced-price lunch, 5% limited English proficient, and 10% special education, respectively. There are 1,561 preschool and elementary students, 827 middle schools students, 1,389 high school students, and 16 ungraded students for a total of 3,793 students in the district (School Matters, 2005).

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 demands that states set clear and high standards for what every student in grades K-8 should know and be able to do in the core academic subjects of reading and math. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is one of the underpinnings of NCLB. AYP requires that districts and schools demonstrate continuous academic improvement for all students and for each major subgroup of students. States must then measure student achievement using standardized tests that are aligned with the standards. NCLB requires states to establish an initial AYP target goal for student performance on these tests and raise the bar in gradual increments in following years. The ultimate goal is for 100% of students to achieve proficiency on the assessment tests by 2013-14 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

In accordance with NCLB, public school districts and individual schools that fail to achieve AYP for 2 consecutive years are identified for improvement. If a district or school identified for improvement receives Title I funds, they must comply with sanctions as stipulated in the NCLB legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The sanctions are implemented in phases starting with requirements to offer parents an option to transfer their children to schools that have not been identified for improvement. The sanctions become more severe for each additional year that the district or school fails to achieve AYP, culminating in a requirement to restructure the existing governance framework in the 6th year. Restructuring can include a state takeover or closing a building and reopening it as a charter school. Schools that meet or exceed AYP objectives or close achievement gaps were eligible for State Academic Achievement Awards (Michigan Department of Education, 2005a).

In Michigan, AYP is determined using scores from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics tests (Michigan Department of Education, 2005b). All four elementary schools in the Oak Park School District made AYP in 2004; however, one school was identified for improvement at the Corrective Action phase until it achieves AYP for 2 consecutive years. Corrective Action requires that the school offer all students the option to transfer to a school not identified for improvement and offer qualifying students the opportunity to participate in supplemental educational services. Additionally, the district must continue to provide technical assistance to the principal and faculty as part of the required corrective action plan implemented the previous year.

In addition to the four elementary schools, the Oak Park School District also has one middle school and one high school. At Roosevelt Middle School, the economically

disadvantaged subgroup made AYP in Mathematics based on the 2004 MEAP results, but not in English Language Arts. Students as a whole, and all other subgroups made AYP in both subjects. Roosevelt had the potential to be identified for improvement if the school failed to make AYP for 2 consecutive years. Oak Park High School failed to meet AYP in the area of Mathematics and was identified for improvement in 2004. However, since the high school does not receive Title I funds, NCLB sanctions do not apply.

Since over 50% of the students attending each of the elementary schools and Roosevelt Middle school qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch program, all five buildings meet the requirements for offering Schoolwide Title I programs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). These schools went through the process of changing their program delivery system from Targeted Assistance programs to Schoolwide Programs (SWP). One advantage of a SWP is that all students in the school are potentially eligible to receive Title I services based on their current academic performance in the core curriculum subject areas.

At the time that this study was conducted, approximately 95% of the teaching staff of the district was considered to be highly qualified by the standards established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which means that the teachers have: (a) a bachelor's degree, (b) full state certification or licensure, and (c) proven that they know each subject they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The district helped teachers who did not meet the requirements of NCLB before the mandated 2006 deadline. Additionally, almost 70% of the staff had attained a master's degree or higher. The mean length of employment in the district was 9.5 years; with a range of 46 years to less than 1 year (Oak Park School District, 2004).

Significance of Study

The results of this investigation have implications for practitioners determining whether efforts similar to this university-school partnership should continue. The participating educators have given of their time, effort, and financial support to create and sustain this partnership. Since partner schools and the universities are public institutions, research is necessary to rationalize the investments made by these two institutions and to verify the effectiveness and value of educational partnerships. The findings provide insight for educators for future activities that lend themselves to continued professional growth and development through the formation of an educational partnership between a university and a school district.

The case study offers educators a process by which they can analyze their roles within their own school cultures in the areas of school leadership and school improvement. Findings of this research provides additional insight to other educators concerning school improvement efforts as well as defining and redefining roles, practices, and models of school leadership. This process could be helpful to other educators in establishing a baseline of information and determining a direction for future dialogue and interactions in the areas of school improvement and leadership.

Delimitations and Limitations of Study

In research, "delimitations address how the study was narrowed in scope, whereas limitations identify potential weaknesses of a study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). The researcher needs to understand these restrictions and indicate that they have been considered throughout the study (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000).

Because case studies are by nature limited in scope and generalizations to larger populations cannot be made (Yin, 2003), this study was limited to respondents who participated in the case study. However, it is my hope that a theoretical supposition formulated from this case can shed light on other cases. This case study was further limited to the collection of data over the 5-school-year period from August 2001 through June 2006. Out of necessity, this study included the perceptions of individuals that participated in the study and does not include individuals who did not participate in the study.

Role and Placement of the Researcher

As a teacher in the small, urban school district, I was a participant in the educational partnership. Additionally, as a researcher in this case study, I was an observer of the participants of the educational partnership. This put me in the valuable position of being a participant observer (Yin, 2003), which allowed me an ideal opportunity to examine this case study from both perspectives. As a participant observer I was able to view the partnership from the inside (as a participant) and from the outside (as an investigator). However, I am also cognizant of the necessity of researchers in case studies to be sensitive of the inherent biases in this type of research (Merriam, 1998). I am aware that I have biases and took them into account when commenting on this case (Merriam, 1998); however, every effort was made to remain as neutral and unbiased as possible in the collection, analysis, and reporting of the data used in this case study.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to explore the processes followed in the educational partnership and to describe the changes in the participants' beliefs, practices,

and sense of efficacy as a result of their participation. This case study described and analyzed the educational partnership between Western Michigan University, a large Midwestern university, and the staff of the Oak Park School District, a small, urban school district located in southeast Michigan. The purpose of the partnership was to provide the participants the knowledge to enhance student achievement as well as to develop educational leaders throughout the district. The participants consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators of the district that enrolled in the educational partnership that existed for 4 school years. In this case study, the data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires that were conducted at the conclusion of the educational partnership.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study is a narrative account of an educational partnership between the Oak Park School District, a small, urban school district, and Western Michigan University, a large Midwestern university. It is a careful description of the educational partnership and its effects on its participants. It considered the rationale that was applied in the formation of the educational partnership and the contributing factors to the outcomes of changes in the beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy of its participants that evolved as a result of the collaboration. A development of insights on educational partnerships and professional development, as well as the interaction of the two, and their effect on the participants' beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy was included.

The review of relevant literature and research focused on the following sections: section one is a summary of the current literature and research regarding what benefits educational partnership can provide to professional development; section two encompasses research on professional development's impact on participants' beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy.

Educational Partnerships

Definition of Educational Partnership

The term *educational partnerships* refers to relationships between universities and schools that draw upon equitable and shared power relationships that plan, implement, and evaluate joint initiatives designed to better meet the education needs of teachers and students (Brookhart & Loadman, 1992; Clark, 1988; Feldman, 1992; Hord, 1986). A variety of configurations of these relationships, such as Professional Development Schools (Holmes Group, 1990), Clinical Schools (Goodlad, 1994), and Partner Schools (Harris & Harris, 1993), exist and are used to describe collaborations between schools and universities. Goodlad indicates that "a school-university partnership represents a formal agreement between a college or university (or one of its constituent parts) and one or more school districts to collaborate on programs in which both have a common interest" (pp. 113-114).

Although a multitude of terms exist that apply to educational partnerships, many educational researchers advocate a precise definition to avoid mislabeling of programs and projects. The term *educational partnership* needs to be expanded and supported with a review of the definitions others have written. Although *partnership* is a term that is frequently used in literature, Su (1991) points out that "the concept often carries different meanings when used by different persons or institutions" (p. 11). She points out that *collaboration, cooperation,* and *partnerships* are often used interchangeably to refer to inter-institutional relationships. Clark (1988) distinguishes "partnerships" from "networks" by saying that networks tend to consist of similar organizations, whereas partnerships more often are composed of dissimilar institutions (p. 21). Goodlad and others reiterate this difference, commenting that networks most often function to

exchange information but not in the service of joint projects (Goodlad, 1987; Goodlad & Sirotnik, 1988). Hord (1986) points to the differences between collaboration and cooperation. She indicates that cooperative arrangements do not require a mutual goal or participation that collaborations do. Further, cooperation usually occurs when one organization asks another for assistance in completing a project; however, collaboration requires equal participation and cooperation as well as the exchange of ideas (Hord, 1986).

The significance of such differences and distinctions is that a consistent interpretation of the parameters of educational partnerships is still elusive. While there seems to be general agreement that partnership programs must function with the active collaboration of the associating institutions, the interpretation of this factor is inconsistent (Greenberg, 1992; Hord, 1986; Karwin, 1992). This allows for different philosophical propositions and evaluation standards to exist which create opportunities for a wide variety of interpretations of the term. Consequently, there are many programs which refer to themselves as educational partnerships which adhere to very different principles of design and practice from those of others. The theoretical framework of an educational partnership needs to be considered when studying, analyzing, or designing a program (Kerka, 1997; Petrie, 1995). Additionally, a researcher must recognize that it is not so much the organization of the partnership but whether it is appropriate for the problems being addressed and the setting in which the partnership is situated (Tushnet, 1993).

Purpose and Rationale

Educators, particularly those of at-risk students, are turning to educational partnerships to renew the efforts, practices, and strategies implemented by teachers in the education of their students (Karwin, 1992; Sheridan, 2000). Educators who have

participated in collaborations gain insights into the nature of their own and fellow educators' orientation with respect to the areas identified for renewal (Gifford, 1986). Teachers who collaborate grow both personally and professionally as they become more analytical and more willing to apply new ideas (Porter, 1987). Participants of educational partnerships become trained in current best practices and then are able to share their knowledge and experiences with their colleagues. Additionally, the participants are able to research teaching practices and strategies in operation at a variety of school sites (Auton, Browne, & Furtrell, 1998; King-Sears, 1995).

Educational partnerships also effectively address the disconnect that graduate students experience between their on-campus coursework and their off-campus classroom experiences. For both pre-service and in-service teachers this fragmentation between on-campus coursework and off-campus classroom experiences is one of the major weaknesses of traditional teacher education programs (Goodlad & Sirotnik, 1990). As noted by McIntyre and Byrd (1996), a significant number of teacher education programs fail to enable their students to understand how ideas and concepts discussed in their college classes are related to their actual teaching experiences. Collaborations are advantageous for both the university and the school because they provide the opportunity for both faculties to unite in the desire to support teachers to effectively meet the needs of their students. Additionally, universities and school systems work together so that their needs compliment each other and so that resources from each are more fully shared and utilized (King-Sears, 1995). It is prudent from an administrative point of view to enroll similar students into groups that would move through the educational process together as well as strive to achieve common educational and personal goals (Clementson, 1998).

Changing practice requires teacher learning hence school-university partnerships provide the opportunity for educators to acquire learning that is relevant and pertinent to their teaching situation (Kerka, 1997; Sandholtz, 1998). Research has indicated that learning and knowledge should be situated in the physical and social context that is familiar to the learner and requires interaction with peers to be most effective (Putnam & Borko, 2000). They also suggest that learning and knowledge are best situated in a context that is applicable to the learner and is enhanced with interaction among learners and the setting. Therefore, teachers need experiences that help them attach meaning to concepts and theories, provide opportunities to interact with others in the discussion and practice of concepts and theories, and require examination of the contexts in which the practice of teaching occurs. A close connection between clinical fieldwork and coursework is necessary to provide such learning experiences; experiences that help teachers gain depth and meaning from their knowledge. Further, in order to affect a wider range of changes beyond individual classrooms, teachers need to consistently share what they learn with their peers (Burnaford, 1995).

Participants of educational partnership are immersed in sustained professional development and growth as they are intellectually stimulated and energized by exposure to new ideas, opportunities to conduct action research, and increased collegial interconnections (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). Cultural changes occur in schools as participants incorporate new paradigms to improve student achievement and teacher development as a learning community (Holmes Group, 1990). Goodlad (1994) has identified this paradigm as "simultaneous renewal" and reform. In a study conducted by Reinhartz and Stetson (1999), teachers within a school university partnership showed a significant increase in teaching effectiveness that was indicated by significant gains in student achievement as

measured by standardized test scores. They further suggested that increased teacher

willingness for risk taking, implementing new instructional strategies and technologies,

working longer hours, interacting with university supervisors in the classroom, and

willingness to assist other teachers were the result of participation in educational

collaborations.

As indicated by the research reviewed, educational partnerships are opportunities

for beneficial and productive interactions between school districts and universities. An

educational partnership has the potential to create and nurture professional interactions to

bring about changes that can result in improved student learning (Mocker, 1988; Sadao &

Robinson, 2002; Teitel, 2001). However, a mutually beneficial relationship is not in itself

an inherent result of all educational partnerships (Wiske, 1989). The factors that

contribute to successful educational partnerships, that is, those that serve as instruments

for educational improvement, will be addressed in depth later in this literature review.

History of University and School Educational Partnerships

Educational partnerships have been in existence for more than 100 years and can

be traced to the late 19th century (Clark, 1988). The earliest efforts began in 1892 when

Harvard's President Charles Eliot and others formed the Committee of Ten. The

committee outlined and described curricular and other educational goals for American's

secondary schools including the subjects taught in schools, most effective strategies for

instruction, and the best methods of preparation of teachers (Benson & Harkavy, 2001;

Brookhart & Loadman, 1992; Clark, 1988). In the early 1900s, educational collaborators

concentrated on the requirements for high school graduation and the testing of students

entering college. Continuing throughout more than half of the 20th century, the most

significant outcomes of educational partnerships were on the preparation of teachers and

the shaping of curriculum. However, the impact of the reforms brought about because of early educational partnerships was not profound (Bennett & Croxall, 1999).

During the 1980s an education reform movement began that has been described as occurring in three distinct "waves." The first wave of reform had centralized authority with responsibility at the state level, creating bureaucratic control and prescribed practice. A report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform,* is considered the impetus for the first wave of the educational restructuring movement. The report identified the weaknesses in the educational systems throughout the United States and indicated the need for stronger academic requirements, higher expectations for student performance, and improvement in the preparation of teachers. Promoting leadership from the federal government, the report encouraged top-down initiatives such as education bills containing regulations pertaining to teacher preparation, staffing, merit pay, and requirements for graduation. Throughout the process, increased accountability was demanded from educators (Lane & Epps, 1992).

In response, partnerships between public schools and universities gained new purpose and meaning. Substantial support for educational excellence through university and school system partnerships began to develop (Brown & Jackson, 1983). In *A Place Called School,* John Goodlad (1984) expressed the need for a greater commitment toward excellence in schools. Earnest Boyer's report entitled "High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America," (1983) furthered the support of this premise and offered guidelines for collaboration. The Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching encouraged collaboration between high schools and colleges as one of its goals (Maeroff, 1983).

By the mid-1980s, the second wave of educational reform began to focus on improving the quality of school organizations and teachers and was characterized as a "bottom-up" approach (Lane & Epps, 1992). The means of achieving reform shifted from centralized, bureaucratic strategies of reform that minimized teachers' decision making to a decentralized approach that gave teachers greater autonomy and influence and sought to build their professional knowledge and skills (Conley, 1988). Rather than controlling teachers' behavior, reform was designed to build the capacity of teachers and schools by engaging in collaborative inquiry and decision-making. In 1986, the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, established by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, published *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. The Carnegie Report called for drastic improvements in the preparation of teachers to serve as the basis for other school reforms. The report centered on teacher preparation and the building of teachers' professional capacities to transform schools.

The Holmes Group, composed of deans from university schools of education, expressed a commitment to the education of teachers in their first report entitled *Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group* (1986). The report advocated creating strong bonds between universities and public schools as well as professionalizing the culture in which teachers work and learn. The group went on in their second report, *Tomorrow's Schools* (Holmes Group, 1990) to discuss the "professional development school (PDS)—a new kind of educational institution that was a partnership between public schools and universities" (p. vii). The authors expected professional development schools to be long-range partnerships, "for the development of novice professionals, for continuing development of experienced professionals, and for the research and development of the teaching profession" (p. 11).

A third wave of reform began to take shape by the early 1990s. School reform focused on school restructuring, calling into question the management structure and culture of the school (Darling-Hammond, 1993; Lane & Epps, 1992). The third wave of school reform sought to transform theory into practice by encouraging the restructuring of schools. Restructuring involved three types of changes—changes in the teaching and learning process, in the conditions of teacher's work, and in the incentive and governance structures of the school (Elmore et al., 1990). As stated by Darling-Hammond, these changes were driven, in part, by the need to professionalize teachers' roles, a requirement if teachers were to be recognized as the most significant component in student achievement.

Factors for Success

Educational partnerships between schools and universities can provide the professional development that fosters new teaching paradigms needed to improve student achievement (Mocker, 1988; Sadao & Robinson, 2002; Teitel, 1997). A collaborative partnership can support and encourage a forum for reflection, discourse, and an environment for change. However, collaborative relationships between universities and schools have been characterized as a "fickle romance" (Wiske, 1989), one in which both institutions need to understand and appreciate the other (Osguthorpe, Harris, Black, Cutler, & Fox-Harris, 1995).

Variables that address the success of school college collaborations are cited extensively in literature. There is no single way or checklist to follow; however, certain principles should be applied by those who wish to use partnerships as vehicles for educational improvement (Tushnet, 1993). Researchers (Allum, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Goodlad, 1988; Karwin, 1992; Maeroff, 1983; Mattessich & Monsey,

1992; Trubowitz & Longo, 1997; Wiske, 1989; Zetlin, Harris, MacLeod, & Watkins, 1992), who have studied educational partnerships, indicate a variety of factors that contribute to the success of collaborative efforts. Specifically, these authors emphasize the importance of common goals, mutual respect, effective communication, adequate resources, and sustained support. It is believed that in order to have an effective collaboration, both partners need to understand the importance of each of these factors, be flexible to the demands of the project in the face of persistent change, and apply them in practice (Boyer, 1987; Starlings & Dybdahl, 1994). Because of the significance of these findings, these are the areas that were addressed in this section of the review of literature.

Common Goals

To be most effective, educational partnerships need to have a mutually determined purpose or goal that is designed to address the educational outcomes of students (Hord, 1986; Kasowitz-Scheer & Pasqualoni, 2002; Mocker, 1988). Mutually identified goals intended to improve existing programs that address student learning are attained through the sharing of knowledge, skills, resources, and efforts of the participants of the educational partnership (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, Bishop, & Mayer, 2001). A clear vision, which spells out the mission and determines the outcomes of partnerships, strengthens the development and attainment of the goals of strong, successful collaborative efforts. As Fullan (1982) points out, for an innovation to succeed, those who implement the program must share the vision. Further, visions are best accepted and most effective when they reflect a shared ownership of the group (Karwin, 1992) rather than one that is imposed on an organization and attains only compliance rather than commitment (Senge, 1994).

With the attainment of a shared vision of what they are trying to achieve, which determines a mutually agreed-upon set of goals, participants gain a sense of ownership in and commitment to the educational partnership (Kerka, 1997). This process gives the participants a sense of satisfaction that they are making meaningful contributions to the development and attainment of their goal (Fullan, 1993; Karwin, 1992). Through the process of working together to bring about change and attain common goals, the participants and their respective institutions are impacted. The more the partnership requires individuals to change what they are doing and how they relate to one another, the more important it is for them to be involved in early discussions that determine the goals and directions of the program (Tushnet, 1993).

In successful partnerships, the results of the changes grow and continue to proliferate as the desired results are collectively actualized (Fullan, 1993). According to Trubowitz and Longo (1997), throughout the process, the positive feelings of solidarity and unity are visible and are frequently expressed verbally, especially at points of high intensity, success, or attainment of goals. To obtain optimal success, the participants must be willing to trust and share authority, responsibilities, and leadership (U.S. Department of Education of Educational Research and Improvement, 1996). Trust develops as participants believe that the decisions that are made are based on true collaboration, a focus on common goals, and a sincere desire to benefit both institutions (Robinson & Mastny, 1989; Sandholtz & Finan, 1998)

Goals that drive collaborative effort should be specific and clearly defined. When goals are broadly stated, they can lose their meaning and the ability to be achieved (Trubowitz & Longo, 1997). To encourage ownership of the educational partnership requires mutual effort and dedication by the members in the formulations of its goals.

The advantages of clear, concise goals can be found in the united desire to support and effectively meet the needs of the participants of the partnership (Sheridan, 2000). The rewards are worth the extensive amount of time and energy spent in the development of the goals, since from it a sense of mutual trust was established. Further, this will allow members to understand their roles in relation to their vision, thus possibly avoiding conflicts (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

Mutual Respect

Educational partnerships require establishing respect, trust, and parity among participants in order to be successful. Collaboration between the partners must maintain a sense of collegiality and support the understanding that all members are essentially equally contributing citizens to the partnership. An environment must be created in which participants feel safe taking risks, relinquishing autonomy, and viewing the world from others' standpoints (Kerka, 1997; Sandholtz, 1998). The building of trust must be continuously nurtured among the members in order for them to take ownership of the collaboration. Therefore, it is important for the partners involved in the collaboration to know when and how ownership is achieved. According to Trubowitz and Longo (1997), "Trust and respect are the means by which any of the other goals was reached, and it is critical that the importance of this process is appreciated and given the full attention of its merits during this vital phase" (p. 56).

The leadership must be shared, based on knowledge and expertise. To be most effective, the leadership must provide opportunities to air philosophical differences, sort out the different goals and issues, and establish which activities are common and which are primarily the domain of one institution. Leadership should rotate among partners as appropriate to their skills, with teachers given equal status and leadership opportunities as

university participants (Balajthy, 1991; Wiske, 1989). Thus, the strengths and skills of each individual participant will contribute to the overall decision-making efforts as each member has equal status within the collaborative relationship. As the participants are willing to relinquish personal control and assume more risk, they create a more flexible environment that will enable a higher level of collaboration (Hord, 1986).

Communication of the content and the roles of the participants are also important. These communications should respect the existing knowledge and skill of participants (Tushnet, 1993). However, achieving parity among the participants in educational partnerships may be challenging. This is particularly difficult when teachers are in equal relationships with those whom they formerly perceived as authorities (Teitel, 1996). The notion of parity, which refers to the equal and balanced position that partners share within a collaborative relationship (Welch, 1998), does not imply that all members are identical; indeed a benefit of this approach is that individuals with diverse backgrounds, skills, and expertise come together to address educational issues. However, the communicative exchanges should be reciprocal; each partner should have input as well as gain something in the exchange (Wiske, 1989).

