

## **ABSTRACT**

Michael R. Palmer, **CONNECTING THE DOTS: THE INTERSECTION OF TEACHER READINESS AND PRINCIPAL ACTIONS** (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May, 2021.

The goal of the participatory action research study was to improve the conditions in which students have equitable access to and increased rigor in learning by focusing on teacher practices. However, as an effective instructional leader, I had to fully acknowledge and then facilitate teacher learning that reflected the dual importance of teachers' beliefs and values and relational trust as necessary prerequisites. As a principal new to the school, I worked with a group of teacher participants at an independent school in Vancouver, British Columbia over three cycles of inquiry. I initiated a series of safe-fail probes (Snowden, 2007) to experiment with which principal actions best intersected with teachers' levels of readiness. In using community learning exchanges (CLEs) as an inclusive methodology and process to learn from teachers in a non-traditional format for learning, we built relational trust. As I assessed adult readiness through the iterative process of diagnosis and design (Spillane, 2013), we collaboratively addressed professional learning for adults centered on student learning. As a result, I developed a framework that intersects adult readiness with holding the vision, appropriate pushing, and strategic risk-taking that illustrates the ways in which the principal can influence change. The findings have implications for the reimagined role of the school's instructional leader, local school policy that supports teacher development, and further research into the ways research practitioners can support school improvement



CONNECTING THE DOTS: THE INTERSECTION OF TEACHER READINESS  
AND PRINCIPAL ACTIONS

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by

Michael R. Palmer

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CONNECTING THE DOTS: THE INTERSECTION OF TEACHER READINESS  
AND PRINCIPAL ACTIONS

by

Michael R. Palmer

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF DISSERTATION: \_\_\_\_\_  
Matthew Militello, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
David Siegel, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lawrence Hodgkins, EdD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lynda Tredway, MA

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Marjorie Ringler, EdD

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Paul Gemperline, PhD

## **DEDICATION**

To Masha, Andrew, and Matthew, who supported me unconditionally through every chapter. I could not have completed this work without you.

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## CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING THE FOCUS OF PRACTICE

*Better is possible. It does not take genius. It takes diligence. It takes moral clarity. It takes ingenuity. And above all, it takes a willingness to try. Atul Gawande*

*The first time I received feedback as a teacher from a principal I was called to his office for a meeting. With the door closed and me seated, he slid a paper across the desk toward me. There were twenty items on the paper, each with a box shaped bullet in front of the item—some with a check mark in the box, and others with an X. He said the checkmarks showed the skills on which I had done well, and each X indicated what he did not observe when he visited my lessons. He then told me that I needed to improve those items with an X and asked if I had any questions, which I did not. It should be noted that the principal visited my class twice that year, once in fall and once in spring, using the same checklist. This was my first experience as a teacher receiving feedback from the school principal and that experience led me to this study. As a principal, I aim to seek ways that I can support teachers to improve in a safe and trusting environment.*

Just 54% of teachers surveyed from participating Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries receive feedback from their principals (OECD, 2014). For teachers, the OECD report recommends that feedback should be viewed as a way “to improve teaching practices, in turn, to improve student learning” (p. 18). For school leaders, the report recommends that schools adopt a professional development approach that promotes collaboration and professional growth through peer observations and feedback. Indeed, the theme in more than one OECD report indicates that feedback from observations of teachers is an important step toward shaping teachers’ actions within schools and developing an understanding of the aims of instructional leadership (OECD, 2009), and although that advice has been evident in 50 years of advice for clinical supervision it has rarely transferred to school use (Acheson &

Gall, 1997; Cogan, 1973; Glickman et al., 2010; Goldhammer et al., 1993; Mette et al., 2017; Rosenshine, 1970).

In my role as principal of an elementary school (termed the junior school), I believe quality feedback to teachers on their work can have a transformational influence on their instructional practices. However, feedback has to be based on evidence collected from classroom observations using evidence-based tools and must follow the prescriptions of effective conferencing and coaching (Acheson et al., 2003; Glickman, 2002; Johnson et al., 2017; Knight, 2015). Rather than the checklists and judgments using *pro forma* evaluation processes designed for the convenience and consistency of the organization, principals need to engage in more authentic conversations with teachers based on our conceptions of how teachers actually learn and collaborate in transferring learning about their teaching to classrooms (Little, 2011; Rowan & Raudenbush, 2016; Russ et al., 2016; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). To achieve authentic engagement with teacher learning, we need to reimagine the traditional role of the principal and the normative practices of instructional leader.

As an instructional leader, I needed to consider my roles in three ways: Would I act as a typical leader and go through the motions of observation and evaluation? Could I introduce innovations that changed the relationships between the principal as instructional leader and the teachers? How could I advocate for equitable teaching practices for students? These logics of leadership interacted throughout the action research project as I engaged teachers in the junior school on the journey to more effective classroom practices (Rigby et al., 2017).