Researchers assert that in a collaboration, effective relationships among the participants must be nurtured and supported in ways that more hierarchical arrangements do not require (Johnston, Brosnan, Cramer, & Dove, 2000). Collaboration in educational partnerships should be viewed as a value system that is based not on competition, but on human caring, mutual aspirations, appreciation of the other's contribution, and a chosen commitment to work together over time (Wiseman & Knight, 2003; Wiske, 1989). Nel Noddings (1992) supports the notion of caring and mutual purposes as central to the success of educational dialogue. As Goodlad (1988) indicates, consideration of the needs

of the partner and the partnership must take precedence over one's own needs in order for the collaboration to be successful. Interest in the survival of the collaboration must be prominent; this goal is achieved when everyone's energy is focused on the end goal.

Effective Communication

In the more recent partnership literature, dialogue appears as a prominent component of building and sustaining collaborative partnerships and is considered one of the most important factors that contribute to the success of collaboration. There is broad agreement by theorists that good communication is an essential goal that must be accomplished if a partnership is to be effective (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Karwin, 1992). Darling-Hammond believes that communication is the key to conflict resolution and that good communication skills should be required of all participants. Members of the collaboration must make a conscious habit of sharing information that is of interest across organizational boundaries, and that "information should be treated as a cherished commodity shared widely" (p. 216). Marilyn Johnston and Michael Thomas (1997) state, "many of us judge the quality of a meeting and the strength of our collaboration by whether meaningful dialogue has occurred, to make collaborative work and its challenges worth while" (p. 19). When participants are reluctant to openly discuss conflicts, concerns, and differences directly, the effectiveness and quality of the educational partnership can be compromised (Teitel, 1997).

Karwin (1992) as well as Mattessich and Monsey (1992) agree and recommend that communication between collaborative partners should be both formal and informal as well as always open and frequent. Relationships in a collaborative effort are built on the members knowing their worth to the partnership. Darling-Hammond (1994) reminds us that when there is a breakdown in communication and meaningful relationships,

mistrust, cultural conflicts, intrusiveness, conflict, and self-interest take hold and have a negative impact on the relationship. She recommends open meetings among all members of the partnership as an effective instrument to avoid miscommunication. Furthermore, she states that if this formula is religiously followed, even in the face of change, including change of membership and goals, the educational partnership will survive.

Researchers assert, that in order to be most effective, the level of anxiety experienced by the participants need to be recognized and addressed (Bullough, 1999; Karwin, 1992). Johnston and Thomas (1997) discuss the importance of dialogue among participants of school-university partnerships to enable them to move beyond viewing differences as conflicts. Rather, they contend, that dialogue contributes to a "growth environment" where ideas are shared in a spirit of learning and understand that the discourses will aid in the development of individual and group capacity. Further, Johnston and Thomas assert that dialogue should be considered a communal exchange and negotiation of ideas; it is an opportunity for ideas to be "shared freely, critically, and in ways that nurture rather than destroy" (p. 16).

Adequate Resources

One of the reasons for collaboration is the acquisition of mutual resources through the merging of the resources of all of members of the partnership. The clear identification of the resources is necessary for the partnership to succeed, as it takes various resources to make a collaborative effort between a school and college effective. The basic elements that are necessary include adequate personnel, facilities, materials, and financial resources (Hord, 1986; Kerka, 1997). Although an educational partnership may be endorsed, it will not be effective unless adequate resources are made available to ensure

that the collaborative efforts are carried out as designed. Organizational structures must be developed and put into place prior to implementation of an educational partnership in order to optimally facilitate collegial interactions and avoid inefficiency and ineffectiveness (Welch, 1998).

Since the major expenditures in an educational partnership include the personnel and operating expenses, adequate financing is recognized as one of the most important resources. Darling-Hammond (1994) recognizes this importance:

> Participants should not be expected to take on the task without adequate operational support. Otherwise, it will not be taken as a serious commitment of the sponsoring institutions, and individual participants will measure their energy accordingly, those involved in the collaboration must be intellectually honest and politically savvy regarding this matter. (p. 214)

The resources for the project should be spelled out and communicated to the partners, so that the partners will know what their share was; changes midway to what is committed may have a negative impact on the collaborative effort. Partners should know how much and where their funds are coming from, and plan accordingly (Moriarty & Gray, 2003).

Robinson and Mastny (1989) disagree that funds are the most essential resource for collaborations but rather believe that the commitment of time is more essential for creating the partnership. They feel that finding the adequate resources should not be a problem for today's collaborators and that the funds can be acquired as the collaboration continues. This joint activity might actually be a way to bond the partners. They conclude by saying that many urban institutions are pressured by funders and government mandates to collaborate, and this alone can serve as the incentive for collaborations.

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) state that staffing, not finances, is more important for effect of collaborations and that increased staffing can supplement the normal budget formula of the respective institutions. Human resources include a skilled coordinator, committed leaders, and the right mix of knowledge, skills, and abilities among individual members (Kerka, 1997).

Successful educational partnerships provide resources, particularly technical assistance, to those who are expected to change behavior, roles, and/or relationships. Necessary resources include training opportunities, matching talent to activities, and providing technical support. The greater the change required at the activity level, the greater the need for technical assistance and the less likely that training and identifying appropriate personnel will suffice. When partnerships aspire to make changes, assistance is needed from leaders to support new ways of developing and implementing policy (Tushnet, 1993).

Sustained Support

Direct support of school and college leaders, specifically that of the superintendent and president, is an important factor in the success of collaboration. That commitment must be communicated to all members of the collaboration. Mocker (1988) and Trubowitz and Longo (1997) tell us that the greater the support that collaboration receives from both educational systems, the better the chances that the partnership will survive. Trubowitz and Longo reiterate by saying that systems are complicated and so it is difficult for them to be managed from lower-levels; to do so requires support and decisions to be made at the top. This support from the top is crucial, since it is believed that it will ensure that the necessary resources are made available to the partners. Trubowitz and Longo identified successful collaborative leaders as people who are

competent, who are visionary, who are enthusiastic about the collaborative venture, who hold stable positions, who are clear about their role, and who know how their respective systems benefit from the collaboration.

Karwin (1992) gives the role of the leader a different spin. He feels that the leadership role must be played by the chief executive officers of partnership. He states that in today's school-college collaborations, the role of the chief executive officers is not clearly defined. Karwin forewarns us that because of the position CEOs hold in the organization, they should not be limited to a peripheral role in the operation, because limiting them to that role can mean problems for the partnership. Additionally, Karwin feels that the governance structure of a partnership must include broad representation to ensure that the needs of all members of the partnership are met. Karwin sees the chief executive officer as one who should be honest, a good listener, one who has the ability to understand and respect both organizational cultures, one who is open and willing to champion the ideas, and one who maintains the interest of the whole enterprise rather then his or her own institution's personal agenda. Starratt (1993) and Goodlad (1998) believe that leaders have no power or authority in a collaborative effort since all those involved in the partnership functioned as peers. Also, they maintain that those who are leaders in their respective organization may lack expertise on the intricacies of collaboration, and in many cases, may have to depend on others who have the necessary knowledge to accomplish tasks, thus limiting the chances of the success of the collaboration.

Professional Development

Definition of Professional Development

Before embarking on an effort to explore and more fully understand the area of professional development, a careful look at the definition of the term *professional development* should be taken. With an understanding and awareness of what professional development encompasses, a greater recognition of the scope of the area can be attained. Leading authorities in the field of education have included an array of definitions of professional development in their writings on the subject. It should also be acknowledged that there are synonyms for professional development such as staff development, teacher development, teacher training, and professional growth, which are used interchangeably in educational literature.

Guskey (1986), a leading authority in the field of education, offered this definition of staff development, "staff development programs are a systematic attempt to bring about change—change in the classroom practices of teachers, changing their beliefs and attitudes, and change in the learning outcomes of students" (p. 5). In a later writings, Guskey and other experts define effective professional development as those processes designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and instructional practices of educators to improve the learning of students (Guskey, 2000; Odden, Archibald, Fermanich, & Gallagher, 2002; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). In both definitions, the authors indicate that professional development involves efforts that are designed to improve educational structures and culture. By improving the practices, skills, and beliefs of the educators, the organization can solve problems and renew itself, which will ultimately improve student learning.

Other authors add various aspects to the concept of professional development. In their definition of professional development, Knapp, McCaffrey, and Swanson (2003) state, "our conception of professional development incorporates any learning experience that teachers engage in to expand their professional knowledge and skill" (p. 7). According to this definition, there is a broad range of experiences that could qualify as professional development of teachers rather than the intentionally designed activities included in Guskey's (1986) definition. Little (1993) adds further to this concept when she states that "Professional development must be constructed in ways that deepen the discussion, open up the debates, and enrich the array of possibilities for action" (p. 22). In this statement Little indicates that successful professional development includes experiences and opportunities for growth beyond those that are predetermined in its design.

To add another aspect to the definition of professional development, Evans (2002) notes that professional development is "the process whereby teacher's professionality and/or professionalism may be considered to be enhanced" (p. 131). Further in her writings, Evans points that professional development should be a continuous process rather than a series of isolated, disconnected workshops or activities. Adding to this aspect of professional development, Speck and Knipe (2001) propose that "professional development is a lifelong collaborative learning process that nourishes the growth of educators, both as individuals and as team members to improve their skills and abilities" (p. 4). This definition also emphasizes the need for the continuous, interrelated nature of successful professional development.

Elmore (2002) states, "professional development is the set of knowledge—and skill-building—that raise the capacity of teachers and administrators to respond to

external demands and to engage in the improvement of practice and performance" (p.13).

In this definition Elmore includes administrators, a group not directly included in most

definitions. Bellanca (1995) furthers this concept of when he defines professional

development as a planned, comprehensive, and systematic program with the goal of

improving the ability to design, implement, and assess productive change in each

individual and for all the schools personnel in the school organization. He feels that

professional development opportunities should be delivered in a variety of forms, extend

beyond formal coursework, and utilize a variety of delivery modes that include all

involved in the educational process. King and Newmann (2000) elaborate on this concept

when they indicate that professional development is most effective when "teachers

collaborate with professional peers, both within and outside of their schools, and when

they gain further expertise through access to external researchers and program

developers" (p. 576).

The definitions of professional development that have been offered by various

authors suggests that effective professional development is designed to included the

following: change in the practices, skills, and beliefs of educators; a variety of delivery

modes and forms that extend beyond formal coursework; focus on continuous,

interrelated teacher learning; and the participation of teachers and administrators.

However, collectively all of the experts in the field of education indicate that the explicit

outcome of effective professional development is the increase of student learning and

achievement (Bellanca, 1995; Elmore, 2002; Evans, 2002; Guskey, 1986, 2000; King &

Newmann, 2000; Little, 1993; Odden et al., 2002; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989;

Speck & Knipe, 2001).

Historical Overview

In order to frame and enlighten the understanding of present day decisions about professional development, a look at past professionals' development theories and practices is necessary. Insights gained through a historical perspective will help inform the rethinking of current and future preparations of teachers as well as new and potential professional development practices (Speck & Knipe, 2001). Professional development for teachers has seen many revisions; some of the professional development approaches initiated and conceived in the past have been abandoned, while others have been able to evolve to their current form. Early professional development was based on the premise that curriculum packages, testing programs, and management systems would improve schools (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Educational leaders now view teachers as professionals and involve them in needs assessments and professional development plans (Darling-Hammond, 1997; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001; Hallinan & Khmelkov, 2001; Senge, 1994). To attain a greater awareness of present views of professional development, a review of the evolution of professional development was synthesized.

Early attempts to provide professional development beyond the coursework designated for certification to educators that were already in the field had its roots in "institute days," which provided an opportunity for teachers to meet their licensing requirements (Bellanca, 1995). It was through the efforts of teachers themselves that educators attempted to collaborate in order to hear speeches by prominent educational leaders and then participate in discussions surrounding the educational issues of the day. As educators felt the need for more in-depth learning to improve their instructional practices, the workshop, a form of professional development familiar to most educators, began as a way of supporting teachers, school reform, and curriculum innovation. The

workshops were designed to provide opportunities for formal interaction among teachers

to discuss educational concerns, policies, and practices (Kridel & Bullough, 2002).

Examples of this type of professional development includes "one-shot" (Papanastasiou &

Conway, 2002), "credit-for seat time" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), and

short, one-time sessions (Darling-Hammond, 1996) and "charge up the staff" sessions led

by experts with little follow-up (Shibley, 2001). The pragmatic concerns of teachers such

as constraints of time, funding sources, and local or district policies often resulted in the

overabundance of short-term workshops and cookbook approaches which ignored or

underemphasized the complexity of teaching strategies and practices. Additionally,

professional development was often disconnected and sporadic as well as unrelated to the

daily lives of teachers and their actual classrooms experiences (Speck & Knipe, 2001).

    With the passage of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in

Education, 1983), an increased bureaucratic interest in the skills of teachers developed

(Hallinan & Khmelkov, 2001). A myriad of views about how teachers should be

supported through professional development occurred. One strategy that gained

prominence was to study the practices of teachers in schools with high student test scores

to identify the skills that teachers should emulate. In order to achieve this end, schools

that scored high on standardized tests were identified and a list of skills for effective and

efficient teaching strategies used in those schools was generated (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

The assumption was that when educators were encouraged to implement a prescribed set

of teaching skills and strategies, higher test scores would be attained. Later research

revealed that a designated set of teacher skills might be a necessary component; however,

in isolation from other factors it was not adequate for the successful development of

effective teaching and learning relationships. Researchers realized that a simplistic and

mechanistic approach to the complex art of teaching did not fulfill the needs of a

successful educational support system (Good, Miller, & Gassenheimer, 2003).

Further research indicated that effective teaching was contingent on more than the

acquisition of specific teaching skills. The importance of the relationship between teacher

learning and aspects of coaching gained prominence. Coaches were considered "teachers

of teachers" which provided them the opportunity to provide "on-the-job teacher

training" (Siens & Ebmeier, 1996). Coaches and teachers gradually gained expertise in

the ways in which this type of relationship would produce progressive growth for the

teacher, the coach, and level of student learning in a school (Wood & Lease, 1987). The

development of the coaching model to enhance and reinforce the training of teachers

while establishing an ongoing learning process was a critical breakthrough in

professional development. Teachers began to guide and lead their own profession, and

wanted to determine the direction and course of their own professional growth and

development (Speck & Knipe, 2001).

In recent times, professional development that was fragmented, based on fads,

and piecemealed has begun to be replaced by systematic, coherent plans for professional

development and organizational change (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; Fullan, 1991).

Increasingly, professional development that is interwoven with the organizational

development of the school and that is on-site, job-embedded, and sustained is viewed as

central to advance the present reform agendas (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995;

Lieberman, 1995; Little, cited in Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Sparks, 1995; Xu, 2002).

This approach emphasizes the importance of professional development that focuses on

learning in and from practice and that incorporates the combination of knowledge of

subject, teaching, and a particular group of students (Little, cited in Lieberman & Miller,

2001). With this approach to professional development, educators must understand and collaborate on effective practices rather than simply adopting and implementing teaching strategies thought to be effective (Eaker et al., 2002; Little, 1993). Thus, the focus of professional development has adjusted from teachers acquiring new skills, knowledge, or support, to providing occasions for them to work collaboratively to "reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 597). Additionally, today professional development is viewed as a process that is continually improved and expanded upon and that the measure of its quality is increased student learning and achievement (Eaker et al., 2002; Farnsworth, 2002; Guskey, 2000; Odden et al., 2002).

Rationale

With the rapid pace of innovations and changes in work practices, the need for continuous career-related learning has been escalated. Proposals for educational reform and plans for school improvement recognize the need for high-quality professional development. As in other professional fields, educators need to be aware of emerging knowledge and continually seek to acquire new knowledge to refine their instructional skills (Guskey, 2000). Without continuous professional and self-growth, teachers cannot attain the levels of expertise needed to perform their roles as educators. Effective professional development is a vehicle for educators to further enhance their knowledge and skills in order to prepare themselves to best educate students (Fullan, 2001).

In most schools the teachers cannot produce the kind of instruction demanded by the new reforms and government mandates; frequently this is not because they do not want to, but because they do not have the knowledge and skills to do so. Additionally, some school systems in which educators work do not adequately support their pursuit of

the expertise needed (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). The increasing diversity of the student population has put a significant amount of pressure on the knowledge and skills teachers must have to achieve the accountability goals put in place with government mandates such as No Child Left Behind and Adequate Yearly Progress (Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, 1998). Particularly difficult to achieve is the specific goal of ensuring that children of all backgrounds master a demanding core curriculum, as well as the other materials intended to prepare students to assume their civic and social responsibilities in a democratic society. Unless the commitment to enhance the quality and professionalism of America's teaching force is made, it is unlikely that the national goal was met (Shanker, 1996). Darling-Hammond (1996) as well as Rotberg et al. (1998) suggest that reforms, which invest in teacher learning and give teachers greater autonomy, are the best hope for improving education across the nation. Darling-Hammond further asserts that the reform changes that are taking place have set student achievement standards that are increasingly difficult to achieve. These standards reflect a growing knowledge base and a consensus about what teachers should know and be able to do to help all students learn. Research has indicated that opportunities for professional development are directly linked to goals for student achievement and actual student performance (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Without an adequate effective professional development, teachers will have difficulty attaining success in achieving these standards (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Increasingly, research shows that improving teacher knowledge and teacher skills are essential to raising student performance (Odden et al., 2002; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). As Norman (1979) indicates, the National School Boards Foundation has identified investing in teacher education as the primary means to raise student achievement. Reese

(2004) and Guskey (2002) concur that students' attainment of high levels of achievement depends on the ability of knowledgeable teachers who believe all children can learn and are able to facilitate the learning process in their students. Realizing the importance of the need for professional growth, teachers themselves have identified successful profession development as an important factor in affecting school success (McElroy, 2005). The difference of one full year of a student's achievement can be determined by the instruction of a well-prepared teacher rather than a poorly prepared teacher (Haycock, 1999). Professional development, when done correctly, has been shown to be an effective means of improving both the way teachers use classroom time and the quality of instruction they provide, so that more classroom time is used for academic learning time for the students (Aronson, Zimmerman, & Carlos, 1999). Opportunities for student learning can the increased by ensuring that teachers are employing efficient use of time, knowledge, and instructional strategies. Teachers must know subject matter well and see it through their students' eyes in order to seize opportunities to better correlate content with students' interest and experience (Metzker, 2003). In order to be most effective, educators need a great deal of high-quality professional development with strong emphasis on training designed to addressing the individual needs of schools as determined by student performance on standardized tests (Bridglall & Gordon, 2003; King & Newmann, 2000; Speck & Knipe, 2001).

The rational for professional development is based on the premise that the continuous growth and development of teachers' knowledge and skills will result in increased levels of student learning. A sustained reflection on teaching and learning acknowledges the influence of teachers' understandings of their subject as well as the awareness and implementation of best practices needed to successfully impart their

knowledge to the students (Schwartz, 2001). Both educators and their students reap the benefits of increased learning when successful professional development is in place.

Factors for Success

Transforming schools in order to improve student learning and achievement through effective professional development is not an easy process or one that happens quickly. It is a process in which educators need to take a clear, sustained, systematic approach and one that must be nurtured over a period of several years (Fullan, 2001; Schmoker, 1996; Speck & Knipe, 2001). Throughout their participation in professional development that is supportive in facilitating this transformational process, teachers and leaders require opportunities to gain new knowledge, practice, reflect, and grow together (Speck & Knipe, 2001). It is also essential that all efforts for change and growth within a school or district pertaining to professional development to be part of a coherent framework for improvement (Guskey, 2000).

Research has shown that there is no one right answer or best way to approach professional development that is designed to improve student learning; rather there are a multitude of methods and formats. Success rests in finding that optimal mix of format, content, and context that can be most constructively applied in a particular setting (Guskey & Huberman, 1995). However, from the analysis of a diverse array of practices and strategies used in successful professional development initiatives, several principles appear to be common (Barth, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Eaker et al., 2002; Guskey, 1997, 2000; Hoban, 2003; King & Newmann 2000*;* Lambert, 1998; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Little, 1993; Sagor, 1992; Speck & Knipe, 2001). Having clearly stated goals and objectives, an emphasis on student learning, decisions that are data driven, collaboration among participants, an embedded or integrated program, an initiative that is participant

driven, an effort that is supported, and a format that is continuous or ongoing have been identified as important factors in the success of the professional development endeavor. Due to the significance of these findings, these aspects of professional development will be addressed in this section of the review of literature.

Goals and Objectives

Experts in the area of professional development assert that the first and perhaps the most essential element related to the effectiveness of professional development, is goal clarity and identification (Guskey, 2000; Speck, 1996). It is important to be explicit about the goals of the professional development, especially in terms of the students' learning levels to be attained and the practices that are to be implemented in order to achieve the desired results (Eaker et al., 2002; Guskey, 2000). The district's and schools' goals need to be reviewed so that the professional development was consistent throughout the district. Teacher professional development needs to be a systematic and intentional process based on collectively established, school-centered goals and a vision that supports the achievement of the broader organizational goals (Bellanca, 1995). The quality and effectiveness of the professional development increases when educators that have a clear understanding of the kind of changes they want to see and which goals they hope to accomplish (Guskey, 2000; Lauro, 1995).

If significant change and progress is to be achieved, professional development plans must be linked systematically with school- and district-wide goals and change efforts (Speck & Knipe, 2001). The direction of the district becomes evident when the professional development opportunities and use of the district's resources are aligned with its goals (Joyce & Showers, 1995). This alignment of goals with professional development and resources provides the coherence necessary for long-term commitment

to change. The change process must be guided by a "grand vision" that enables everyone to view each step in terms of a single, unified goal that goes beyond the individual classrooms or buildings and focuses clearly on improved student learning throughout the district (Guskey, 2000).

There is valid rationale for the professional development process to have its goals and objectives clearly determined. First, when educators commit themselves to making major decisions on why and how they will interact with their students' learning process, the impact of the professional development increases. The identification of the assessment procedures by which progress can be measured and success verified can be more readily achieved through the setting of clear goals that are based on student learning (Eaker et al., 2002; Lieberman, 1995). Also, administrators and teachers are more prone to stay on task and avoid distractions by peripheral issues that waste time and usurp energy when they are clearly focused on their intended goals (Guskey, 2000). When well-established goals are in place, educators are able to better mange conflicting policy mandates and practices that may arise and maintain a clear path to success (Little, 1999).

Based on Student Learning

Professional development efforts that are highly successful and effective are focused primarily on issues that are related to student learning. Although there are a variety of approaches and formats, the most successful professional development efforts are centered on a school mission that emphasizes the attainment of high learning standards by students as their principal goal (DuFour, 1997; Eaker et al., 2002; Guskey, 2000). Research in education has indicated that there is a direct link between a professional development plan that is based on a comprehensive, interrelated change process that includes the objective of improved student learning and the accomplishment

of goals that the plan was designed to achieve (Odden et al., 2002; Sparks, 2002). The authors emphasize that professional development should be built upon a solid learning research foundation in order to provide an adequate background for the intended improvement in student learning to occur.

The ultimate goal of professional development in education should be the improved learning for all students. The most effective professional development efforts are those that have been successful in reaching that goal and have valid evidence to prove it. Educators should evaluate the progress and impact of their profession development by the effect it has made on student learning based on data collected (Speck & Knipe, 2001). According to Sparks (1995) students should be judged by the knowledge that they have acquired and how they are able to apply their skills. Further, professional development that is designed to best meet the needs of the students has the acquisition of student learning as its primary focus (Guskey, 2000).

In order for the professional development to be most valuable, educators need to determine what the students need to learn, how the level of student learning was determined, as well as how to assist and support students in order to improve their learning (Eaker et al., 2002). Teachers play a vital role in helping students acquire essential skills and concepts that they need. It is through the knowledge gained from research on students' achievement and cognition acquired in successful professional development that educators are better able to implement teaching strategies and model instruction in lesson presentations that support and encourage the ability of students to broaden their understanding and application of their acquired learning (Ragland, 2003).

Data Driven

Researchers in the field of education assert that if professional development efforts are to be successful, relevant information must be gathered, analyzed, and presented to the participants before the goals are determined. Because student learning is the primary goal in most effective professional development, data about the students' achievement and needs as well as information about teachers' abilities and needs should be used in the design and development of the initiative (Eaker et al., 2002, Guskey, 2000). The decisions about what professional development needs to take place should be based on a thorough analysis of student work, their achievement levels, and a comparison of these data with the expected standards of student achievement. The information gained from this analysis of data will assist teachers in finding gaps in student learning and in teacher competence. A meaningful analysis of the data enables teachers and leaders to see patterns and trends that provide the understanding necessary for an informed decision regarding future professional development needs and plans (Speck & Knipe, 2001). When data analysis is not done or done inadequately, professional development plans are often based on misinformation and focus on training that is neither necessary nor useful (Guskey, 2000).

Continuous professional development is given credibility and validity with the periodic evaluation of its progress toward the attainment of its goals and its impact on student learning. Without a comprehensive evaluation of progress, leaders lack the evidence that the professional development is effective (Eaker et al., 2002). Data need to be collected, analyzed, and reflected on in order for the leaders to make any necessary modifications to improve the impact of the professional development process (Guskey, 2000). The evaluation process must analyze whether teachers have improved their

practices and whether the change in practice has affected student learning. When leaders

look at the effect of professional development has had on student achievement, important

data in the assessment of the impact and success of the professional development

initiative are attained. Evaluation is most effective when it is a continuous effort to verify

the success of the professional development effort (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Speck &

Knipe, 2001).

Collaboration

As Muchmore (2001) states, "Teaching is a solitary profession in which

practitioners have limited opportunities to interact with their colleagues." (p. 98).

Professional development is a means to counteract isolation and increase professional

interaction among staff members. Research suggests that professional development

thrives in a collaborative setting in which participants have the opportunity to share their

learning and experiences with others. To make the professional development experience

most beneficial, educators need opportunities to discuss, think about, try out, and refine

new practices in an environment that values inquiry and experimentation (Guskey, 2000).

Educational researchers Hawley and Valli (1999) agree that in order to foster teacher

learning, educators need to work collaboratively as they put into practice what they have

learned and periodically evaluate their progress toward the achievement of their

established goals.

As professional development plans are organized, the breadth and depth of the

knowledge that the faculty possesses as well as how to share that knowledge in a culture

that nurtures continuous improvement and learning needs to be incorporated into the

process (Joyce & Showers, 1996; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). As the professional

development endeavor progresses, it is important for the leaders to listen to educators,

acknowledge their anxieties, and nurture the change initiative while implementing instructional models and strategies. During the process, teachers benefit from ample amounts of time for discussion of the rationale for the strategies they are beginning to implement and to acquire a deeper understanding of the process through their collaboration with others (Speck & Knipe, 2001). Without the opportunity for the participants of the professional development to gain a shared meaning and understanding of the models and strategies that are presented and applied into practice, their widespread implementation on a permanent basis is less likely to occur (Sparks, 1996).

Embedded

Research indicates that in successful initiatives for change and improvement, professional development is most effective when it is school-based and job-embedded rather than a one-day workshop that is separate from teachers' day-to-day professional responsibilities (Guskey, 2000; Odden et al., 2002). Professional development that is planned as a special event that occurs infrequently throughout the school year does not provide the optimal learning situations that are needed for a profound impact in the enhancement of the knowledge and instructional skills of educators. To best meet the needs of the participants, professional development is most beneficial when it is an ongoing activity that is an integral part of an educator's professional life (Lieberman, 1996). When professional development is an ongoing, job-embedded process, every day presents a variety of learning opportunities for educators. These opportunities occur as lessons are taught, assessments are administered, curricula are reviewed, professional reading occurs, classes are observed, and conversations take place among colleagues. Educators need to be encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities as they occur, make them purposeful, and use them appropriately (Guskey, 2000)

Professional development should not be an isolated event that takes place outside the school, but an integrated part of the daily work of teachers. The experiences of learning together emerge most effectively from the actual work settings and situations that the participants share (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Research has shown that professional development is most successful when it includes opportunities for teachers to work directly on incorporating the new techniques learned into their instructional practice (Odden et al., 2002). Professional development that is embedded in the real work of teachers provides for clear connections to their interactions with students and to the improvement of student achievement. This relevancy and context of professional development to their daily work experience allows teachers to inquire, reflect, analyze, and act on their current practices as they examine student work and learning as well as their ability to provide increased learning for their students. As it becomes embedded into the teachers' daily professional lives, professional development nurtures commitment and continual growth based on the unique circumstances of the teacher and the school. When professional development is seen as an embedded, integrated part of a teacher's work life, the assessment of learning needs; the seeking out of new knowledge, strategies, and skills; and the reflection of current teaching practices become routine practices and procedures (Speck & Knipe, 2001). As these practices and procedures are used on a daily basis, they encourage further learning, continued sharing, and the constant upgrading of conceptual and craft skills of the educators (Guskey, 2000).

Participant Driven

Research supports teacher professional development that is delivered in a model that facilitates reflection and examination of the beliefs and practices of the participating educators. The involvement of the participants in the design and implementation of the

professional development project facilitates a feeling of ownership, a deeper understanding of the plans, and the development of the knowledge and skills needed to ensure the positive participation of the educators (Lieberman, 1995; Sparks & Loucks-Horsely, 1989; Speck & Knipe, 2001). When teachers are engaged in the planning of the process, they can design, give feedback, review, and revise the professional development based on their own knowledge of the students' learning needs and the staff members' commitment to the plan. Because teachers are affected by change brought about through the professional development, they need to have input into the changes or there is no substance or commitment in their involvement (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). School leaders must work collaboratively with teachers to engage them in the process of identifying their needs in acquiring the knowledge and instructional skills that are necessary to better meet their students' learning needs (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1998; Speck & Knipe, 2001).

Frequently, school leaders adversely affect the validity and effectiveness of professional development by failing to include participants in the planning and implementation of the initiative (Corcoran, 1995; Speck & Knipe, 2001). However, there are distinct advantages in seeking participant involvement in the design and execution of the professional development process. To begin, when the professional development addresses the needs of students that have been identified by teachers, a solid foundation for the building of the professional development plans is established. It is difficult for teachers to focus on district-imposed professional development when their immediate concerns are not being addressed. Also, when leaders respond to teachers' expressed professional development needs, which emerge from their direct work with students, the design for professional growth becomes more meaningful (Lieberman & Miller, 1999;

Speck & Knipe, 2001). In addition, it not only increases teachers' knowledge and skills used in their classes, it also enhances their ability to work collaboratively and share in the decision-making process. As members of the educational staff work collaboratively to design the professional development, those involved become more aware of the perspectives of others, more appreciative of individual differences, and more skilled in group dynamics. When participants help form the professional development, they generally have a strong interest in the problems and issues addressed and become personally committed to finding workable solutions. Further, by involving all staff members, the isolation that many educators experience is diminished (Guskey, 2000). As teachers plan, implement, review, and revise their own profession development, their interaction with others strengthens themselves individually as educators and collectively as a staff working together for a common goal (Speck & Knipe, 2001).

Supported

Administrative support is a key element in successful professional development planning and implementation (Bellanca, 1995; Robb, 2000). When administrators understand the importance of the professional development plan and how it affects student learning, their support is more easily attained. As administrators support teachers and their professional development work with the needed allocation of resources, including structured time and recognition of merit, they send an important signal that professional development is to be taken seriously (Guskey, 2000; Schmoker, 1996). With the leadership of administrators and teachers that establishes a priority for professional development planning and implementation, the attainment of improved student learning is made possible. The most supportive learning environments for students occur in those

schools where teacher development was also valued and supported (Lieberman & Miller, 2001).

Professional development without leadership direction and active participants lacks the necessary commitment on the part of teachers and administrators to successfully achieve its goals (Little, 1993). Principals and other leaders need to be present and involved in professional development activities to learn, understand, and support the new learning (Fullan, 1993). Through discourse and engagement in learning, teachers and administrators model a community of leaders. Educators can easily become confused by "mixed" messages that are sent when leaders do not provide support and resources for professional development, but still expect that teachers should learn and implement the new strategies to raise student achievement (Speck & Knipe, 2001). If changes at the individual level are not encouraged and supported at the administrative and organizational level, even the most promising innovation is doomed to failure (Sparks, 1996).

Continuous or Ongoing

If individual educators are to continue their personal growth, they must have multiple opportunities for participation in professional development with an in-depth approach that is intensive and sustained over an extended period of time (Bellanca, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Ongoing professional development is essential for further growth and to maximize teacher productivity to better meet the needs of all students. Research has shown the importance of continuous, ongoing, long-term professional development that is substantial in length, sustained over an extended period of time, and intensive in content for lasting change to occur (Fullan, 2001; Odden et al., 2002; Speck & Knipe, 2001). Successful professional development is a systemic process that

considers change over an extended period of time and takes into account all levels of the organization (Guskey, 2000).

To support the professional development, the new learning must be supported with opportunities for modeling, coaching, and refining their practices. This can be attained with study, practice, coaching, feedback, and refinement that occur in an ongoing and sustained manner. Modeling, practice, coaching, and analysis of performance help hone the skills of the individual, end the isolation of teachers, and broaden the school into a community of learners in support of teaching and learning (Barth, 1990; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Little, 1993; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Professional development that does not model or include the critical element of ongoing modeling and coaching lacks the important element of continuous support that is needed for individuals to change practice (Joyce & Showers, 1982, 1995, 1996). If teachers are exposed only to one-time or other forms of fragmented workshops with little or no modeling, follow-up, coaching, analysis of problems, and adjustment in practice, there was little change.

Summary

Various effective approaches to professional development have been designed, implemented, and studied for decades (Guskey, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Sparks, 1995). A limited amount of research has addressed the design, implementation procedures, and effectiveness of educational partnerships that have existed between school districts and universities (Kerka, 1997; Trubowitz & Longo, 1997). Furthermore, very few researchers, however, have delved into and analyzed the experiences of teachers and administrators participating an educational partnership between a school district and

a university that was designed to be a comprehensive professional development experience to meet the specific educational needs of the students within that district. The results of this research provide the data necessary to fill some of the gaps that presently exist in current literature. Therefore, the following questions will be applicable to this study on the collaborative effort between Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District:

Primary or Central Research Question: How do the participants of an educational partnership between a large state university and a small, urban school district describe the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as a result of this partnership?

In an effort to narrow the focus of this case study, the broad, general primary or central question was further addressed with the following series of subquestions:

1. What formal and informal learning did the participants of the cohort experience to develop the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy?

2. What barriers did the participants encounter in the process of bringing about changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy?

3. How were the participants of the cohort able to bring about changes in the district?

4. From the participants' perspective, what impact has the partnership had on their classroom or school or school district or all three?

5. How did participation in the cohort prepare the participants to better address the challenges of the school district?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This narrative account was conducted in the Oak Park School District using the

techniques employed in qualitative research (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The

naturalistic data collected included careful descriptions of people, places, conversations,

and artifacts through sustained contact with individuals in the targeted school district.

Additionally, the data were gathered where teachers were engaged in their natural setting

of their classroom or building. The researcher, a member of the cohort group, served as

the investigator in the collection and analysis of the data that were used in this case study.

The data were collected by the researcher surveying and interviewing teachers and

administrators over a period of approximately 6 months. The written results of the

research contain quotations from the interviews, focus group sessions, and questionnaire

responses to illustrate and substantiate the presentation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002).

The study attempted to examine the elements of change in an urban school

district, as it is understood in the context of those who were directly involved in the

change process. The subject of the study focused on how the various participants in the

collaborative effort saw, described, and explained the changes that occurred in

themselves and throughout the school district as a result of the educational partnership.

While preparing this case study, as the researcher I was concerned with the participants'

perspectives; that is, my goal was to understand the subjects from their own point of

view. Also, as the researcher I made sure that the perspectives of the participants were represented as accurately as possible and that the people's own way of interpreting the significance of their responses was captured as accurately as possible (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002).

<div align="center">Case Study Method</div>

A qualitative case study is a comprehensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, experience, or phenomenon. A researcher utilizes the case study methodology when he or she develops a particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic account of a specific situation or setting (Merriam, 1998). When a case study examines a particular program or entity, it is considered particularistic. This case study focused on the educational partnership that occurred between the Western Michigan University and Oak Park School District. The subjects or participants in this case study were the educators of the school district who participated in the educational partnership with the university. A case study is regarded as descriptive when it uses vivid details to describe the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). The descriptions of the changes in the beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy of the participants were constructed through the detailed responses that were given by individual teachers and administrators in questionnaires, interviews, and focus group sessions. This case study was considered to be heuristic in that it attempted to examine, summarize and ascertain the changes in the beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy that occurred in the participants of an educational partnership, thus increasing the case study's potential applicability (Merriam, 1998).

Most research experts concur that a case study is the exploration by a researcher of a "bounded system" (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 2000). The defining feature of a case

study is the boundaries that establish the parameters of the unit of study. "By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). In this research project, the bounded system refers to the group of educators from the Oak Park School District that participated in an educational partnership with Western Michigan University. A case study method was chosen for this study since the primary or central research question asked how the participants of an educational partnership between a large state university and a small, urban school district described the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as a result of this partnership. This approach allowed for observation of the phenomenon of framing within the context of its occurrence (Yin, 2003) within the educational partnership.

Another important element of case study research is the focus upon the collection of multiple forms of data and the provision of "thick, rich description" (Stake, 2000). In the case study discussed in this research, the data selected for collection demonstrate these criteria as they take the form of open-ended survey questions, transcribed interviews, and transcriptions from focus group sessions. In all three forms of the data collection instruments, opportunities for the participants to give detailed, informed responses were available. These data provided me with the information needed to prepare the depth and quality of the descriptions that were required for this case study.

Role and Placement of the Researcher

Background

Because the researcher functions as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in a qualitative case study, background information about the researcher is pertinent to the credibility of this research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). As the researcher in this case study, I am not a neutral party; I bring my own ideas, values, and prior knowledge based on my experiences to the study (Patton, 2002). Having spent over 37 years as both a secondary classroom teacher and as a Title I teacher, I have had extensive experience in the educational field. Additionally, my understanding and awareness of educators was furthered through participation in staff development workshops, educator conferences, in-service training, and the attainment of a master's degree in education. My personal experiences as an educator have served as a positive influence and valuable resource in conducting the research since an empathetic understanding of the participants and the setting by the researcher is a characteristic of credible naturalistic studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Participant Observer

As the researcher of this study and as a student in the educational partnership between the Oak Park School District and Western Michigan University, I was in the position of being a participant observer (McMillan, 2000; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). As Yin states, this technique has "most frequently been used in anthropological studies of different cultural or social groups" (p. 94) and has gained increased recognition in educational studies. A participant observer develops an insider's view of a program or setting and relates their findings of their observations to others. In case studies, the challenge for the researcher is to combine participation and observation so as to become

capable of understanding the setting as an insider, while describing it to and for the awareness and understanding of outsiders (Patton, 2002).

In this case study, I was able to view this educational partnership from both the inside (as a participant) and the outside (as an investigator). As a participant of the educational partnership, I was able to experience first hand the university's educational program with the other educators in the school district. As the researcher who fully participated in the activities and actions of the cohort, I could appreciate the program to an "extent not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through interviews" (Patton, 1980, p. 23). Additionally, as a researcher, I collected data and reflected on the findings. While actually participating in the program, I became immersed in the data, which enabled me to have greater insight and understanding in the interpretation of the data (Yin, 2003).

Researcher Bias

My participation in the educational partnership, as well as my experiences as an educator provided me with a greater understanding of the teachers, the climate and culture in which they worked, and their educational concerns. Because of my background and the opportunities for insights that would be unavailable to a relative outsider, the effect that my biases and assumptions may have on the findings of the study need to be addressed. Researcher bias recognizes that someone else, looking at the same data that were collected, may sort and interpret the findings differently than myself as a researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). When an attempt is made to create an awareness of the researcher's assumptions, what the investigator brings to the research setting can have a positive effect on the research process (Locke et al., 2000).

In order to enhance the creditability of the study, it is important that as researchers begin the research, they clearly identify their role as well as be acutely aware of their biases and predispositions (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity in this case study, my biases as a researcher may have shaped the way I analyzed and interpreted the data collected. As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (2002):

> No matter how much you try, you can not divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe in it what you value . . . the goal is to be more reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it. (p. 34)

As has been asserted by Patton, a serious limitation to the credibility of qualitative research concerns the researcher's bias as it could influence the results. In an effort to address this limitation, as the researcher I relied on the triangulation of data, which is the usage of multiple sources of data to confirm or corroborate the emerging findings (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998), and member checks, which is the systematic solicitation of feedback about the data and conclusions from the people you are studying (Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These procedures will be used to ensure the validity of the results (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003).

Participant Selection

This case study included the teachers and administrators of the Oak Park School District that participated in a collaborative effort with Western Michigan University to form an educational partnership. Initially, the district had approximately 75 teachers that participated in the leadership program. With just over 230 teachers in the district, the

cohort participants represented over 35% of the district's staff. The experience of cohort members ranged from first-year teachers and administrators to others with more than 30 years of teaching and or administrative experience. Instructional and support staffs, counselors, instructional leaders, and building administrators participated in the program. Specifically, when this program began there were two elementary principals, two secondary counselors, two elementary subject coordinators, three secondary department heads, three elementary and one secondary Title I teachers, as well as 62 K-12 classroom teachers. In addition, 36 staff members from all grade levels on the elementary level as well as 39 secondary level staff members from all the academic and nonacademic areas participated in the educational partnership. Further, there were 15 male and 60 female educators, 42% of which were African-American, 56% of which were Caucasian, 2% of which were Chaldean, and 1% were Hispanic, that were involved in the program.

This case study was limited to the educators who participated in the educational partnership, and was further limited to the collection of data and artifacts that reference the 5-school-year period from August 2001 through June 2006, the length of time the educational partnership was in place.

Data Collection

Data collection involves the acquisition of the information needed to answer research questions. It includes a description of the methods used, how they will be conducted, and why the methods were chosen (Maxwell, 1996). For purposes of this case study, information was gathered by the researcher, who was a member of the educational partnership. In this case study, I utilized individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires as instruments to collect my data. In all instances, participants were

purposefully selected, which means that the participants were selected because they were particularly informative about the cohort itself as well as their participation in the cohort (Creswell, 2003; McMillan, 2000). Purposeful sampling was used because I wanted to discover, understand, and gain insight from a sample from whom the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). The interviews, surveys, and focus group sessions were conducted at a time and place that was convenient and comfortable for the participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Below is a detailed description of the processes and techniques that were utilized in each of these methods of data collection.

For this study, a questionnaire with eight open-ended questions was sent, via the interschool mail system, to each of those staff members of the Oak Park School District that participated in educational partnership with Western Michigan University and had met either one of the following criterion: (a) been awarded a master's degree, or (b) were active members of the specialist and or doctoral degree program as of May 2005. A total of 46 individuals qualified to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire had a letter of explanation, consent form, and return envelope attached to it. The subjects were instructed to read and sign the consent form before completing the questionnaire. The subjects were told not to put their name or any other identifying information on the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, the subjects placed it in the return envelope, sealed the envelope, and sent it back to me along with the consent form via the interschool mail system. When I received the consent form and the sealed envelope, I separated the consent forms from the envelopes and placed them into two different groups in order to ensure the confidentiality of the subjects. All staff members that participated in the cohort had the opportunity to complete the questionnaires confidentially at their earliest convenience. The survey consisted of eight open-ended

questions regarding the staff members' opinions concerning the relevancy of the cohort

on the policies, procedures, and practices of the district. The following are the open-

ended questions included in the questionnaire:

1. What was your initial impression of the Oak Park/Western Michigan

University partnership when it first began in 2001? (i.e., planning, communication with

cohort members, appropriateness of course content, community building, etc.). Why did

you feel this way?

2. What is your impression of the partnership now? Why do you feel this way?

3. From your perspective, what impact has the partnership had on your school?

4. Give one or more examples of how the partnership has influenced your

teaching—either directly or indirectly.

5. What do you view as the greatest challenge facing Oak Park teachers today?

6. Do you think the Oak Park/Western Michigan University partnership helped

you to address this challenge? If so, how?