Normative practice for principals in state and independent schools is to support teachers' growth through a process of supervision and evaluation. However, most teachers receive little to no feedback on their work (OECD, 2014). In fact, according to Khachatryan (2015), "qualitative

feedback on teaching is scarce” (p. 116). In addition, observations of teachers have been characterized as “drive-bys” and judgmental, providing the teacher with superficial information on their work, as was the case in my first experience of being observed (Rowan & Raudenbush, 2016; Toch & Rothman, 2008). Urging and gently nudging teachers to take risks and build their capacity as professionals in a learning profession are critical actions for principals, and principals who do not engage in active instructional leadership may contribute to stunted growth for both teachers and students (Day, 1999). Yet, as became obvious through three cycles of inquiry in this action research project, my challenge was to strike a balance between teacher readiness and the urgent need to improve practice.

The action research project and study were aimed at improving teacher practice through the use of observational evidence and facilitative conversations. Knowing how to successfully collaborate with teachers to activate their professional learning and desire to take risks is a professional dilemma that informs the focus of practice of this project. As a novice principal in an independent international school seeking to develop my capacity to lead teachers toward instructional improvement, I encountered what Cuban (2001) refers to as a “wicked problem” facing teachers’ instructional practices: teachers’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions toward observations prevent them from engaging in professional conversations about learning. Thus, as the principal and instructional leader, I consider teachers’ readiness to learn as a strong factor in supporting them to improve practice.

In outlining the focus of practice, I analyze the assets and challenges of the school context, provide a rationale for investigating the problem that outlines equity considerations, and consider the potential significance of the study. I then present the research questions that guided

the inquiry as well as the proposed design of the research project, confidentiality and ethical considerations, and study limitations.

### **Participatory Action Research: Identifying a Focus of Practice**

In a participatory action research project and study in a school, having a focus of practice is a way to closely examine an issue and has the potential to impact change in the school organization and reach further in the field of education (Bryk et al., 2015). The FoP aimed to improve teachers' instructional practices through the use of evidence-based observations and facilitative conversations. Since teachers have the greatest impact on student learning (Rigby et al., 2017), the principal must provide teachers with opportunities to learn and grow so they can continue to improve student learning. Effective principals guide teachers toward improvement and work alongside teachers and support them as they develop their instructional practices.

### **Rationale**

I focused on the use of evidence-based observation tools and feedback to teachers because my initial observations of classrooms indicated that we needed to have more coherent instructional practices for student learning. As a novice principal, I had not been fully prepared to provide evidence in this way, but I thought I could learn. When attempting to provide relevant and thought-provoking feedback to teachers on their instruction, I learned about the varied attitudes toward observations and the ways that we construct how teachers effectively gain new knowledge and skill (Little, 1999; Russ et al., 2016; Supovitz et al., 2010). As we proceeded, however, the study revealed some ways for me to be a better instructional leader as a part of the action research process (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Another factor emerged as important: a continuum of readiness and interest on the part of teachers. Some teachers were proactive about learning—paying for advanced degrees, course

work, or subscriptions to educational publications—while others firmly believed that the school should provide professional learning. However, often that professional learning was episodic and did not lead to improvements. I learned that we needed a new paradigm of professional learning. Principals and teachers need to collectively engage in looking at their particular context to direct how to structure professional learning (Borko, 2004; Fullan, 2007; Grubb & Tredway, 2010; Guajardo et al., 2016; Little, 2011; Russ et al., 2016).

To grow and improve, we know that teachers, as learning adults, require specific, concrete, and precise feedback on their instructional practices (Saphier, 1992; Sullivan & Glanz, 2013). However, teachers and principals must engage in conversations about student learning that are grounded in constructivist learning theory and situated cognition theory (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, principals need to attend to the ways in which adults learn best to effectively support instructional improvement (Drago-Severson, 2012). The issues of teacher professional development, and the frequency and quality of feedback are significant in schools and improving the feedback may lead to broader improvements in the school (Bryk et al., 2015; Mintrop, 2016). Or, as I learned, if we go too rapidly in the process so that teachers do not understand or are not quite ready, we risk compromising our efforts.

The long-term goal of the PAR project is to have an impact on student engagement and academic effectiveness, two of the three aims of improvement science (Bryk et al., 2015). However, the proximate goal was to work with teachers to improve instructional practices through a re-imagined approach to observations and feedback, and engagement in what Besar (2018) and Lave and Wenger (1991) call a community of practice. In detailing the focus of practice and the rationale for the project, I have established the reasons why a participatory

action research project and study are important to the school I am in and critical for my work in developing myself as a leader who has confidence in teachers to make decisions at the local level. However, the situation comes with a set of assets and challenges at three levels of influence—macro, meso and micro—that I had to consider throughout the study.

### **Assets and Challenges**

Working closely with teacher participants as a part of the participatory action research process acknowledges the wisdom and power of place and people and builds on these assets to develop a deeper understanding of the strengths that each member brings to the school (Guajardo et al., 2016). Several assets supported the work of increasing teacher and leader capacity to improve instructional practices, and some challenges emerged as considerations. In Figure 1, I used a revised fishbone to map the context of the school as that applied to the study and project (Bryk et al., 2015; Rosenthal, 2019).