7. What do you see as the biggest shortcoming of the partnership?

8. What do you see as the greatest strength of the partnership?

As the researcher of this study, I had a listing of all the participants of the

educational partnerships. As the questionnaires were returned with the signed consent

forms, the names of the respondents were checked on the listing of participants. Two

weeks after the initial questionnaires were mailed, a second mailing was sent to all the

participants who did not return the completed questionnaires. In the second

correspondence, I reminded the participants of the original mailing and encouraged them

to complete the questionnaire and send it back to me via the interschool mail.

Additionally, I sent a new copy of the cover letter, consent form, and the questionnaire to

each participant who did not return the questionnaire in the event that they may have misplaced the original mailing. As the questionnaires were returned from the second mailing, I checked the respondent's name off the listing of the participants.

After one more week, I personally contacted each participant that had not completed and returned his or her questionnaire and consent form. I did this by visiting them in their classrooms, either before or after the school day. In a friendly and noncoercive manner, I reminded the participant of the research project and its questionnaire. I had additional copies of the consent form, questionnaires, and interschool mail envelopes available for them to use in the event that they misplaced the previous copies sent to them. After one more week, the number of completed questionnaires was accepted as final. When all the indicated procedures were implemented, a total of 39 of the 46 participants who were sent a questionnaire returned a completed questionnaire to me for use in this research project.

In addition to the questionnaire, I conducted individual face-to-face interviews with a purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of 10 participants of the cohort program. The interviewees were determined to be key informants as defined as "individuals who are particularly knowledgeable and articulate" (McMillan, 2000, p. 262). The key informants provided responses to the matters questioned as well as provided insights and perspectives on the topic being studied (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Semi-standardized interviews were conducted in which seven predetermined questions were asked of each interviewee in a systematic, consistent order. However, as the interviewer, I was allowed the freedom to probe beyond the answers to the prepared standardized questions to elicit further views and opinions of the participants (Berg, 2004; Yin, 2003). Each interview was conducted separately in a

predetermined setting that was comfortable and familiar to the interviewee and at a time that was convenient for both the interviewee and the interviewer (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

The interviews delved into the staff member's views and beliefs regarding how their participation in the educational partnership affected them as individuals and as educators within the district. The following are the predetermined questions that were asked of each of the interviewees:

1. Share with me something about yourself and your position in the district.

2. Explain your perception of the purpose/goals of the Oak Park/Western Michigan University educational partnership? Do you feel that they were attained? Why/why not?

3. What skills did you acquire or refine as a result of participating in the cohort? Explain.

4. How were your attitudes and dispositions affected by your participation in the cohort?

5. Give one or more examples of something that the cohort accomplished, either by you as an individual or collectively as a group—in your classroom, the school, or the Oak Park School District?

6. How do you think that the accomplishments of the cohort will continue? Give examples.

7. How do you feel about your participation in the cohort?

As previously noted, in addition to these predetermined questions, probes were used as the interview progressed to gather more information or insight into the issues that were under discussion.

Five focus groups, comprised of a minimum of three staff members who participated in the cohort, were organized in schools throughout the district; one focus group was conducted in two of the elementary schools as well as one in both the middle and high schools. A fifth focus group was held at the middle school; it was comprised of participants from the various buildings throughout the district. The participants of this cross-district focus group had not participated in any other focus group session that had been conducted. All of the focus groups were a means to gather views, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes of staff members on the impact of the cohort program on the policies and practices of the district. A total of 19 staff members participated in the five focus group sessions. The focus groups were used as "member checking" bodies to feed back to them the insights gained from the questionnaires and probe their responses further (Creswell, 2003). These were particularly effective uses of focus groups. The focus groups provided and encouraged a setting in which one participant was able to draw from another's response or to brainstorm collectively with other members of the group (McMillan, 2000; Villard, 2003). As Villard further states, focus groups allow participants to express their points of view in a group setting as well as provide researchers with information on the topic being studied (p. 2). In order to create the optimum research situation for the focus groups, there was a facilitator and a second person who sat, observed the group, and created field notes about the group dynamics (Berg, 2004). The questions that were asked during the focus groups are as follows:

1. Describe your perception of the initial purposes of the educational partnership.

2. What went well?

3. What did not go well?

4. What happened during the course of the program that changed the direction of the program?

5. What would you have done differently or should have been done differently?

6. Is this type of program beneficial?

Both the interviews and focus group sessions were tape-recorded. As the interviews and focus groups were completed, the data were transcribed. Additionally, the responses to the questionnaire were carefully read and reviewed. The written results of the research include direct quotations from the interviews, focus group sessions, and responses to the questionnaires necessary to exemplify the data collected and validate the conclusions derived as a result of the findings.

Data Analysis

In order to gain optimal value from the data, the researcher needs to organize and analyze the information collected (Merriam, 1998). As Maxwell (1996) indicates, this is how researchers make sense of the data that they collected and are able to apply their findings to interpret the larger meaning of the data. The process involves "preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2003). Once all the interviews, focus group sessions, and questionnaires were completed, the data were read and reread to categorize the responses according the perceptions of the respondents. The information was analyzed for categories, patterns, themes, and issues and then compared for relationships and differences. The data were then coded and rearranged into categories that facilitated the comparison of data within and between these categories and aided in the comparison to

guiding literature. The data were further reviewed to look for relationships that connected statements and events within a context into a coherent whole. In the analysis of the data, topics and trends that were expected to be found were looked for and emerging information that contradicted the expectations was sought and analyzed. This was done in order to gain a wider theoretical perspective in the research (Creswell, 2003).

After the themes and trends were identified, a data accounting sheet was designed and implemented. The data accounting sheet enabled me to arrange each research question's trends and themes by participant or group of participants. This process enabled me to visually represent the volume and frequency of trends and themes as well as the corroboration of data and testing of emerging conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Verification

Verification is the strength of qualitative research made possible by the extensive time the researcher spends in the field, the thickly detailed descriptions, and the closeness to the participants (Creswell, 1998). The first means of verification was through the triangulations of the data. This was achieved through the examination of evidence from three different sources (interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires) to build a coherent justification for the themes (Creswell, 2003). I employed member-checking to verify my findings. Member-checking was used to determine the "accuracy of the qualitative finding by taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether participants feel they are accurate" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). In this case, I provided a purposeful sampling of the participants of the educational partnership as well as any other participant who requested a copy of my findings for them to read and review. They then had the opportunity to indicate if they felt my findings

were accurate. With these methods of data verification in place, I am confident of the validity of my findings.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the methods and procedures that were used in the compiling of this qualitative research project. The decision to use qualitative research was based upon considerations of the problem, the personal experience of the researcher, and the audience (Creswell, 2003). The design of this research project was a case study in which the researcher was both a participant and an observer of the educational partnership studied. The role of the researcher was explicitly stated, as well as an acknowledgement of my biases, which were taken into account when commenting on the case (Merriam, 1998). The strategies that were used in this research project for the selection of the participants, data collection, data analysis procedures, and data verification methods were described. Chapter IV will present the findings from the analysis of these data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and the results of the analysis of the data

obtained through a study of the educational partnership between the Western Michigan

University and the Oak Park School District. The collaboration was designed to address

the needs and conditions of the small, urban school district and to assist the participants

of the district to grow professionally to more effectively meet the educational needs of

their students. Within the educational partnerships, there were two cohorts: (a) one

comprised of master's degree students, and (b) one comprised of specialist or doctoral

degree students. At the end of the first 3 years of the cohort, the participants that were in

the master's portion of the program were awarded a master's degree in educational

leadership. Those students who were enrolled in the specialist or doctoral portion of the

program continued their coursework for the next 2 years. This qualitative case study

described the processes employed in educational partnership and explored how the

participants of the collaborative effort described the changes in their beliefs, practices,

and sense of efficacy.

In order to give the reader a better understanding of the context for this study,

information on the background and history of reform in the school district, an explanation

of the educational program, a description of the curriculum of the program, as well as

demographic details regarding the program participants are given before addressing the

findings derived from the data. The next section of this chapter presents a narrative discussion of the findings that were based on the data gathered from the responses given by the participants in the questionnaires, interviews, and focus group sessions that were conducted. The findings are presented as they related to the changes that occurred in the participants in different contexts throughout the district. The presentation of the findings relating to these changes includes the trends and themes that emerged in the participants' responses as well as the similarities and differences in responses of the participants of the partnership.

By analyzing the data from the questionnaires, interviews, and focus group sessions, this case study attempted to answer the following questions:

Primary or Central Research Question: How do the participants of an educational partnership between a large state university and a small, urban school district describe the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as a result of this partnership?

Subquestions:

1. What formal and informal learning did the participants of the cohort experience to develop the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy?

2. What barriers did the participants encounter in the process of bringing about changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy?

3. How were the participants of the cohort able to bring about changes in the district?

4. From the participants' perspective, what impact has the partnership had on their classroom or school or school district or all three?

5. How did participation in the cohort prepare the participants to better address the challenges of the school district?

The Reform Movement in Oak Park

In an effort to address the low performance scores on the Michigan Educational Achievement Program (MEAP), the state's standardized test, at all levels throughout the district, the Board of Education and superintendent of the Oak Park School District formed a partnership with Consumers Energy, a major Michigan utility company in 1992. Together they implemented the Sixteen-Step Strategic Planning Process, which was a system-wide reform initiative. Goals for students, teachers, and administrators were aligned with the profiles of student achievement data and were used to track improvement of students' performance at regular intervals. The Oak Park schools demonstrated impressive gains in student achievement after the initial implementation of its Improvement Plan. However, the preliminary gains in student achievement slowed and the district remained below the state average for most grades and content areas on the MEAP (Marx, 2001).

After a review of the data on student performance and the effectiveness of the Sixteen Step Strategic Planning Process, the officials of the Oak Park School District concluded that the that there had been little change in the daily teaching practices of teachers and administrators. They determined that this change was crucial to being able to best meet the needs of their struggling students. To improve student performance the district's officials believed that an educational partnership with a university would enable the district to provide professional development opportunities designed to increase teachers' content knowledge and instructional strategies. They further felt that if the course content was job-embedded the teachers would perceive it as relevant to their daily needs and contexts. After presenting their concept for a master's program to several universities, the Oak Park School District reached a partnership agreement with the

Western Michigan University's College of Education. Both the district and the university faculty and administrators saw the educational partnership as an opportunity to design and implement a university-based professional development program for teachers that focused on district-wide school improvement (Marx, 2001).

The first educational partnership between Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District began in August 1999. There were 32 Oak Park School District employees, the majority beginning or newly hired elementary teachers, that participated the 2-year degree program. The school district officials saw this educational partnership as a cost effective way to engage teachers in an intensive professional development experience that would directly benefit the district. The district paid all the tuition, fees, and textbooks required for the program since the expenses incurred for the program were only slightly higher than the hourly stipends that would have been paid to teachers participating in professional development workshops of the same length. Additionally, with the professional development offered as a part of a university program, the teachers would be able to complete projects and assignments related to their course work without violating contractual provisions regarding workload and compensation (Muchmore et al., 2002).

Early in the partnership, a planning team consisting of teachers, school administrators, and university personnel decided that their major focus needed to be improving the reading instruction in the district. The planning team adopted a balanced literacy approach as their model. The program addressed pedagogical issues in reading instruction and re-conceptualized the district's reading curriculum. As the program developed, the cohort evolved into a forum for sharing ideas and a general support group for teachers implementing balanced literacy teaching in their classrooms. It was through

their involvement in the reading cohort that the Oak Park teachers were enabled to grow

professionally, take risks, and improve classroom instruction (Muchmore et al., 2002).

Graduates of the first educational partnership received master's degrees in reading from

Western Michigan University in the spring of 2001. Because I was not a member of the

educational partnership that occurred between 1999 and 2001 and I am a participant

observer of this research project, the partnership was not included in the data collection,

data analysis, and findings of this case study.

After the members of the reading cohort finished their 2-year master's degree

program, Oak Park and Western Michigan University officials were eager to provide the

graduates with continued professional development opportunities as well as to create new

opportunities for other teachers in the district. In the fall of 2001, Oak Park and Western

Michigan University officials decided to begin a second master's degree cohort and to

initiate a specialist and doctoral degree cohort for district teachers who already held

master's degrees. Approximately 30 teachers enrolled in the second master's cohort and

45 enrolled in the specialist and doctoral cohort. Unlike the original cohort, which

consisted almost entirely of elementary school teachers, the two new cohorts included

teachers from all grade levels and a variety of subject areas. With the increased

involvement across all levels and disciplines, a true district-wide intervention was created

(Muchmore et al., 2004).

Although the structure and format of the two new cohorts were similar to those of

the first cohort, their focus was different. Oak Park and Western Michigan University

officials decided to shift the focus of the programs to educational leadership. The primary

reason that Oak Park's program focused on educational leadership was to empower

educators throughout the district to act as leaders. It was realized that in Oak Park,

sustainable change required transforming the traditional hierarchical roles of teachers and administrators into a more collaborative relationship. In so doing, there would be improved communication among teachers, administrators, and parents. This would then establish a culture in which questions would be asked, data would be examined, and the collective responsibility for student achievement would be shared among all stakeholders (Muchmore et al., 2004). When the program concluded in April 2003, 21 educators were awarded master's degree in educational leadership and 25 educators continued to be enrolled in the specialist and doctoral program in educational leadership. It is this second educational partnership between Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District that occurred between August 2001 and December 2005 that is the focus of this qualitative case study.

Overview of the Partners

Oak Park School District

The Oak Park School District is located in the city of Oak Park, which is part of the larger Detroit Metro region. The school district encompasses four 5.5 miles and includes portions of Royal Oak Township and the city of Southfield. However, some children that live within the city of Oak Park are part of the Berkley and Ferndale school systems. The 2000 census indicated that there are almost 30,000 residents of the City of Oak Park. At the time of this study the median family income for the city is $54,786 and the per capita income is $21,677; the national median income is $70,807 and the median per capita income is $41, 877. The cost of the average home in the United States is $213,900 and the average home in Oak Park costs approximately $130,000, which makes Oak Park attractive to young families and first-time homebuyers. The racial makeup of

the city is 46.9% White (which includes a significant number of Chaldeans), 45.95%

Black, 4.13% from two or more races, 2.18% Asian, 1.28% Hispanic or Latino, 0.17%

Native American, 0.02 % Pacific Islander, 0.60% from other races (Wikipedia, 2006).

The blending of the populations that inhabit the city provides an eclectic mix of race,

culture, and religion for its residents (City of Oak Park, 2006).

The Oak Park School District has an enrollment of 3,793 students who receive

instruction in four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The Oak

Park School District accepts students from other districts through Michigan's Schools of

Choice program. Under the guidelines of the Schools of Choice program parents have the

option to enroll their child in a participating school district outside their home district, if

there is room. Students have the ability to transfer from one local school district to

another local district within the same county school or intermediate school district (ISD),

or from one local school district in one ISD to another local school district in a

contiguous ISD (Oakland Schools, 2006). Through the School of Choice program, the

Oak Park School District enrolls many students who are residents of Detroit whose

parents are attracted to the district's reputation for quality curriculum and programs in its

schools. Additionally, there are a large number of Orthodox Jewish families that live in

the northern section of the school district. They send their children to private schools that

incorporate their religious followings into their educational program rather than send

them to the public schools. Because of these factors, the Oak Park School District does

not reflect the same demographics as the community itself. The students represent a

diverse population that includes 91% Black, 7% White, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.5%

American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 0.5 Hispanic, respectively. In addition, there is a

wide range of socioeconomic levels within the district; however, almost 48% of the

students are eligible for free or reduced lunches, which is well above the state average of 34.5%. There are almost 10% of the students with disabilities and over 5% of the students are identified as English Language Learners (School Matters, 2005).

The Oak Park School District's core spending of $9,075 per student in 2003-04 was moderately above the state average of $7,658. Statewide, only 7.6% of Michigan's districts reported higher per-student spending on core operating activities. However, despite the higher spending per student, in the last 15 years the Oak Park School District has been one of the lowest performing school districts in the state, as measured by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). The district's overall MEAP Proficient Rate for 2003-04 was 42.2%, which was well below the state average of 57.7%. Statewide, only 3.8% of Michigan's districts reported a lower proportion of MEAP test scores that meet or exceed state standards. The district's MEAP High School Test proficiency rate for all subjects combined was 31.7%, which was well below the state average of 58.8%. Statewide, only 2.3% of the Michigan's districts reported a lower proficiency rates on the MEAP High School Test (School Matters, 2005).

Western Michigan University

Founded in 1903 in Kalamazoo, Western Michigan University began as a regional teachers college named Western State Normal School. It grew gradually until World War II; afterwards, it grew rapidly to an internationally regarded institution of higher education. The name of the school changed in the process; it went from Western State Normal School to Western Michigan College of Education to Western Michigan College. The name was finally changed to Western Michigan University in 1957 when the state designated it as the fourth public university in Michigan. Western Michigan University's main campus is located in Kalamazoo; the university encompasses more than 550 acres

and includes 125 buildings. The university also has an off-campus study site in Kalamazoo and eight branch campuses around the state, all of which provide primarily graduate and professional education to more than 6,000 students each year. Branch campuses are located in Battle Creek, Benton Harbor-St. Joseph, Grand Rapids, Holland, Lansing, Muskegon, South Haven and Traverse City (Western Michigan University, 2006).

Western Michigan University is a nationally recognized student-centered research university with an enrollment of more than 26,000 students. The university attracts students from across the United States and more than 100 other countries. The U.S. News & World Report's annual ranking of American colleges and universities has included Western Michigan University as one of the nation's top 100 public universities. Its nearly 1,000 full-time faculty members focus on delivering high-quality undergraduate instruction, advancing its growing graduate division, and fostering significant research activities. Undergraduate students may choose from 152 program offerings, while graduate students may choose from 71 master's, two specialist, and 29 doctoral programs. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching places Western Michigan University in its highest category for doctoral-research universities (Western Michigan University, 2006).

The Western Michigan University College of Education includes approximately 2,600 graduate students, with almost 800 enrolled in various master's degree programs for in-service teachers. For the past decade, the university's College of Education has been among the nation's top 10 producers of professional educators in terms of numbers. Degrees are offered in counselor education; educational studies; family and consumer sciences; health, physical education, and recreation; and teaching, learning, and

leadership. The mission of the College of Education is to promote scholarly activity and research that informs and supports instruction and fieldwork; to provide the necessary resources; and to facilitate a supportive environment where students become effective learners, educators, practitioners, scholars, researchers, and related specialists. Important to its mission is the conducting of research and evaluation, which guides the development of effective instruction, provides service to communities, and explores issues meaningful to the teaching and learning process (Western Michigan University, 2006).

Curriculum

The designers of the Western Michigan University and Oak Park School District educational partnership envisioned a program of study that would provide intensive professional development and would assist the participants in the process of more effectively meeting the educational needs of their students in the small, urban school district. The emphasis of the program sought to enable the Oak Park educators to grow professionally and empower teachers to act as leaders to establish a culture in which responsibility for student achievement was shared among all stakeholders. For the purpose of increasing the relevancy of the program to the educators in the Oak Park School District, there were some significant changes to the traditional curriculum in place at Western Michigan University. Although the program was formed to address the specific needs of the district, Western Michigan University and Oak Park officials sought to design a program that possessed the same rigor and legitimacy as the Western Michigan University on-campus programs (Muchmore et al., 2004).

The courses included in the curriculum of the Western Michigan University and Oak Park School District education partnership were aligned to courses taught in

traditional graduate programs at Western Michigan University; however, they were adjusted to meet the specific needs of the Oak Park School District participants. It was important to the school district that the program that was designed and implemented actually be sustained professional development that was job-embedded and perceived as relevant to teachers. For these reasons, the content of the courses was provided in the context of ongoing professional development instead of traditional time-bound courses. Although the course titles were typical of those that were included in the curriculum of other colleges and universities that offer advanced degrees in educational leadership, the curriculum was changed by the structure of the program, the pedagogy, and site-based assignments. When possible, the courses focused on specific, long-term objectives and were modularized, something that is often not possible in traditional graduate programs. Because the courses were modularized the content of individual courses was not bound within the normal 15-week semester time frame. Rather, the contents of many of the courses in the programs were spread across the entire program, often weaving the content strands of one course through the content of several other courses (Muchmore et al., 2004). However, the framework of the program was consistent with the traditional graduate program offered by the university.

The courses presented in Table 1 were delivered in a cohort model and taken by students in both the master's and doctoral program.

Table 1

Required Courses of All Participants in Both the Master's and Doctoral Programs

Course Title	Term	Credits

Systems Thinking	Fall 2001	3
School Community Relations	Fall 2001	3
Introduction to Research	Spring 2002	3
Curriculum Development	Spring 2002	3
Educational Leadership	Fall 2002	3
Supervision	Fall 2002	3
School Curriculum	Spring 2003	3
The Elementary or Secondary Administrator	Fall 2003	3

The courses presented in Table 2 were required of all participants in the master's

degree program and optional for those in the doctoral program.

The courses listed in Table 3 were required all participants of the doctoral

program only.

Table 2

Required Courses of All Participants in the Master's Program and Optional for Those in the Doctoral Program

Course Title	Term	Credits
School Finance	Spring 2003	3
School Law	Summer 2003	3

Table 3

Required Courses of All Participants of the Doctoral Program Only

Course Title	Term	Credits
Professional Field Experience	Summer I 2002	3
Theories of Leadership	Spring 2003	3
Professional Field Experience	Summer 2003	6
Professional Development Seminar	Spring 2004	3
Elementary Statistics	Fall 2004	3
Qualitative Research Methods	Spring 2005	3
Dissertation Seminar	Fall 2005	3
Doctoral Dissertation	Fall 2005-Completion	12-15

Although Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District were more than 150 miles apart, all of the courses were taught in various sites throughout the district. The courses were taught by a variety of personnel, including university faculty members, outside consultants, and district personnel. Because of the substantial distance between Western Michigan University and Oak Park, there were only two university faculty members assigned to the cohort as part of their regular course loads. Additional faculty members led particular sessions or taught entire courses as needed; however, most did not have to travel to and from Oak Park on a regular basis. With the exception of the research courses in the doctoral program, in order to fully respond to the needs of the participants and the students of the district, the content for the courses was planned and organized by the Oak Park assistant superintendent and a university co-coordinator (Muchmore et al., 2004).

For the first 2 years of the cohort, all the students attended course sessions that met every Tuesday and Thursday for 3 hours immediately after school. During the

second year a 6-hour class met on Saturdays once a month for all the students. In the third year, all students met for classes on Tuesdays but only the doctoral students had classes on Thursdays. In addition, for the first 2 years of the program, the school district paid the tuition for the courses and the participants paid for the books, curriculum materials, and fees required by the university. Due to the financial difficulties experienced by the Oak Park School District, after the second year the participants were responsible for all costs associated with the program.

Participant Demographics

When the designers of the educational partnership initially introduced the concept of the program to the educators in the Oak Park School District in the spring of 2001, more than 100 educators expressed interest in the cohort. After the classes began and participants needed to apply for admission to Western Michigan University's Graduate School in order to be enrolled in the program, 75 educators out of the more than 100 educators initially interested in the program did so and remained active participants through the first 2 years of the program. However, as the program progressed, students dropped out of the cohorts for a variety of reasons such as family obligations, illness, and financial difficulties. At the end of the first 3 years of the program, 21 participants completed all the requirements for and were awarded their master's degree. Twenty five students who were enrolled in the specialist and doctoral programs continued to take classes for the next 2 years.

The participants of the Western Michigan University and Oak Park School District educational partnership represented a variety of ethnic groups as well as both genders. There were a relatively equal number of Black and White participants in the

program; however, there were very few representatives from other ethnic groups. Additionally, there were considerably more females than males in the program. In Table 4, the ethnicity and gender distribution of the participants of the cohort is shown.

Table 4

Gender and Ethnicity of Cohort Members

Gender	Black	White	Hispanic	Total
Female	14 30.4%	21 45.7%	1 2.2%	36 78.3%
Male	7 15.2%	3 6.5%	0 0%	10 21.7%
Total	21 45.6%	24 52.2%	1 2.2%	46 100%

The members of the Western Michigan University and Oak Park School District educational partnership was comprised of a group of educators that represented a broad spectrum of experience in education. When the cohort began, there were educators for whom it was their first year in teaching. There were also participants who had more than 30 years of experience in education. Specifically, it was the first year of teaching for the least experienced educator and the most experienced educator had 34 years experience in the education. The median number of years of experience in education for the participants of the cohort was 11.

The educational partnership had the potential to influence district-wide because it included teachers from all grade levels and in all subject areas throughout the entire district. There were 25 elementary participants of the cohort, which comprised over 54% of the program. The secondary participants totaled 21, which represented almost 46% of

the participants. Within the elementary and secondary levels, the participants represented

a variety of roles in the district. Participants of the educational partnership held a wide

range of positions in the district such as classroom teachers, support services (i.e.,

counselors, coordinators, administrative assistants, department chairperson, Title I

teachers) or administrators (i.e., principals). In Table 5, the distribution of the positions

of both the elementary and secondary participants of the cohort can be seen.

Within the educational partnership, some of the participants were working

towards attaining a master's degree in educational leadership, while others were working

towards a specialist or doctorate in educational leadership. There were participants from

both the elementary and secondary levels that were enrolled in the masters and doctorate

portions of the program. In Table 6, the distribution of participants who were working on

their masters and doctorate is shown by elementary and secondary levels.

Table 5

Cohort Participants' Positions in the District

Level	Classroom Teacher	Support Services	Administrator	Total
Elementary	20 43.5%	3 6.5%	2 4.3%	25 54.3%
Secondary	16 34.8%	5 10.9%	0 0%	21 45.7%
Total	36 78.3%	8 17.4%	2 4.3%	45 100%

Table 6

Cohort Participants' Degree Program by Level

Level	Masters	Specialist or Doctorate	Total
Elementary	9 19.6%	16 34.7%	25 54.3%
Secondary	12 26.1%	9 19.6%	21 45.7%
Total	21 45.7%	25 54.3%	46 100%

Emergent Themes

The purpose of this case study was to describe how the participation in an educational partnership changed educators' beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy. The data for the study were gathered from three different methods of data collection that included written questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus group sessions. The variety of forms of data collection provided valuable information that enabled the different voices and perceptions of the participants of the case study to be heard from multiple sources. Additionally, the various collection methods provided for triangulation of the data necessary to ensure the validity of the study. After the data were gathered, it was sorted, coded, and examined for the broad, overriding categories and themes.

It was through the examination and analysis of the data that reoccurring themes emerged which characterized the views and opinions of the participants of the educational partnership. The emergent themes added to the understanding of the changes that occurred in the participants as a result of their participation in an educational partnership. There are three major reoccurring themes that surfaced and were identified from the data as effecting changes in the participants. These themes include: (a) collaboration, (b) knowledge and skills acquired, and (c) leadership. The remainder of

this chapter will provide a detailed narrative of each of these themes as they relate to the changes that occurred as a result of the partnership. Within each of these themes, the four categories of (a) individual, (b) classroom, (c) building, and (d) district, which are the contexts in which the changes occurred, also emerged from the data and will be presented. In the discussion of the findings, each of the themes will be addressed within each of the categories. Included in each theme and category are data that are presented with detailed illustrative quotes that highlight the surveys, interviews, and focus group sessions that were conducted. The categories are presented in order of progression of the size of the context, from the smallest area of context, the individual, to the largest area of context, the district. However, other than being arranged alphabetically, there is no significance in the order in which the themes are presented; each theme is represented with an equal level of significance.

Discussion of Terminology

Before delving into the findings of this research project, a brief discussion of the areas of change, collaboration, knowledge and skills acquired, and leadership, as they apply to this qualitative case study, will be presented. The presentation will include the application of the terminology in this study as well as its relevance to this research project. The explanation that follows will enhance the understanding of the use of these terms as it places the findings within the context of this study.

Change

In this qualitative case study of an educational partnership, the central research question addressed how the participants of an educational partnership between Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District described the changes in their

beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as a result of participation in this partnership. Additionally, the goal of the partnership was to create leaders in the Oak Park School District that would bring about positive changes within the district to more effectively meet the educational needs of their students. In order to effectively and efficiently achieve this goal, the designers of the partnership determined that an awareness and understanding of the change process by the participants was a vital component of the program. To more fully comprehend the dynamics of change as well as better lead the desired changes in the district, participants needed to become aware that change is a process that can take up to 7 years to achieve and not an event that occurs in a short period of time (Fullan, 2001). Further, they needed to be cognizant that successful leaders realize that change cannot the managed or controlled; however, it can be understood and perhaps led (Fullan, 1991). In the classes that were taught in the cohort, participants ascertained that achieving the desired changes in the district was contingent on the integration of skills training and cultural restructuring (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

It was their knowledge and understanding of change that enabled the participants to lay the foundation for the desired improvements in the district through their support, training, and new roles as leaders in the process. As the participants of the cohort became aware of the theories, development, and patterns of change, they acquired an understanding of the processes that are necessary for change. The knowledge that was gained in the partnership enabled the participants to be more fully involved in the changes that occurred in the district. As researchers have indicated, a change in any part of an organization may have an impact on other parts of the organization (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001). Bearing this in mind, participants of the educational partnership became cognizant of the necessity for change to occur within themselves

personally, their classrooms, the school buildings, and the organizational structure of the

school district in order for meaningful, sustained improvements in student achievement to

be realized. It is the participants' perceptions of the changes that occurred in each of

these categories that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Collaboration

The first theme that emerged in this case study is collaboration. Educational

reformers have come to realize that collaborations enhance the cohesiveness of the staff

as well as improve the teaching and student learning of the particular school and the

district as a whole (Robinson, 2005; Supovitz & Christman, 2005). Additionally, the

benefits of professional development increase as teachers come together and collaborate

on the teaching and learning process, particularly when it occurs throughout a district or

in a cross-district collaboration (Short & Echevarria, 1999). Although the Oak Park

School District is a relatively small school district, prior to the establishment of the

educational partnership, communication within and among building staff members was

not as frequent and effective as was needed to be most beneficial in increasing student

learning. The cohort provided the forum for the productive and sustained exchange of

ideas among staff members throughout the district on a regular basis. Members of the

educational partnership found this substantive communication to be effective in nurturing

relationships that improved their teaching strategies and increased student learning.

Through their collaboration, teachers were able to discuss techniques and approaches that

they had used in their classroom with others. In this way, the participants were able to

grow professionally as they shared with other cohort members the effectiveness of the

implementation of teaching strategies discussed in the class sessions. The support and

interaction with others enabled the participants to modify their teaching practices and strategies to best meet the needs of their students.

Knowledge and Skills Acquired

Highly qualified teachers that are the most successful in the classroom, as defined by student outcomes and improvement, continuously experience new learning to enrich their instruction (Gehrke, 2005; Lasley, Siedentop, & Yinger, 2006). To further enhance their effectiveness, teachers require the opportunity to share what they have learned with their colleagues and students (Texley, 2005). When educators have the opportunity to participate in learning experiences that expand their content and methodology knowledge base as well as increase their understanding of their students, effective learning and growth occurs. As teachers reflect on their learning and its implementation in their classrooms, student achievement increases as they grow professionally with the expertise gained (Short & Echevarria, 1999). The educational partnership between Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District was designed and implemented to provide the staff members with sustained professional development opportunities. In this way, the participants would be able to acquire the knowledge and expertise needed to best meet the needs of the students of the district. The second theme that emerged from the data collected was that as the participants acquired the knowledge and skills in this educational experience, their capacity and efficiency as educators was enhanced.

Leadership

Effective educational leaders address ongoing changes through a process of mutual influence which blends their thoughts, feelings, and actions with those of their followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bolman & Deal, 2003). Leaders must also stimulate, develop, and elevate their people to higher levels of potential; this will enable the

organization to move forward toward mutually agreed upon goals or ideals (Bass &

Avolio; 1994, Carlson, 1996). Keeping these principles in mind, the designers of this

educational partnership focused on the development of the leadership skills of the

participants in order to achieve their goal of increased student achievement. The concept

of leadership was the third theme that emerged from a review of the data collected for

this case study. The opinions and thoughts of the participants concerning the

development of their knowledge and skills in the area of leadership was a direct

reflection of the attainment of the goals of the educational partnership. As the participants

shared their views in the questionnaires, interviews, and focus group sessions, it became

apparent that through the knowledge and expertise they gained in the program, their

leadership skills were developed and refined.

<div align="center">Presentation of Findings by Category</div>

In an effort to provide a clear understanding of how the participation in an

partnership between Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District

changed the beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy of the educators in the district, the

findings of this qualitative case study will be presented within the contexts of where the

changes occurred, that is, in the four previously identified categories of the individual,

classroom, building, and district. The description of the changes that occurred in each of

these categories is presented separately to identify and more fully understand the specific

changes that occurred at the four levels throughout the district. Within each of these

categories, each of the themes of collaboration, knowledge and skills acquired, and

leadership will be addressed individually. However, it should be noted that in this case

study the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; the impact of the changes that

occurred as a result of the partnership collectively throughout school district and the interrelationships of these changes is greater than the impact of the changes that occurred in each of the four categories combined.

In the presentation of the findings of this study, direct quotations that were taken from the questionnaires, interviews, and focus group sessions are included. The quotations were incorporated into the findings to exemplify the data collected and validate the conclusions derived as a result of the findings. In an effort to ensure the confidentiality of the members of the program, measures were taken to ensure their anonymity. Participants were instructed not to put their names on the questionnaires so that the identity of the individual who completed the form could not be determined. Additionally, each person who was interviewed or participated in a focus group session was given a pseudonym so that other individuals who viewed the data or read this case study would be unaware of their actual identity.

<div align="center">*Individual Change*</div>

Collaboration

The benefits of the relationships that were developed with others in the district enabled the participants to grow personally and professionally. This is the first theme that emerged from the data in the category of individual change. The self-growth that the participants experienced extended the learning that was gained in the courses through the intentional and productive collaboration with their colleagues. Because of their collaboration with other educators, participants were able to establish professional relationships that enabled them to better meet the educational needs of the students of the Oak Park School District. Through their dialogue and interactions with colleagues, participants' attitudes, perspectives on teaching, and the effectiveness of their instruction

and ultimately student learning were affected positively. The benefits of collaboration and the development of relationships with colleagues were noted during an interview that was conducted with a fifth grade teacher named Karen. During the interview, Karen expressed her thoughts on the value of the classes that she took. She indicated that the classes were beneficial because of the knowledge that she gained as well from the productive relationships that she was able to develop with other educators in the district. Karen indicated the following:

> It was just more than taking classes to keep myself qualified so that I could continue to teach because there was so many other fringe benefits that came from that, closer relationships. Not just friendly relationships, but the type of relationships that are beneficial when you . . . It is easier for two to take up for something than one, those types of relationships.

Involvement in the partnership also had a positive effect on the attitudes and perspectives of the participants of the partnership. This is exemplified when an elementary support staff member named Linda shared the changes that occurred in her attitude because of her involvement in the project. During an interview Linda answered a question regarding how her attitudes and disposition toward education were affected by her participation in the cohort:

> My attitude was probably healthier because I wasn't so frustrated because I figured that someone's in the same boat as me, so I think that my attitude was definitely improved. And I thought, okay, it wasn't such an impossible feat when you had all these people, who were all with me together, who could achieve the same goals. So maybe we really could do this, maybe we really could change something instead of being one lonely person trying, you know, to fix the world.

In a response to a question on the questionnaire regarding how the partnership influenced them, another participant reinforced what Linda stated. The teacher expressed how the experience made them feel that they were not working in isolation; rather they came to realize that they were part of a team. They wrote the following:

> The partnership has changed the way I look at education. I now view my position as an educator from the perspective of what I do is part of a system. I am part of a team and not just one teacher in a classroom.

During a focus group session at an elementary school Henry, a fifth grade teacher, discussed how teachers are more willing to collaborate with others as a result of their participation in the partnership. In response to a question regarding the impact of the cohort on the participants, Henry shared his opinion:

> I think the people that have been involved in the program do have a greater awareness of their roles and are more willing and maybe even more overt in trying to stretch out. But other people who either haven't been or simply, for whatever reason, because we don't like change . . . any of us, have really held to their own. Maybe that's where the contraction comes in—when somebody starts to stretch into somebody else's areas.

While being interviewed, Marla, a fourth grade teacher, responded to a question regarding whether she sought out members of the cohort for advice because of the relationships that had been established in the program. Marla indicated that the availability of other cohort members in her building to collaborate with was especially meaningful for her when she stated:

> Yeah, I do. And it's pretty easy to do here since we had so many people there, but yes, definitely. I feel very comfortable you know, talking with them, sharing my

ideas or concerns or, you know, things of that sort and getting their feedback.

Their feedback is definitely valuable to me.

While in the program, participants became aware of the concept of mental models. Senge (1994) asserts that mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. However, most individuals are very often are not consciously aware of their mental models or how their behavior is effected by their mental models. The awareness and appreciation of their own mental models as well as those of others helped the participants to grow personally and professionally. A participant responded to a question regarding how the program influenced them with information regarding their collaboration with their colleagues. In the following quote, the participant indicated that as they began to work with others, their understanding of mental models influenced them. The participant wrote, "The partnership has made me a better educator! I am more open-minded (mental models) and more confident in my abilities to teach. I also am able to work closely with my fellow cohort members on ideas/projects." Another participant wrote the following in response to a question on the questionnaire regarding how the partnership helped them address the challenges that they face in the Oak Park School District, "There were times when I was able to get advice from others—from projects done in class or ideas to get parents involved."

It should be noted that although there were definite positive effects of the collaboration that occurred as result of the partnership, some participants expressed concerns as to their ability to continue the process once the program ended. Sophia, a middle school teacher, expressed her personal concern regarding her ability to stay connected with the other members of the cohort. Sophia offered the following in response

to a question posed during an interview regarding how she thought the changes and accomplishments of the cohort would be able to continue once the program ended:

I will always have a connection to them, but whether it will go farther than that, it will depend on how we go about it. If there was a purpose or if we had an opportunity to make some changes, I think we would pursue our relationships more as opposed to just remaining acquaintances.

Knowledge and Skills Acquired

The acquisition of knowledge and skills is the second theme that emerged from the data in the category of individual change. As a result of the readings, presentations in the courses, and discussions with colleagues, participants acquired knowledge and skills regarding current literature and research on the best practices in education and leadership. These opportunities for growth were further cultivated through practice and self-reflection to ensure their effectiveness. Participants of the partnership felt that they had grown as individuals and as professionals because of the knowledge and experience that they had gained. This self-growth influenced participants in a variety of ways including the development of their public speaking skills, self-confidence, and intellectual growth. When questioned during an interview about how the partnerships had impacted her, an eighth grade teacher named Evelyn gave specific examples of the changes that occurred within her when she stated:

Expressing more. Public speaking practice, that really helped me because up to that point I wouldn't speak publicly. Maybe I had an opinion but I wouldn't express it as much. So the more you express your opinions, you become more of an integral part of how the building flows and what goes on with the schedule. What goes on with, how different things go. That makes more of a teaching

leader, more of a leadership role. Making, more active as to what happens. Prior
to now maybe I would, you know, do whatever the principal thought was best.
Even other people in other groups, like student improvement groups, I would
leave it up to them to make those decisions. Now through public speaking and
feeling that I have the authority really to so some things, that is really how I
obtained the leadership skills.

During a focus group session conducted at the middle school, Evelyn elaborated
even further regarding the knowledge and skills she gained as a result of her participation
in the partnership. She shared how her participation in the program developed her
leadership skills. Since being in the program, Evelyn indicated that she had made
changes on a personal level that would always remain a part of her when she shared the
following:

On a personal note, being empowered . . . just being able to speak publicly. The
cohort has changed me on a personal level and that's not going to change. It has
enlightened me as far as all things research based. All the things I didn't really
seek out before.

A member of the high school staff named Brooke shared her thoughts regarding
the teaching skills and strategies that she gained through her participation in the
partnership. During a focus group session, Brooke expressed how teachers at the high
school had implemented teaching strategies that had been presented in the program in
their own classrooms. She offered the following:

I really think that at the instructional level there are a lot more teacher leaders—
not curriculum but instruction delivery. How do we get the higher order thinking
done, more discussion? Look at some of the things you have done as far as unique

stuff you have developed to bring the best out of your kids instead of pulling out a

textbook and doing the work. I have seen a lot more of that. . . . I have seen a lot

more teachers talking to other teachers about things that they like, things that

could change. . . . I think it's there, I think it's not as obvious as it can be, but I

think it is emerging.

When middle school teacher Sophia was asked during an interview what she felt

was the most valuable aspect of her participation in the partnership, she responded with a

description of her own growth as a professional. Sophia reflected on how the knowledge

and skills that she attained in the classroom changed her perception on education:

Just learning how to look beyond my classroom, how to look at the district as a

whole and how to look outside of the box and try to find resources available so

that we can achieve things despite what we don't have such as learning how to

write the six hour day and getting that approved, Student Led Conferences. When

we had a voice, when we had empowerment in the first year of the cohort, we

were able to achieve a lot despite the challenges that you know an urban district

faces.

A participant had definite opinions regarding the longevity and sustainability of

the changes that occurred within her as a result of her participation in the program. In a

focus group session, an elementary teacher named Leslie spoke emphatically of the

changes that occurred within her as well as her unwillingness to resume the status of

herself and her teaching as they were before she experienced the educational partnership.

Leslie described how she felt about the changes with the following:

If I speak personally, I will not go back. I won't stop doing what I am doing. And

if it becomes such that I have to stop doing what I am doing, stop moving. Then if

the district can't handle me moving, then I need to be somewhere else.

Leadership

The third theme that emerged from the data in the category of individual changes

is leadership. As a result of the knowledge and understanding gained from their readings

and class discussions, the leadership skills within the participants were encouraged and

supported. Because of their participation in the program, the educators felt that their

knowledge of leadership had enabled the development of their own leadership abilities

and skills. The application of their understanding of leadership included the realization of

their own potential as a leader, the appreciation of the effective application of leadership

skills by themselves and others, and the development of their empowerment to have a

voice in the changes in the district. During a focus group session at one of the elementary

schools, a teacher named Stephanie indicated that through the knowledge she gained in

the cohort she became aware of the different levels of leadership. Additionally, she came

to understand the impact that all levels of leaderships can have on the success of an

organization. She stated:

I would say that one thing that I have learned is that anyone can have the potential

to be a leader. You don't just have to be the person in charge. As long as you can

influence or help or guide someone who may be having difficulty with something

or just something that can positively change or influence the organization, then

you can be a leader.

An example of individual leadership can be seen in an in an interview with Linda,

an elementary support staff member, when she responded to a question about how her

participation in the partnership helped her develop any skills. Linda shared how her participation in the program made her cognizant of the leadership skills and abilities that she possessed but had not previously recognized when she offered the following:

As far as my own skills as a leader, I probably, I learned probably first and foremost that I've always been a leader—but what qualities and things that have made me a leader, I think I'm better able to identify. I think I am better able to develop my leadership skills because I know what is important in leadership and I can hone in on those things in my personality and my skills to become a better leader.

A further indication of development of individual leadership skills can be seen in a participant's response to a question regarding the biggest accomplishment of the partnership that was on the questionnaire. Like Linda, this participant came to realize their own leadership abilities. The respondent also acknowledged the impact that their learning had on their sense of efficacy as a teacher. They stated:

It has made me recognize leadership in myself. I feel that I am working up to my potential and that makes me feel good. People involved in the cohort feel empowered because they're knowledgeable. When people feel productive/ worthwhile, they accomplish more. This makes the instruction more improved.

In a response to a question regarding how the partnership influenced them that was on the questionnaire, another participant discussed the attainment of an awareness of their own leadership skills and how it has enabled them to develop as an educator. They concurred with the statements of the two previous participants cited when they wrote the following in their response:

I have learned how to identify my own patterns of leadership, those of others too. This allows me to develop professionally with greater self-awareness and to conduct myself with more focused and authentic direction and effort.

Other respondents to the same question on the questionnaire gave additional examples of how their participation in the partnership affected their leadership skills. One respondent wrote the following regarding how they view their role in the change process, "It has allowed me to look at myself and others in different ways. It has positively affected the way I lead and the way I follow! I am able to have a voice when change is underway." Another respondent wrote of how their leadership skills were also enhanced as a result of their participation in the partnership when they stated, "It empowered me to take on leadership roles in my building, helped me find my voice, and to see potential for me to move beyond my classroom."

During a focus group session that was conducted at the middle school, Jennifer, a seventh grade teacher, added her opinions regarding changes that occurred in her feelings about her own leadership skills and roles as the result of her participation in the cohort. Jennifer felt that although she had not assumed a titled leadership role in the building, she had become a better leader through the confidence and experience she gained as a result of her participation in the program. In the following response Jennifer indicated her feelings about the changes that occurred within her:

I think we have more leadership skills and abilities; maybe that is a part of the change in our overall attitude. Not negative, I am just saying that I feel like I have more confidence in what I am doing because I have all this behind me. But for a "leadership role" no, I am not the assistant principal, no, I am not like in a role of purpose. Just feeling that I am a strong leader and am able to speak to a

curriculum or speak to a situation, I feel much more comfortable than I did before

the cohort—and that is with the time and experience.

<p style="text-align:center;">*Classroom Changes*</p>

Collaboration

Through the collaboration that occurred with other teachers, changes came about

in the individual classrooms of participants of the cohort. Collaboration is the first theme

that will be discussed in the category of classroom changes. These changes were reflected

in the practices and strategies that were implemented as a result of the readings and

discussions that took place in the class sessions. Teachers would read and discuss

strategies such as differentiation, the adjustment of the teaching process according to the

learning needs of the individual student; authentic assessments, any type of assessment

that requires students to demonstrate skills and competencies that realistically represent

problems and situations likely to be encountered in daily life; and inquiry learning, a

student-centered, active learning approach focusing on questioning, critical thinking, and

problem-solving. Participants would then seek out other partnership members to discuss

the application of the strategies in their classrooms. Because of their collaboration with

other educators, the instruction in their classroom was modified to best meet the

educational needs of the students. During a focus group session at the middle school, an

eighth grade teacher named Evelyn shared how she sought out with other cohort

members for advice on classroom situations. She responded to a question regarding the

changes she had made as a result of participating in the program with the following:

> Just getting students to make connections outside in the real world and actually
>
> become more of a student leader is one thing I do continue. I do continue the

connections; I do look for the cohort members more so than others sometimes when I need advice on certain things.

During the same focus group session, Jennifer, a seventh grade teacher, gave specific examples of how she collaborated with other staff members in other disciplines to enhance the educational experience in her classroom. In the following, Jennifer shared how her experiences working with other teachers in other departments supported the learning that goes on in her own social studies classroom:

I will always seek out my colleagues and try to make better connections across the curriculum with them because I know, what research says, and my students learn better and I have watched it. I have put it in place the last couple of months and I have watched them take what they have learned in language arts to my classroom and back and forth. Without hesitation, I will always continue to do that. Plus work with Courtney, who is my colleague, so that we are on that same page with everybody else who is teaching seventh grade and I would like to expand it. I would like to go to the math department and say "Hey, could you just give a couple of things that I could try with this or that?" or go to the science department and say, "Could you talk to them about nuclear power in Korea?" . . . to try to continue that. That is something I will always work towards as having a cohesive curriculum available to my student to best fit their learning needs.

When a question regarding whether teacher leadership was in place in their school was asked during a focus group session that was held at the high school, Maureen shared how teachers within her department collaborated to help each other. In particular, this occurred with the implementation of the SCoPE curriculum, which is a curriculum for each of the four core academic areas, that was developed by Oakland County

Intermediate School District to reflect the Michigan Core Curriculum (Oakland Schools,

2006). Additionally, she indicated that there was a concerted effort to work with new

teachers in order to assist and guide them through their first years of teaching. Maureen

indicated that her department was doing the following,

> I know particularly in the math department we are always helping each other. We
>
> don't put anyone down if they don't remember how to do a certain problem.
>
> Don't be afraid to ask. With the SCoPE curriculum, we are giving the same test
>
> for each unit. That helps out a new teacher tremendously. How do I make my
>
> test? Is this a good test? We are sharing and saying, do this, do this, and do this.
>
> Emphasize this but you don't have to emphasize that. For a new teacher just
>
> starting off, this is tremendous because we have three, four, five non-tenure
>
> teacher out of nine in our department.

In an interview with Sophia, a sixth grade teacher at the middle school, she spoke

of the benefits from the knowledge she gained from the classes taken while in the

program as well as from the relationships that she developed with her colleagues as a

result of being in the program together. In the following reflection Sophia described her

feelings:

> In my classroom . . . I varied my assessments and I began differentiating some of
>
> my instructions for some of my more enriched learners and some of my more
>
> challenged learners to help them all become successful. I also gained a lot insight
>
> and knowledge through communicating with my fellow teachers who dealt with
>
> the same or similar students. You know, that time to be able to build a critical
>
> friends network and to be able to discuss strategies was very empowering. One of

the most valuable things I found when I got into the cohort was the collegial communication.

Knowledge and Skills Acquired

The knowledge and skills that were gained in the partnership enabled the participants to implement strategic and intentional changes in the instructional practices utilized in their classroom. This emerged as the second theme in the category of classroom changes. Through the expertise that the participants gained as a result of their readings, class discussions, and interactions with others, they became more knowledgeable professionals. They were better able to address the educational needs of their students and interact more effectively with their colleagues. In an interview with Marla, who teaches fourth grade at an elementary school, she expressed the following regarding her growth as a professional as a result of being in the cohort. She continued with a reflection of the changes that occurred in her as an educator because of the knowledge and skills that she had attained while in the program:

It definitely, definitely made me become more reflective as a teacher and really analyze my role in my students' education. It made me really raise my expectations for my students. You know, I had, I certainly had a certain expectation for my students and I don't think that it was a low expectation. But I noticed that after learning some of the things that we learned I tried to really apply those within my classroom and it forced me to push my students farther than I was pushing them before. So, yeah, I definitely think that it increased my skills, improved my skills.

Later in the same interview, teacher Marla went on to add the following regarding the changes in her thinking and approaches to assisting her students reach their potential as learners. She continued with:

It really forced me take a harder look at that—when my students weren't as successful as I wanted them to. It forced me to think, "Okay, what am I doing? What is my goal? What do I need to do differently? How do I need to adjust my instruction?" It didn't make me change my thoughts on how difficult I thought the job was or that we have. There definitely are difficulties, it's a tough job. So it didn't change my perception in that way. But just in the way of looking at what I can control within my own classroom.

Participants of the partnership also grew professionally through their exposure to a variety of teaching skills and strategies. It was felt that with the knowledge and ability to implement multiple approaches to instruction, participants would be better able to address the specific educational needs of their students. In their response to a question regarding the biggest accomplishment of the partnership that was on the questionnaire, a participant wrote of the changes that occurred in them as an educator. They wrote the following, "The partnership has made me a better educator! I am more open-minded (mental models) and more confident in my abilities to teach. I also am able to work closely with my fellow cohort members on ideas/projects."

Another participant wrote the following on their questionnaire in response to a question regarding the impact the partnership had on their class and/or school when they stated that they "took risks to effect change based on research and their greater student engagement and learning because instructional strategies changed." The same respondent indicated in another question regarding how the partnership helped them address the

challenges of the district that the course instructors had "taught us about the role of change and its importance to keeping action research ongoing."

A third educator responded to a question that was on the questionnaire regarding how the partnership influenced them with examples of the changes that took place in their classroom. The educator enumerated a variety of ways that it has been advantageous for their students to have a teacher who participated in the partnership with the following: "My students have benefited in many ways. I have implemented several forms of differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, inquiry, student centered classrooms, etc." Another teacher that responded to the same question on the questionnaire expressed a variety of ways that the partnership influenced them. Their response indicated their learning on authentic learners, which are students involved in authentic learning practices, and tower view models, which is an awareness of others' view points and perspectives had a positive effect on their teaching. They wrote the following on their questionnaire:

> Personally, I have gained an enormous amount of knowledge and understanding. My understanding of how an organization like a school district functions has improved. My teaching and researching skills as well as public speaking ability has improved. My teaching style and communication with parents and others in the community has also changed as I incorporated the "authentic learners" and "tower view" models.

In their studies in the partnership, a significant amount of time was spent by the participants examining and analyzing the SCoPE curriculum. Through their studies of SCoPE, the members of the cohort were better prepared to implement the curriculum in their classrooms throughout the district. This can be seen in the responses of participants

of the focus group session comprised of participants from throughout the district. A fifth

grade elementary teacher named Mary stated the following regarding the implementation

of the SCoPE curriculum and the teaching strategies such as higher order thinking, which

is thinking that takes place in the higher-levels of the hierarchy of cognitive processing,

which were introduced in her classroom:

> The thing that effected my instruction within my classroom, which then, directly
>
> affected the success of my students, was the SCoPE work that we did. The SCoPE
>
> lessons we did and the work we did with SCoPE helped me to focus my
>
> objectives without a doubt. That also helped with us teaching science this year.
>
> Totally, it was all SCoPE, that's exactly what guided the lessons. Inquiry lessons,
>
> which simply stated, allowed us to differentiate instruction for our at-risk kids,
>
> which we have a lot of in this urban setting. That alone made a huge difference in
>
> reading as far as instruction goes. Also the authentic work we did, with authentic
>
> instruction. Also with our urban kids I feel makes a big difference. And higher
>
> order thinking (HOTS) changes the way you write up your lessons.

Another elementary teacher named Fred, who teaches the third grade, addressed

the area of the SCoPE curriculum with a different perspective of its implementation.

Although he felt the curriculum study and analysis was beneficial to the students in his

classroom, he was not as positive regarding its implementation by all staff members

throughout his entire school. Fred felt that the effective adoption of the SCoPE

curriculum had not been realized in all of the classrooms in his elementary school. This

can be seen in the following statement he made regarding the receptiveness of the

teachers at his elementary to the SCoPE curriculum during in a focus group session:

A lot of the things that we have talked about are starting to come in place. I thought when we analyzed the SCoPE curriculum it was a pain in the butt but we were on the right track in terms of adopting some sort or curriculum. Unfortunately, an actual adoption has not taken place except in math. I do like the idea of what we talked about where you have to have strands and benchmarks to inform your instruction. It's not happening. I was in a staff meeting where I was arguing in favor of that and I was the piranha. You would not believe how people looked at me when I said, "We need a program of study. We need a curriculum to teach from."

Leadership

The second theme that emerged from the data in the category of classroom focused on leadership changes that took place within the participants' classrooms. Through their readings, class discussions, and interactions with their colleagues, participants became cognizant of their role as a leader in their classrooms. Teachers came to realize the effect of their instructional leadership roles in their classroom as well as the effect that their classroom leadership skills could have on the entire school. In a focus group session at an elementary school, fourth grade teacher Isaiah shared his views on how his participation positively influenced his skills as an instructional leader in his classroom and school with the following:

Being in the classroom and looking at instructional leadership, the one thing that I have learned is that you never stop learning. Instructional leadership means that you are always probing, you are always looking, or questioning what it is that you are doing in the classroom and how can you do it better and how does your piece fit into the big picture.

In second focus group session that was held at another elementary school, teachers were asked a question regarding what the participants had learned about instructional leadership and organizations while involved in the educational partnership. A fifth grade teacher named Felicia responded with how, in her building, the learning acquired strengthened the leadership skills in participants' classrooms when she shared:

As you learn more, things become more meaningful to you and it just adds on to everything else. I feel that a lot of us here in our building have pretty good intrinsic motivation. I think that those of us that have been in the cohort, particularly, have expanded on that with this whole idea of educational leadership. I have seen people become more confident and become more dynamic in their own classrooms. It's not so much a top down structure. You have a lot of people doing some really great things in their own classroom.

In a third focus group session that was held at the middle school, a question was posed regarding the assumption of leadership roles in their building by participants of the partnership. A sixth grade teacher named Kim expressed the following regarding the effect that being a leader in your classroom has on the entire school:

I think even if you're not doing a bigger role in the building, if you are doing a good job in the classroom and implementing the things that you learned in the cohort, you are being the upfront leader and you're setting an example for your peers.

An example of how leadership within the classroom was effectively transferred from the teacher to their students can be seen in a response to a question regarding the impact of the partnership on their classroom and/or school that was on the questionnaire. A respondent wrote the following account of how they were able to extend the leadership

responsibilities in their classroom, "In learning how to utilize my role as a teacher leader, I have allowed my students to exercise themselves as leaders in various capacities in the classroom."

During an interview with a middle school teacher named Evelyn, she corroborated what the previous participant said about creating student leaders. Evelyn responded to a question regarding how the cohort accomplished something in her classroom with the following example of the changes in focus that occurred in her teaching practices:

> The main focus is, instead of me teaching by going to the chalkboard more and doing examples, I had to focus more on students being leaders and for them to be, take more of an active role as far as learning and in their learning teaching other students. I believe I got that from the cohort.

School Changes

Collaboration

Within in the category of changes that occurred at the schools, collaboration was the first theme that emerged from the data analysis. Effective relationships among the participants were established and nurtured through participation in the cohort. Participants felt that because of their involvement in the program, the relationships that they developed with others in their buildings were beneficial to themselves, their students, and the staff of the school. The teachers indicated that through the relationships fostered with their colleagues, they were able to establish effective lines of communications, which previously had not existed, with the personnel in their building. Additionally, these bonds enabled communication to occur more readily, without the formality that can deter productivity. During an interview with an elementary teacher

named Marla, she spoke of the classroom teachers collaborating with others staff

members and how it brought them closer together as a positive force within the school

when she shared:

> I think that it really, brought us much closer together as a staff. I saw this within
>
> the staff and administration relationship; there were more positive interactions. I
>
> noticed that staff members were taking on a lot more responsibility, going above
>
> and beyond. We started initiating things.

Later in the same interview Marla offered further insight into the significance of

collaboration within her school. In her response to a question regarding the benefits of

participation in the partnership, Marla answered with the following containing specific

examples of collaboration that she felt had a positive impact on educators:

> The camaraderie of the teachers in the building, I guess would be the biggest
>
> aspect that I could think of. Being able to meet with someone and you know you
>
> have similar goals and that this is how we can make the district better in this
>
> particular or that area. Whether it's in reading, or how teachers talk to the student,
>
> or whatever it may be.

The building of professional relationships provided the means for participants to

feel that they had the ability to seek out others who helped them enhance their

professional performances. When the participants sought out others who were involved in

the cohort, they were able form and nurture relationships that were beneficial to

themselves and their students. During an a focus group session that was held at the

middle school, Evelyn, an eighth grade teacher, and Sophia, a sixth grade teacher,

discussed the collaboration that occurred among the staff members at their school even

after the educational partnership ended. They discussed the value of having a common

language, which is the knowledge, understanding, and use of terminology by a group of individuals, when they participated in the following exchange of opinions:

Evelyn: I do continue the connections; I do look for the cohort members more so than others sometimes when I need advice on certain things.

Sophia: We still have a common language too.

Evelyn: Common language. I still think in the back of my mind creating and urban district that is successful. Where as is in the past, yeah, we go to the gripe sessions at lunch, but it is a little more than just saying . . . sometimes I would like to make comments like, "I'm just about to give up to my student," or something of that nature. "Well, that student is just bad." Now I will try to look at it as "How else can I reach this student? What else can I do in my classroom to change to reach these kids?" Whereas before I might have written the student off and kind of ignored him/her. Still trying to struggle to reach every student and create a classroom adjusted toward those students who are not achieving

Sophia: I feel that even though we do gripe at lunch, we also try to be solution minded and we try to bounce ideas off each other, "You got him to work in your class? What did you do?" That is the kind of thing.

In an interview with a member of the high school staff named Pamela, she shared her thoughts in a response to a question regarding how the cohort accomplished something in her building. In the following reply she discussed the increase in communication that took place at the high school:

I think, again, the communication changed. I learned things about people that I didn't know which changed my perspective in dealing with that person. My relationship changed with a lot of people in the building. People that I normally

would not have talked to or you know, other than just dealing with them as far as

students are concerned. That we, you know, I won't say formulated friendship but

the relationship did change.

To further exemplify the impact of collaboration within the school setting, one of

the participants of the partnership offered the following in their response to a question

that was on the questionnaire regarding the biggest accomplishment of the partnership,

"The bonds that were made at Roosevelt by the members have help our school flourish.

We have become friends who want to see each other successful in and out of the

classroom." Another respondent to the questionnaire answered the same question with

the following regarding the effect that collaboration had on their school when they wrote,

"I feel like one accomplishment for our school is the team that was created!"

In one of the elementary schools that is in the district, the participants of the

partnership felt that they had been able to bring about positive changes in their school.

Through their interactions with others, a sense of team building or community was

developed by and with the participants. This deeper level of collaboration connected the

participants even further and strengthened their bonds of engagement with each other.

The following dialogue occurred at a focus group session held at their elementary school.

The exchange occurred among Isaiah, a fourth grade teacher, Stephanie, a third grade

teacher, and Melinda, a second grade teacher. It illustrates the depth of the collaboration

that was nurtured at their school. The conversation began with a discussion of the

development of collaboration throughout the district and the profound positive effect that

it had on the district. However, the teachers felt that the collaboration had a strong

influence throughout their entire building; it extended to all the stakeholders in their

building. The teachers shared their thoughts on collaboration in the following

conversation:

Stephanie: I think it goes deeper than that. At the building level, we weren't just

looking at teachers. We were looking at everyone: the staff, the janitor, the

secretary, the parents, the students. It wasn't just the teachers; it was everybody

who was involved in the process.

Isaiah: It was a community. We became more of a community.

Melinda and Stephanie: Right, right.

Teacher Isaiah: A community was developing. You have a teaching community

within the teaching community at large. That helped us.

Knowledge and Skills Acquired

The knowledge and skills acquired through participation in the partnership

enabled the staff of the schools to raise the level of instructional methods utilized within

the building. This emerged as the second them in the category of building changes.

Additionally, because of the knowledge and skills gained, teachers had the means to

bring about significant, sustained changes in the areas of the school climate, school

improvement initiatives, and networking among staff members in the various schools

throughout the district. A participant of the educational partnership named Stephen, who

was an administrator of an elementary school, expressed some definite opinions

regarding the intellectual growth of the members of his staff that were involved in the

cohort. During an interview, Stephen shared his beliefs when he stated the following:

You can't stay the same way that you were having been through a learning

experience with coworkers—because of the fact of the cohort and study groups.

We have prepared to review chapters, to present chapters in front of class, to even

to the core comprehensives, to study as a team, to actually go out and purchase books to make them part of your library, and take time after class or work to read chapters, to come on Saturday or even after school, to stay until eight o'clock, nine o'clock—you cannot help but change. And then when you discuss various authors and what they have to say about leadership or what they say about building climate or professionalism you can't help but become a different person. Because the more you read, the more you know, and the more that you become familiar with authors and what they say about leadership and leadership styles. It makes you a different person; it makes your conversations different.

In an interview Nancy, another elementary administrator, was asked to what she would attribute the changes in the leadership knowledge and skills of teachers interested in school improvement in her building. Nancy gave credit to the exposure to leadership styles that was given in the partnership when she shared the following dialogue with the interviewer:

Nancy: I think that they'd learned leadership styles. They learned that in order to be effective schools you need to step forward and have leaders. In taking the classes I just saw a change in so many people. I have some extremely intelligent people that work at my school. So the opportunities came. They even came to me. When we had finished maybe a year of the cohort, about eight of them came to me, came right into my office, and said we want to talk to you. That was really quite interesting. They felt that there needed to be some changes made and that they wanted to be part of the change.

Interviewer: These were changes for the better?

Nancy: Yes, for the better. From that point on, we started for a called a team of

people that would be working as leaders here at my school and it has gotten better

every year.

Later in the same interview Nancy stated that the differences in the attitudes and

behaviors of the teachers in her building were a result of their participation in the

educational partnership. When asked if she felt that the changes that occurred would be

sustained since the educational program had ended, Nancy responded with the following:

Yes, I do. I believe so because it engrained the teachers now. They will ask for it

and they will push for it and they will say this is what we need to push forward.

You have to have that. You have to have the teachers speaking up and saying this

is what we need. Because they are the ones that are in the classrooms and they are

the ones that are going through imparting the knowledge to the students. I believe

it will continue. . . . It has made a difference.

The impact that the partnership had on the schools throughout the district was

addressed in a question on the questionnaire. A participant wrote the following response

to that question: "As a school and district, a very positive result is that staff members

have been elevated on extremely high levels, which will positively impact the students in

the district."

In response to another question that was on the questionnaire regarding the impact

that the partnership had on their classes, a teacher wrote of the skills and strategies that

they incorporated into their instruction as well as their collaboration with colleagues.

They shared the following regarding how these changes had a beneficial to their school:

I have tried to incorporate the expert learner (making students experts in areas) on

authentic learners and student leaders (making the students take more ownership

in their learning and achievements) into my daily lessons. And, overall, it has created a positive change in the school since so many of us were in the program. We network more, and are more expert in our field.

Leadership

The attainment of leadership skills and roles in their buildings became a third theme that emerged from the data in the category of school changes. Staff members felt their participation in the partnership had a positive influence on their opportunity to assume leadership responsibilities in their building. The educators indicated that as a result of their involvement in the program, they had the ability to initiate, organize, and implement significant changes in their schools. In a focus group session comprised of teachers from various buildings throughout the district, an elementary teacher named Mary shared an example of how the participants of the cohort assumed leadership responsibilities in her building:

> For example, just this year my principal came to our team and said, "I want to do something about science MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) scores. You guys need to decide what we are going to do." We all brainstormed, she was even-leveled (our administrator) and we did all these different ideas and we came up with one teacher teaching the whole fifth grade. Then she looked at us and said, "I am leaving, you decide who it going to be." Then she walked out! That administrator would have never done that five years ago. And we came up with me. And believe me I was scared to death. Success happened. We went from 64 to 70% passing that sucker. I think that is a huge accomplishment. Without the cohort in place this partnership, it would have never happened.

In response to question on the questionnaire regarding the impact of the partnership on their school, a respondent wrote of the overt changes that occurred in teacher leadership at their school with, "My school has leaders! The people involved in the cohort step up to plan/organize/influence programs. I didn't see it before." Another response to the same question included an illustration of how the cohort members were able to utilize less evident means to use their leadership skills to influence others in their building. They stated:

> The members of the cohort have developed an extremely strong relationship that is committed to the improvement of our school. This group's positive outlook has changed the views of other non-cohort members. This strong, positive relationship has influenced administration to make changes (instruction, focus).

Within the educational partnership, the most profound structural changes at the building level occurred at Eleanor Roosevelt Middle School. With the expertise that they gained from their readings and experiences in the cohort, the participants of the partnership that were members of the Roosevelt staff were able to research, lead, and bring to fruition significant changes in their building. Using their leadership skills, the members of the cohort were able to formulate their proposals for change, present their change initiatives to their administrators and peers, enlist the support and involvement of others at their school in the change process, and finally implement the initiatives. Once the initiatives were in place, the participants continued to monitor and evaluate the changes for their effectiveness. The change initiatives that took place at Roosevelt provided substantial examples of the successful implementation of the change process for others in the district.

There were changes in the structure and scheduling of the school day as well as in the change from Parent Teacher Conferences to Student Led Conference at the middle school. The first change that occurred was in the school day's structure and scheduling of classes. The school day had previously been structured so that all students took only five classes; all teachers taught five classes in a row with a common planning period at the end of the day after the students had been dismissed. With the changes brought about by the participants of the partnership, the length of the school day remained the same but each of class periods was shortened to enable students to take six classes. Teachers still taught five classes; however, their planning periods were staggered throughout the school day. This change in scheduling provided the opportunity for the students to take an additional elective class to enrich their educational experience. It also provided the teachers a planning period during the school day to work with students on an individual basis, plan their lessons, communicate with parents, and complete other professional responsibilities. The second change that occurred was in the manner that Parent Teacher Conferences were conducted. The format for Parent Teacher Conferences had previously been structured with the teachers meeting individually with parents; through the use of data, the teachers informed the parents of the progress of their child. With the change to Student Led Conferences, students organized a portfolio containing representative work from all of their classes; through a presentation of the materials in their portfolio, students informed their parents of their progress in their classes. Although teachers were available for additional information for the parents, students took the majority of the responsibility of sharing their portfolio of assignments to exemplify their progress with their parents. Both of these change initiatives at Roosevelt were led by members of the educational partnership.

In a focus group session that was conducted at the middle school, Evelyn, an eighth grade teacher, and Sophia, a sixth grade teacher, responded to a question regarding the impact of the cohort on their school. Evelyn and Sophia participated in a discussion, in which they shared their thoughts on the changes the occurred at their school:

Evelyn: One of the major changes is when Sophia came up with the schedule change two years ago in the first year of the cohort, and of course, that is still evident.

Sophia: Kim's Student Led Conferences.

Evelyn: Yes, we're still doing that . . .

Sophia: Within the school, like I said before, the six-hour day and Student Led Conferences were really the key to changing the morale of the building and the way we approach things. I mean things had always been done the same way every year and no one ever conceived of changing them. You complained, you whined, you griped and nothing changed. For us to see that we could be successful was something and for us to actually make that change was very empowering. And even though we met with resistance the second and third year, having so much success the first year made us still willing to try to introduce things in the second and third year even though we weren't very successful.

As an administrator of an elementary school and participant of the partnership, Nancy was able to see the assumption of leadership roles by members of her staff who were in the cohort. She shared how the members of the program expressed their feelings, ideas, and goals for the school with her. To illustrate her point, Nancy gave a specific example of the leadership skills of her staff members when she stated:

Definitely at my school you see more leadership. We did not have that many

teachers that took on leadership roles prior to the cohort coming. They will, in no

uncertain terms, articulate to me how they feel, what they believe, what their

vision is for our school, and that we need to go at this direction. They would

never have done that before the cohort. . . . I think that they'd learned leadership

styles. They learned that in order be effective schools you need to step forward

and have leaders. . . . They even came to me. When we had finished maybe a year

of the cohort, about eight of them came to me, came right into my office, and said

we want to talk to you. That was really quite interesting. They felt that there

needed to be some changes made and that they wanted to be part of the change.

Another participant's response addressed the area of building leadership from a

slightly different perspective. Linda, a support staff member, shared examples of how

cohort members assumed leadership positions in regards to professional development and

school improvement. In a focus group session, she reported:

I think that what the educational leadership did was that it created these leaders so

that now all your professional development as a building, or when they approach

school improvement and those kinds of things, we now have leaders within the

school. They're developed leaders that approach things, in probably in a more

knowledgeable way because of what they learned in cohort.

It should be noted that there was concern expressed by the participants regarding

their ability to continue the level of collaboration that was experienced while the

partnership was in place. The concerns of the participants centered on their ability to find

the forum to continue to meet in order to dialogue and exchange ideas. In addition, once

the cohort was over, building time into their work schedule to dialogue with others

presented a challenge. As pointed out by an elementary teacher named Marla, the ability

to meet on a regular basis had an immediate impact of the master's level students once

their program was completed:

> That's interesting because this is the first year that the masters students haven't
>
> been a part of the cohort, and we've all mentioned about how it's different this
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> year. This is because we don't have that weekly meeting, time to talk and visit on
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> a more social but still obviously professional, but a little more social basis. And
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> it's, it's different. It's changed things a little bit in here, it's not bad, it's just not
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> that closeness that we've had in the past. So it definitely, definitely did really, I
>
> think, propel some of our teachers into different roles and strengthen our
>
> relationships.

District Changes

Collaboration

The educational partnership was comprised of educators that worked in every

building in the district. The participants were able to build meaningful relationships with

their colleagues in their own building as well as those in other buildings throughout the

district. The collaboration enabled educators in all buildings and at all levels to work

together to help the students of the district reach their academic potential; this is the first

theme to be discussed in the category of district changes. An example of how the

participants felt their involvement in the partnership was beneficial can be seen in an

excerpt from an interview with Pamela, a member of the high school support staff.

Members of the support staff frequently interacted and engaged in joint efforts with other

staff members in the various schools throughout the district. In the interview, Pamela

responded to a question regarding what was accomplished in the district through the

occurrence of the partnership. Pamela shared how she thought that she was better prepared for her responsibilities because of the collegiality that had she developed with others in the district when she expressed the following:

I think just getting to know people within the district was a great plus. I think that that was really helpful to me. Not maybe, academically as far as you know, my work was concerned specifically but getting to know people in other areas, in the other schools. I think that that makes for a better community, a school community. And I think that it helps the school climate. So I think that the main thing that I developed was a knowledge of other people within the district. To be able to meet and associate with other people from other schools and other grades, I think that was a plus for the school district. I think it helped me, my understanding of the district and the culture of the district a lot, and I think that most people benefited from that.

To further exemplify the effect of collaboration throughout the district, an eighth grade teacher at the middle school named Alicia stated that the cohort enabled her to make connections with others in the district. These connections with other educators allowed her to have a greater insight into her students. The collegiality she established with staff members in other buildings and at different levels helped her to grow as a teacher which in turn enabled her to better meet the educational needs of her students. During an interview, Alicia commented on the significance of her collaboration with the following:

Having the cohort where I had connections with the elementary, having connections with the high school allowed me to make sure that my future children, my present children and my past children are still excelling because I

have those avenues to keep up with them and find ways to improve so my new

students when they show will then become my children. I have a fair handle of

what is coming up because I've had my cohort friends who teach elementary give

me the insights of what they've done and how I can take it to the next level.

An elementary support staff member named Linda indicated that her participation

in the cohort was valuable in that it enabled her to communicate with other educators in

the district that she might not have had the opportunity to associate with on a regular

basis prior to the existence of the program. The communication with others made it

possible for her to share ideas and lessen the feelings of isolation that she had

experienced in the past. Linda's collegiality with others quelled the difficulties she was

experiencing and strengthened her as an educator. During an interview, Linda articulated

about how the support from others helped her with her own personal struggles with the

following:

I think my participation in the cohort, I really want to say it supported, it

supported what I was already feeling and knowing about the students in Oak Park,

the at-risk kids that we do have. I think I was feeling very isolated and very

frustrated and I think it was being a part of the cohort made me realize that I

wasn't alone. That there were other people, probably right next door in the other

buildings, that were feeling the same sorts of frustrations and different ideas were

being done and tried and ideas then could be shared.

In the true spirit of collaboration and team building, throughout the district

participants of the cohort frequently came together to assist each other in times of need or

when experiencing difficulty. During an interview with Martin, a central administrator in

the district, he succinctly stated the following regarding the educators of the district

working together to help each other: "If we see that someone is struggling, we need to come together; we need to help them do things."

To further illustrate collaboration throughout the district, the following are the responses that were given to a question on the questionnaire regarding the biggest accomplishment of the partnership. One participant wrote, "Bringing together teachers and allowing them to work as a team to help brainstorm and come up with solutions for the problems, issues, and concerns in the Oak Park Schools." Another respondent answered the same question with the following, "The generation of a core group of teachers and administrators across all grade levels and buildings that interact as a community, who have bonded if not necessarily in opinions and beliefs, then in purpose and professionalism."

The following reflection of an elementary administrator further indicates how collaboration and team building had an effect beyond the individual building; it impacted the effectiveness and productivity of the interactions of the personnel throughout the entire district. During an interview, Nancy offered the following observation in response to a question regarding the changes brought about through the partnership:

> I believe that we have become more of a team. We have become more of speaking the same language. We are now meeting on a regular basis with not only elementaries meeting together but middle and high school so that so that we can all be on the same page. So positively, it has affected it by the fact that we understand that no one school stands alone that we all have to work together in the district as a team in order to be effective. I think part of that was done by the cohort. Most definitely, I believe that because we were all in teams out here, not singly.

In a response to a question on the questionnaire regarding the impact of the partnership, a respondent agreed that the establishment of professional relationships was beneficial to the district. The person wrote:

The cohort has affected a sense of camaraderie amongst staff across the district. We also have focused ourselves and our effort as professionals—become more concerned about supporting ourselves and our efforts with research (as well as recognizing the importance of providing such).

On the same questionnaire, the participant further stated in a response to a question regarding the biggest accomplishment of the partnership the following:

The generation of a core group of teachers and administrators across all grade levels and buildings that interact as a community, who have bonded if not necessarily in opinions in beliefs, then in purpose and professionalism.

The participants of the partnership from one of elementary schools felt that the increased collaboration that occurred throughout the district had a positive effect. The following occurred during a dialogue that occurred between Isaiah and two other teachers during a focus group session held at their elementary school. It illustrates the depth of the collaboration that was nurtured at their school. The three teachers were actively involved in the collaboration process throughout the district and realized how it affected all the members of the staff. In the focus group session, Isaiah shared the following:

One of the things that the cohort provided was an opportunity for teachers at all levels from kindergarten to twelfth grade to communicate with one another and to get an understanding that "Just because you are teaching high school, you're no better or no smarter than a person that is in elementary education." If I am in communication with you at the high school and the middle school level and we

are talking about "We are tracking kids from kindergarten that go all the way up through our system." If they we are lacking something and we can collect our data, we set up our assessments or whatever tools we are going to use to measure growth in everything, then we could attack things from a systems perspective instead of always isolating and getting into remediation. We could work more for an intervention basis because of the fact that you have elementary interfacing with middle school teachers; middle school teachers interfacing with high school teachers. All the way around, we were all coming to the table together. Everything we were getting we were looking at with, "How does that impact me where I'm at?"

Knowledge and Skills Attained

As the participants of the cohort acquired new learning, an understanding of the impact of the changes throughout the district developed; this is a second theme in the category of district change that emerged in the analysis of the data. Because of the significant number of participants in the educational partnership, the potential for a profound effect of their learning throughout the school district was realized. Participants became aware that since such a significant percentage of district personnel were involved in the project, substantial changes and long-term improvements in student achievement could be attained. This awareness became apparent in an interview with Pamela, a member of the support staff on the secondary level who often worked with personnel in various buildings throughout the district. Pamela shared an observation that she made about the impact that the participants' experience in the cohort had on themselves and the entire district. In an interview, Pamela indicated the following in response to a question regarding the accomplishments of the partnership:

I think that if you got anything from the cohort you would have to use it. I mean, anything that you learned, I don't think that people would go back to what they were four years ago. I think that anything, any experiences that you have, change you. I think that if, I don't know how many master's people were enrolled but I think about 25 of us, and I think that if 25 lives were changed, the district has to change. I think that when you, you begin to see things differently, you can't go back and do them the way you used to do them. So I think even though it is not the cohort as a group, it is, because as long as the people that were in the cohort are in the district, the district will be affected.

In an interview with Nancy, the principal of an elementary school, she shared her views on the impact of the partnership on the district. Nancy discussed the uniqueness of the opportunity for such a large percentage of staff throughout the district to work together to make positive changes. She stated the following in response to a question regarding what was unique about the program:

It was unique because we had over 60 teachers from the Oak Park District in a cohort together trying to make a difference. You don't find that normally. . . . You had administrators and teachers that were going to class and really getting pertinent information to help them become more effective.

On the questionnaire, there was a question that addressed the biggest accomplishment of the partnership. A participant offered their opinion regarding the advantages members of the cohort had from the knowledge and skills they gained while in the program. As they shared their knowledge, ideas, and thoughts with their colleagues, the district improved. The participant stated the following:

The cohort has affected a sense of camaraderie amongst staff across the district. We also have focused ourselves and our efforts as professionals—become more concerned about supporting ourselves and our efforts w/research (as well as recognition of the importance of providing such).

Interestingly, a different perspective regarding the affect that the skills and knowledge acquired had on the district was offered by a middle school teacher. Evelyn shared that her learning regarding the roles of different leaders throughout the Oak Park school system was beneficial. In the response to question regarding things that participants learned during the partnership that was asked during a focus group session, Evelyn shared her awareness of the importance of understanding the viewpoints of others and how it helped her understand the perspective of various leaders in the district. She stated:

> One of the things that sticks out in my mind is about, in organizations, realizing people's roles. Say, for instance, prior to now I wouldn't think about mental models, about what the superintendent does as opposed to the principal does as opposed to what the teacher's role is and what role we play. Instead of trying to always to just look from my perspective, I do understand that they have a job to do. There job is to do such and such, the superintendent is supposed to this, the principal's is supposed to be able to do whatever it is. Looking at that role, also about change, that might tie in with culture but I remember a lot about change in organization and how people adapt to change and how people resist change and how people will join you or be against you. The overall process of it in an organization and how it affects everybody.

During a focus group session that was comprised of representatives from various schools throughout the district, two participants shared what they learned about instructional leadership and organizations while in the partnership. In their responses, the participants, Linda, an elementary support staff member, shared her response and Mary, a fifth grade teacher, added to the conversations with her opinions. The participants stated:

Linda: I think just what we learned in class helped me to understand their perspective and where they were coming from, whether I liked it or not, meaning the administration. How leaders are and how they can be different, and just how decisions are being made and the whole bureaucracy. I did understand it better . . . because of what we learned in class. I don't think I would have been able to do that if we hadn't learned what we learned about leadership.

Mary: That is exactly what I was thinking in my mind when you asked "What you have learned, or how have we benefited from the teachings that we have gotten as it relates to organizations? We are able to now understand each other more, and understand that within an organization that you have different views and different ideas and you can understand them better, especially through changes. Because we have a better understanding of organizations and the people within them that with the changes that have happened (whether positive or negative) that as a cohort we were able to understand each other better and still stick together. I feel positively as a cohort we set out to make positive changes and I think we have.

However, as the conversation on the same question continued, some of the participants felt that although they had attained knowledge and skills that would help the district improve, the learning acquired was not as productive as it could have been. Three participants, all elementary staff personnel, shared the following discussion:

Fred**:** I think back to the things they were saying about the people from our cohort, providing the leadership, and us becoming the first successful urban school district in the country, and all of these big things. I agree that we all have a lot of terrific skills. I have total respect for those who have made it this far; I think we have a lot to be proud of. But the goal wasn't to make 25 people a lot better; the goal was to improve the whole district. And I really don't feel like we haven't necessarily been given the opportunities to be in the position of leadership within the district. I don't say that out of bitterness, I do feel that way.

Diane**:** I agree, strongly.

Linda: I think there are pockets, I think I have had a lot more opportunities within my building and with the people I work closest with. And I don't necessarily think they look to me because I was part of this cohort but maybe because of where I was going and what I was talking about what I was doing. Maybe that's what struck the nerve, "Maybe we will call on her." I could have not been in the cohort and they would have going and doing and learning in order places and they might have turned to me.

Leadership

The leadership changes that began at the individual level, progressed to the classroom, building, and ultimately to the district level. The leadership change at the district level was the third theme that emerged from the data. The leadership changes that occurred at the district level often took place as a gradual process rather than by large incremental growth. Members of the program shared their understanding of district leadership as well as examples of their newly developed leadership skills. Participants of the partnership indicated their views regarding the impact of the cohort on the leadership

throughout the district. Linda, a member of the support staff shared that she felt that the participants of the program came to realize the leadership structure within the district as a whole as well as how leaders within the district interact. In an interview, she stated the following in response to a question regarding the acquisition or refinement of skills she experienced as result of participating in the cohort:

> I think we learned, we learned about leadership and leadership qualities so that we had a better understanding of the inner workings of the district, just from the top on down and from the bottom up. How each perspective, each person's perspective is a little different. Also, I gained an understanding of people's roles within the district and how it all works together. And I understand how one thing affects another thing in the district.

In a focus group session that was conducted at an elementary school, a fifth grade teacher named Henry shared an example how the leadership changes at his school went on to be applied at the district level. Henry indicated the following:

> I could think of at the building level, there have been over the past few years, where as administration would have taken the lead on whether a committee direction or a parent program or the use of Title 1 funding. Going back four, five, six years ago, that would have been directed in the front office. Whereas over the past number of years, it maybe helps having our principal involved in this program too, a lot those decisions have been put out to the group, "How do you want the Title I monies to be spent? In what roles to you see people exercising Title I duties? Or who will be exercising those duties?" That's an example. The staff has come together and decided how Title I funding will be utilized in this building. . . . Where as in the district you might occasionally get a group of people

brought together to "piggy back" on the curriculum thing that Teacher MC brought up. You may have a group of people from each of the buildings brought together to determine the course of redirecting curriculum or in some fashion amending it to our current need. And yet what comes out of that committee of these different people is the same thing that we have had. I guess you could have a course on that alone. The same thing comes out of that.

A central administrator named Martin who participated in the program observed changes in the leadership skills that occurred in individuals in the district as a result of their participation in the partnership. He shared his observations in the following during an interview:

It still amazes me; wherever I go the leadership that has emerged right now is people that I'd know from the cohort. What is happening right now is there has been this common experience, even though it's not at the level that it was before. What's there right now is, is a series of networks that are established, where we're drawn to the leadership with the union. . . . Within the district for where we have impacted are cultural changes in individual classrooms and schools. That is going to transcend anything that goes on. . . . I really see people who have come through this really moving up and assuming leadership roles.

However, from a different perspective, another participant did not recognize that the partnerships had such a profound effect on the district. In their response to a question on their questionnaire regarding their impressions of the partnership, the participant wrote the following, "I feel that had the partnership continued, changes could have been made to positively impact the district."

In a response to a question that was on the questionnaire concerning the biggest shortcomings of the partnership, a respondent indicated that not all of the changes that were possible in the district had been attained. Their rationale for their opinion was explained in the following:

> Not following through with the partnership for change. During the third school year when we had the tools in place, our leadership was lost. It began to be more like a college credit class instead of an investment in change. We needed the same people (all the people) who began on the journey, to continue it with us.

Another respondent replied to the same question with a sense of frustration with the significance of the amount of change that occurred in the district as a result of the partnership. In their response, they stated:

> I was disappointed in the partnership towards the end of the program. It turned out not to be an investment in change for the long haul (like I initially thought). With the instructional leaders we had I felt that if we had not been disconnected the third year, we may still have achieved or been on the path to achieving our goal.

Summary

The purpose the this case study was to describe the process by which staff members of the Oak Park School District participated in an educational partnership with Western Michigan University as well as the changes that occurred in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as a result of their participation. The chapter presented the background information regarding the design of the program, the participants, and process utilized to implement the educational partnership between the university and the

school district. Additionally, an analysis of the data and a discussion of the findings for the case study on an educational partnership were presented. As the researcher, I analyzed the participants' responses to questions on a questionnaire, interviews, and focus group sessions that provided valuable sources of information in identifying the themes and categories that emerged. In this analysis, the areas of collaboration, knowledge and skills acquired, and leadership were revealed as the major themes that emerged from the data. The findings relating to these themes were discussed as they related to the changes that occurred in the categories of the individual, classroom, building, and district levels. Each of the themes was address within each of the categories. It was realized that the changes that occurred collectively throughout the entire district had a greater impact than the combining of all the changes that occurred in the four categories. The responses of the participants indicated that in order to achieve the intended goals and outcomes of the partnership, professional growth and collaboration were necessary to nurture the changes in the leadership skills of the participants. This dissertation will conclude with Chapter V, which will offer my conclusions pertaining to the case study as well as a brief discussion of related implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This case study described the process by which staff members of the Oak Park

School District participated in an educational partnership with Western Michigan

University. It also chronicled the changes that occurred in the beliefs, practices, and

sense of efficacy of the educators as a result of their participation in the partnership. A

school-university partnership is an opportunity for schools and universities to work

together to improve teacher development and, ultimately, student achievement (Goodlad,

1994). In successful education partnerships, the different perspectives and knowledge of

each partner provide the impetus for augmenting and intensifying the professional growth

of both partners. Additionally, the combining of the skills and resources of the partners

creates opportunities for learning experiences that neither partner possesses or could

achieve independently of each other (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Linn et al., 1999).

To support and assist the reader in the understanding of this research project, the

final chapter of this dissertation will begin with an overview of the study. The overview

will include background on the project, a restatement of the research problem, and a

review the methodology utilized in the study. Then the research findings presented in

Chapter IV will be further examined. The chapter will continue with a discussion of the

implications related to the significance of the research findings that were derived from

the data. Also, recommendations for further research in the area of educational

partnerships will be offered for future study. The chapter will conclude with my personal

reflections, as a qualitative researcher, on this research project.

Overview of Project

Universities and public school districts collaborate to form educational

partnerships to address problems of mutual concern as well as to work together to

simultaneously improve teacher development and improve student achievement (Fullan,

1993; Goodlad, 1987; King & Newman, 2000). This case study described and analyzed

the educational partnership between Western Michigan University, a large Midwestern

university, and the staff of the Oak Park School District, a small, urban public school

district located in southeast Michigan. The Western Michigan University and Oak Park

School District educational partnership was a collaboration that was designed to provide

the participants the knowledge necessary to enhance student achievement as well as

develop educational leaders throughout the district. The participants of the program

consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators of the district that enrolled in the

educational partnership that existed for four school years between September 2001 and

May 2005.

Research has indicated that universities and school districts have formed

educational partnerships to assist teachers in increasing the levels of student learning and

that teachers' beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy can be influenced by participation

in such programs (Moriarty & Gray, 2003; Welch & Sheridan, 1993). However,

educational research has not extensively investigated the design and process of

educational partnerships or the impact of the relationship on the participants and the

school district. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to describe the design and

process of an educational partnership and to explore how the members of the program described the changes in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as the result of their participation.

This case study is a narrative account that was conducted using the techniques employed in qualitative research (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The naturalistic data collected included careful descriptions of people, places, conversations, and artifacts gathered through sustained contact with individuals that participated in the partnership. As the researcher and a member of the cohort group, I served as the investigator in the collection and analysis of the data that were used in this case study. In the role of a participant observer, I made firsthand observations of activities and interactions and sometimes personally engaged in the activities (Patton, 2002). For this case study, the data were collected over a period of 6 months by asking open-ended questions while conducting individual interviews and focus group sessions with key participants of the collaboration as well as through the distribution of questionnaires to all participants from the Oak Park School District. The data collected were organized and analyzed for categories, patterns, and themes. The data were then coded and rearranged into categories that enabled the comparison of the data. In order to gain a wider theoretical perspective in the research, the data were then further reviewed for themes that connected statements within context into a coherent whole (Creswell, 2003). The written results of the research presented contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002).

Findings

The primary or central research question that guided this study examined how the participants of an educational partnership described the changes that occurred in their beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy as a result of the experience. In response to this research question, the members of the Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District partnership indicated in their answers given on the written questionnaire as well as during interviews and focus group sessions that they had been impacted positively through their experiences in the program. The findings suggest that overall the program was a beneficial influence on the beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy of the members of the partnership. Many of the partnership members indicated that the knowledge and experience gained in the program enabled them to grow as individuals as well as collectively as a group within the district. The findings of this study support the Moriarty and Gray (2003) assertion that university and public school district collaborations assist educators in the process of increasing the levels of their students' learning.

An analysis of the data collected indicated that the changes in the participants occurred in the areas of collaboration, knowledge and skills attained, and leadership; these were the themes that emerged from the data. A deeper analysis of the data revealed that these changes occurred at the individual, classroom, school, and district levels. The discussion of the findings that follows focuses on the impact made in the themes that emerged from the data. The themes are presented alphabetically, with no other significance to their order of presentation. Findings that are discussed within this section are positioned in relationship to the findings detailed in the review of literature found in Chapter II of this research project.

Findings by Themes

Collaboration

The collaboration that occurred throughout all levels of the Oak Park School District as a result of the educational partnership with Western Michigan University enabled the participants to interact with others in the district in an efficient and effective manner. The findings that emerged from this study indicated that participants learned to appreciate, value, and seek out interaction with others. In this way, the educators were able to productively utilize the knowledge, skills, understanding, and resources of their peers to more readily meet the educational needs of their students. Further, the educators were able to be strategic in the use of their interactions with others, using their collaboration with their colleagues to strengthen themselves as individuals as well as strengthen the educational staff of the district as a whole. With the members of the educational partnership working together and encouraging other colleagues to join in their effort to achieve common goals, the realization of the goals became more readily attainable.

Research has indicated that as teachers have the opportunity to discuss and refine their practices with their colleagues, the learning they have attained and the teaching strategies they utilize are favorably affected (Guskey, 2000). Additionally, successful educators work collaboratively with their peers to acquire a deeper understanding of their efforts and to evaluate their progress in the achievement of established goals (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Speck & Knipe, 2001). Effective communication, an important component of building and sustaining a beneficial educational partnership, as well as a successful school district, must be accomplished through the collaboration of its members (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Johnson & Thomas, 1997). Throughout the educational partnership

experience described in this study, the collaboration of its members was nurtured. As one

of the underpinnings of the program, collaboration was established and nurtured as means

for the participants to communicate with their peers regarding student achievement on a

regular basis (Muchmore et al., 2004). The collaboration, which occurred within the

educational partnership, spread throughout the district to include nonparticipants of the

cohort.

The findings of this research project concur with the literature; collaboration

among colleagues is essential in the process of reaching the goal of increased student

learning and achievement. The opportunity for educators to interact with their colleagues

to discuss their educational practices enhances their belief in themselves as well as their

sense of efficacy with their students. Within the research literature as well as this

research project, this relationship has been well established and indicated a strong link

between collaboration and increased teacher effectiveness with students.

Knowledge and Skills Attained

Findings from this case study indicate that the knowledge and skills acquired by

the participants of the partnership had a positive influence on their feelings toward

education, practices within their classrooms, and sense of efficacy. Within the classes

taught in the educational partnership, the educators became aware of current literature on

the best practices in the education of children. In addition, the members of the cohort

were able to discuss the application of the theories and strategies during the class

sessions. The application of the instructional techniques was encouraged and supported

throughout the partnership. It was clear from the responses given by the participants to

the questions on the questionnaire as well as those posed during the interviews and focus

group sessions that this acquisition of knowledge and skills made the participants more

confident in their teaching abilities. The findings of this research project further indicated that over the course of the partnership, as the educators became exposed to information and techniques, they pursued other research on their own to further develop and enhance the knowledge that they had attained. This exemplified how their quest for information on how to best serve their students became a characteristic acquired by the members of the educational partnership as a result of their participation in the program.

The findings of this case study support researchers' assertions that suggest that the acquisition of knowledge and skills by staff members is recognized as an important component in efforts to meet the needs of students (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Lieberman, 1995). Sparks and Hirsh (2000) stress that an essential in raising student performance is improving the level of knowledge and skills of teachers. As is articulated by Reese (2004) and Guskey (2002), the ability of knowledgeable and skilled teachers to facilitate the learning process in their students is a vital determining factor in the attainment of high levels of student achievement. When properly implemented, the knowledge and skills imparted in professional development has been shown to be an effective means of improving the quality of instruction (Aronson, Zimmerman, & Carlos, 1999). In order to be most effective, Bridglall and Gordon (2003) assert that educators need sustained exposure to literature on best practices in education to meet the individual needs of students in their schools.

The findings of this case study directly link increased student learning and achievement with the knowledge and skills attained by the participants of the partnership. A purpose of the partnership was to provide the participants the knowledge and skills necessary to enhance student achievement in the district. As the members of the program acquired the knowledge and skills, they incorporated new strategies into their classroom

teaching practices. Because of the changes in the strategies and techniques used in classrooms, throughout the district students' performance on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), the test on which AYP is determined in Michigan, improved (School Matters, 2005). The knowledge gained served as an underpinning of the achievement of increased student learning by the members of the partnership in the Oak Park School District. These findings confirm the assertions of researchers that indicate that that a measure of the quality and effectiveness of educators' exposure to new learning and teaching techniques is an increase in student achievement (Eaker et al., 2002; Fullan, 2001; Guskey, 2000).

Leadership

It is evident from the findings from this case study that the development of the leadership skills of the members of the partnership were initiated, developed, and nurtured throughout the program. The leadership skills of the participants of the cohort were developed through their readings, research, and discussions in classes. Members of the educational partnership became aware of leadership theories, styles, and models. The findings from this study indicate that with their awareness of the attributes of successful and effective leaders, the participants were able to effectively apply their leadership. In their responses given on the questionnaire as well as during interviews and focus group sessions, the educators spoke of an increased awareness of their own leadership skills and their ability to apply their skills in a variety of settings throughout the district. Within their classrooms, teachers noted that they were not only able to be more effective as the instructional leader but also we able to share their leadership with students. At the building level, members of the partnership also indicated that they had assumed leadership roles that brought about positive changes. These changes had a significant

impact on the administrators, teachers, all levels of employees, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the schools. On the district level, central administrators were able to see participants assume leadership roles in various capacities throughout the district.

The findings of this case study confirm current research on educational leadership. Findings from this research project support the theory that in order for an organization to achieve mutually agreed upon goals, leaders must stimulate, develop, and elevate their colleagues to higher levels of potential (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Carlson, 1996).The processes and resources need to be in place for leaders to be developed within a system. It is further asserted by Owens (2001) that an effective leader looks at their followers for their potential, to satisfy their higher needs, and to engage the full person. The result of these efforts is a relationship of mutual inspiration and elevation that converts followers into leaders.

The findings of this case study showed that the leadership skills of the participants were affected by their participation in the educational partnership and concur with other research in the area of leadership. Bolman and Deal (2003) maintained that through the process of mutual influence, which encompasses the blending of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of their followers with those of their own, effective educational leaders are able to address ongoing changes in the attainment of goals that may be encountered. Effective leadership is a process that involves the input of the leader and their followers in the attainment of goals that are common to all involved in the system. In particular to the participants of this case study, the findings indicated that the opinions and thoughts of the participants concerning the development of their leadership skills and abilities was a direct reflection of the attainment of the goals of the educational partnership.

In summary, this study confirmed educational partnerships between universities and public school districts have the potential to assist educators in the process of increasing the levels of their students' learning. It also confirmed that teacher' beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy can be influenced by participation in an educational partnership. The findings collected from this study added to the literature by providing a better understanding how participation in an educational partnership affected its members from the participants' perceptions of the changes that occurred. Specially, the data collected in this case study revealed that from the perspective of the participants of this educational partnership, their membership in the program was a significant factor in their professional and personal growth. The participants regarded the relevant, embedded, and sustained professional development that was an underpinning of the program, as a beneficial experience that enabled them to change their instructional practices strategies and techniques to more effectively meet the academic needs of their students. The experience also provided the members the opportunity for productive collaboration with their colleagues that enabled professional interactions to facilitate the further development and refinement of the expertise that they had gained. Because of the experiences gained in the program, the participants felt that they were better prepared as educators to work effectively with their colleagues to best educate their students.

Implications

Although a single case study cannot provide a solid foundation for the development and implementation of all educational partnerships, this study (and other case studies with similar findings) would suggest that educational partnerships between universities and public school districts have the potential to be an effective and efficient

means to support the needs of both partners. An educational collaboration between a university and a school district has the potential to be a powerful instrument to support the educational needs of both partners. Because of the efforts of the designers of the educational partnership, Western Michigan University offered to provide a program that addressed the specific needs of the educators of the Oak Park School District to become leaders in the movement to increase student learning and achievement.

The university and the school district leaders were able to design a program that met the rigor of a regular university graduate program as well as met the specific needs of the district. The program was designed and delivered as an ongoing professional development experience rather than the time-bound courses in traditional university programs (Muchmore et al., 2002). The partnership provided the opportunity for the university to educate and actively engage district members with a program that was particularly meaningful for them. As Martin, an assistant superintendent in the Oak Park School District and one of the designers of the program, stated in an interview,

> Basically, what we tried to commit to was commit to the students was that we wouldn't do anything that you couldn't apply the next day. That's a challenge, to be able to deal with knowledge and skill. It's easy to run workshops and just deal with skill and say here's a lesson to do it, bye. To be able to integrate knowledge and have the rigor of a university program where you are earning credit, that was a tough thing to do.

The educational partnership between Western Michigan University and the Oak Park School District was successful because of several factors. First, the participants perceived that the program was designed to address the specific needs of the students of the Oak Park School District as determined by student performance on standardized tests.

The members also understood that improving student learning and achievement is not a process that occurs quickly or easily. Additionally, the participants had a clear understanding of the district-wide changes that they wanted to make and the goals they hoped to accomplish. Further, while in the program the members worked collaboratively to put into practice what they had learned and periodically evaluated their progress toward the achievement of their goals. Because of these factors, the members of the program made a commitment to their enthusiastic involvement in the educational partnership and its goals.

As the needs of students in classrooms throughout the country change, it is necessary to explore the models for improvement to address these needs. The model for an educational partnership that was implemented in this case study provides the structure and data for similar programs in other settings. Partnerships between universities and public schools have the potential to enable educators to develop the knowledge and skills to better assist their students in the development of their learning. Although the limitations of the scope and applicability of this research project to the area of education are recognized, the remainder of this chapter will discuss the implications that an educational partnership can have on both universities and public school districts.

Universities can be impacted by their participation in educational partnerships in a variety of ways. To begin with, universities should maintain sustained, reciprocal relationships with school districts. When universities professors engage in ongoing dialogue with public school educators, they are kept abreast of the current needs, concerns, and focuses of educators in public schools. In this way, universities can authenticate the context and direction of their undergraduate and graduate programs. When universities are able to present programs that meet the educational needs of their

students and potential students in the quest to be most effective in their classrooms, their significance can been validated. Specifically, when a partnership between a university and a public school district is formed and successfully implemented, a university is able to collaborate with public schools in the continued preparation of the educators in meeting the needs of their students.

Another implication for universities is to regard educational partnerships as an opportunity to develop relationships with individuals and groups of individuals that they otherwise might not have contact with or become engaged in their educational programs. As universities reach out to the educators of entire public schools districts or groups of school districts, they are able to address large groups of educators who share common experiences and educational needs with a customized program of study. With an educational partnership designed to meet the specific needs of the educators involved in the program, the educators would be more apt to participate in the program. Further, as the educators experience success with the programs that the universities offer, they are more prone to pursue other educational degree programs at the university.

Further, when an educational partnership is formed with a school district, the university professors are provided with a direct connection with the theories and strategies discussed in their classes. As universities are able to present the acquisition of new knowledge meaningfully by making it relative to the educators' actual teaching situation, a channel to give immediate application of the learning is given to the educators. The ability to integrate knowledge into practice is a powerful tool for universities to offer its students. Universities must ensure that students experience not only theory and strategies in their course work but also applicability to their educational experiences in their classrooms. The more frequently universities are able to provide

significant and relevant learning to their students, the more likely students will seek a continued involvement with the universities.

The participation in educational partnerships also can affect school districts in a range of ways. Classroom practices can be positively changed to more effectively meet the needs of the students. As educators become aware of current research and best practices, they are given the impetus to alter their teaching strategies and techniques to be more productive in the classroom. Instructional methods that educators become aware of in partnerships that are designed for their specific districts have the potential of more fully meeting the challenges that they face in their classroom. Additionally, as the educators implement their learning and share their experiences with others, the impact becomes even greater.

A second impact for school district is the result of being proactive in meeting the needs of their staff and students. When school districts take the initiative to seek the resources and personnel necessary to produce an environment most conducive and productive to learning, the level of student achievement will be increased. In school districts that seek out universities in the development and delivery of assistance to the challenges they face, the educators and students of the district benefit from their efforts. Universities offer districts the opportunity to avail themselves of the theory, expertise, and experience that they have to offer. As public school districts utilize the resources that are available through the establishment of partnerships with universities, the professional growth of their staff is extended to the improved performance of the students in their classrooms.

A third implication for a school district is to consider an educational partnership has an opportunity to develop and nurture specific skills within its educators. In the

partnership described in this research project, the district was particularly concerned with developing the skills of individuals in the district who would lead in the process of improving student learning. However, other skills or areas of concentrations could be the focus of a successful university and school partnership. Areas of educational need that have been identified by the district as significant, such as the mainstreaming of non-English speaking or special education students into regular classrooms, reading or math skill development programs, or effective classroom discipline procedures, could be the focus of educational partnerships. Participation in an educational partnership by educators of a district would have a profound effect of the learning experiences of students in the areas cited.

Recommendations for Further Research

With federal legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 in place, educators are held accountable for the progressive development of their students' academic skills and achievements. In an effort to address the specific knowledge and skills that educators must have in order to achieve the accountability goals mandated by the government, there has been an emergence of university and school district partnerships. However, it is essential that the partnerships are intentionally designed and implemented to be most beneficial to the educators. Although there has been research on educational partnerships and the potential for educational partnerships is powerful, there seems to be the need for additional research to delve into this area. From the body of research considered in the research project, the following are recommendations for further research in the area of educational partnerships that should be considered.

By framing this case study within the parameters of the changes in the beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy of the participants of the educational partnership, the scope was narrow. The next time that I would research an educational partnership I would broaden the scope of the project to take into account other areas to get a fuller picture. It would be of significance to delve into an analysis of the perceptions of all the stakeholders of the partnership regarding the strengths and weakness of the program and how it could be modified to make it more beneficial; the impact of the role of the leaders of the university and school district in the development, implementation, and efficacy of the program; or the impact that any unforeseen negative circumstances that may occur at the university or school district level would have on a partnership. The analysis of any of these areas would add depth and breadth to a study of educational partnerships between universities and school districts.

The role of the liaisons, persons representing both the university and the school district that assist in maintaining a concerted relationship, is another area that would be beneficial to research further. The parallel representation for both of the partners in the development and implement of the educational partnership is vital to the success of the program. Additionally, the importance of their roles in the success of the partnership should be delved into for the determination of their significance. Further, the relationship that develops between the liaisons and its impact on the effective of the partnership should be explored.

A third area that would benefit from additional research is the designing and planning of the educational partnership. The procedures utilized in the selection of the designers and their effect on the success of the program should be delved into further. The potential of the educational partnership is dependent on having the designers of the

program who fully understand the specific needs of the educators involved. The techniques utilized to determine the program that would be most beneficial to the participants also needs to be further researcher.

It would be beneficial to return to the same site after 4 years to determine the long-term effects of this educational partnership. It would be informative to determine how the participants felt that their involvement in the program continued to affect them in their interactions with their students and with others in the district. Research designed to determine if the participants were still experiencing strong support from their colleagues from the partnership would also be beneficial. The long-term effect of the program on the participants' beliefs, practices, and sense of efficacy would be another area to be researched.

This research project should be replicated in other sites that include public school districts that are involved in an educational partnership with universities. A comparison with other educational partnerships involving similar partners as well as a comparison with a partnership between dissimilar partners would be valuable to research. Additionally, it would be beneficial to compare and contrast the findings of the two research projects; to ascertain if the themes that emerged in this research project are supported in other educational partnerships in other settings would be valuable research.

<div align="center">Concluding Remarks</div>

Through my participation in the cohort, like the other participants, I had the opportunity to get to know members of the Oak Park staff that were previously unknown to me. However, as the researcher of this project, I was afforded the opportunity to personally interview and be the observer in the focus group sessions. I truly enjoyed

hearing their views of the cohort experience. It was great to be able to hear their opinions regarding the partnership and the impact that it had on them personally and professionally. Additionally, to interact with the other educators as they shared how the program had influenced their interactions with their students and be able to hear first hand the changes that had occurred as a result of their involvement in the cohort was very gratifying to me. It was also especially meaningful for me to have a cohort member share their end of the year evaluation that indicated that their leadership skills had "blossomed" during the school year. The educator glowed as they shared the information with me and so did I!   However, it should be noted that there were struggles in the gathering of the data that were difficult for me to overcome. First, it took a concerted effort on my part to make sure that the various levels, grades, sexes, and ethnic groups within the cohort were equally represented in the gathering of the data, particularly in the determination of the participants of the interviews and focus group sessions. It would have been very easy for me to include only those that I had become particularly friendly with or those that I knew shared the same views as mine regarding the educational partnership. Additionally, as a member of the staff at Roosevelt Middle School, it was a challenge for me to remain neutral to the accomplishment of the cohort members at our school. Because of my personal involvement in the school, I had a tendency to give great significance to the comments, opinions, and achievements of those at Roosevelt. It took a great deal of deliberate effort on my part to remove my subjectivity from this research project. However, with the assistance of member checking by both Roosevelt and non-Roosevelt participants, my objectivity was verified.

Because of the knowledge gained in being a participant observer, I have become aware of many things that I was moving too fast before to see. The significance of a

slight inflection in a voice, the tones used to express feelings, the twinkle or sadness in one's eyes, or the meaning of a touch when interacting with others have become much more apparent to me. This is learning that will remain an important part of my life long after this dissertation has been completed and I move on to other endeavors in my life.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval

Appendix B

Sample Consent Form
Questionnaire

Appendix C

Sample Consent Form
Interview

Appendix D

Sample Consent Form
Focus Group

Appendix E

Sample Questionnaire

**Reflections on the Western Michigan University and Oak Park School District
Collaboration**

1. What was your initial impression of the Oak Park/WMU partnership when if first
   began in 2000? Why did you feel this way?

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. What is your impression of the partnership now? Why do you feel this way?

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. Give one or more examples of how the partnership has influenced you?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. From your perspective, what impact has the partnership had on your class and/or
   school?

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. What do you view as the greatest challenge facing Oak Park teachers today?

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. In what way, if any, did the Oak Park/WMU partnership help you to address this
   challenge?

_____

_____

_____

7. What do you see as the biggest accomplishment of the partnership?

_____

_____

_____

8. What do you see as the biggest shortcoming of the partnership?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix F

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Share with me something about yourself and your position in the district.

2. Explain your perception of the purpose/goals of the Oak Park/WMU cohort? Do you feel that they were attained? Why/why not?

3. Did you acquire or refine any skills as a result of participating in the cohort? Explain.

4. How were your attitudes and dispositions regarding the education of children affected by your participation in the cohort?

5. Give one or more examples that the cohort accomplished something—in your classroom, the school, the Oak Park School District or all of them?

6. How do you think that changes and accomplishments of the cohort will continue? Give examples.

7. How do you feel about your participation in the cohort?

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Describe your perception of the initial purposes of the cohort program.

2. What went well?

3. What did not go well?

4. To what degree were your expectations for the program met?

5. What would you have done differently or should have been done differently?

6. Is this type of program beneficial?

Appendix H

Participant Support of Themes Chart and Key

Participants' Support of Themes Key

Number on Chart	Participant
1	Karen
2	Linda
3	Henry
4	Marla
5	Sophia
6	Evelyn
7	Brooke
8	Leslie
9	Stephanie
10	Jennifer
11	Maureen
12	Mary
13	Fred
14	Isaiah
15	Felicia
16	Kim
17	Pamela
18	Melissa
19	Stephen
20	Nancy
21	Alicia
22	Martin
23	Diane
?	Questionnaire

Participants' Support of Themes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	?
Personal Collaboration	X	X	X	X	X																			XXX
Personal Knowledge & Skills Attained					X	X X	X	X																
Personal Leadership		X							X	X														X XXX
Classroom Collaboration					X	X				X	X													
Classroom Knowledge & Skills Attained				X X								X	X											XX XXX
Classroom Leadership						X								X	X	X								X
Building Collaboration				X X		X			X					X			X	X						XX
Building Knowledge & Skills Attained																			X	X X				XX
Building Leadership		X		X	X	X						X								X				XX
District Collaboration		X															X			X	X	X		XX XX
District Knowledge & Skills Attained		X X				X						X	X				X			X			X	X
District Leadership		X	X																			X		X XX