Mapping the assets and challenges at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the context is an important first step in the inquiry process. The macro level is structural and refers to the larger influences of policy and accreditations within the district, province, and national and international accrediting agencies. The meso level is the school as an institution; in this case, the site of the study. The micro level exists in the interactions I have with the teachers. I consider both assets and challenges within these three ecologies to be influential elements within the school and a primary starting point for analyzing the context for the FoP.

#### ***Macro Level Assets and Challenges***

The school is a licensed K-12 independent day school authorized to operate by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (MoE). Additionally, the school is authorized to implement the International Baccalaureate programs, the Primary Years Program (PYP), the Middle Years

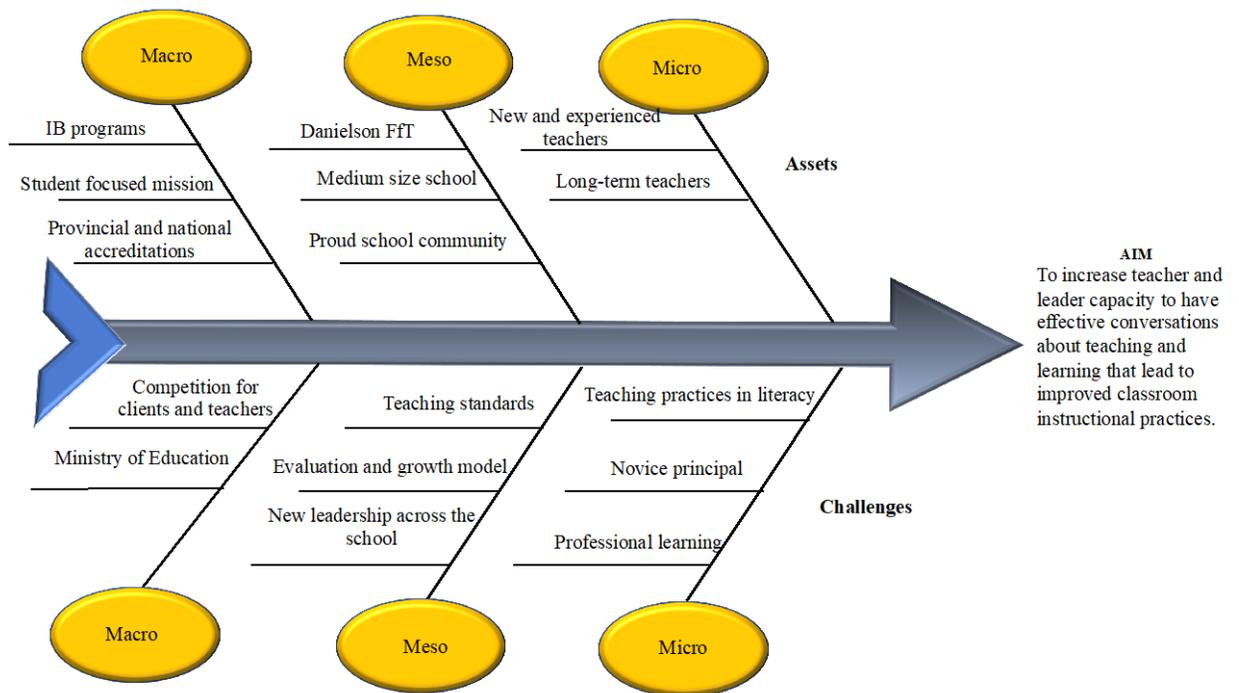


Figure 1. Fishbone analysis.

Program (MYP), and the Diploma Program (DP) and is a member of the British Columbia Association of International Baccalaureate World Schools (BCAIBWS) and the Independent Schools Association of BC (ISABC). In 2019, the school began the process for an additional accreditation from the Canadian Association of Independent Schools (CAIS). The accreditations are not unique to independent schools in British Columbia, a fact which adds to a spirit of cooperation as well as a level of competition for clients among the independent schools in the region.

### ***Meso Level Assets and Challenges***

The school had been utilizing an adaptation of the Danielson Framework for Teaching (FfT) (Danielson, 2013), and, although the school's unpublished model for professional growth is centered on student learning, the model lacks emphasis on the kind of effective feedback that is informed by continuous observation of teachers' work. The FfT is an example of *pro forma* evaluation, and one which the FoP aimed to supersede. Yet, having this tool in place provided an opportunity to build upon and improve the evaluation process at the same time as we were addressing daily changes in classroom practices.

### ***Micro Level Assets and Challenges***

Effective pedagogy is the most important aspect of a teacher's work. Teachers need to use varied strategies to meet the needs of all their learners. I observed a wide range of variance in teachers' beliefs about instruction that did not quite fit with the beliefs and values about instruction in an IB school. Although IB program schools prefer to hire teachers who have prior IB experience, this is not always possible. Furthermore, teachers often require several years to develop the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and self-efficacy to be consistently effective in the classroom (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016). Evidence-based observational practices, including

different kinds of post-observation conversations, can be personalized to a teacher's level of readiness. Therefore, this could offer a solution that supported the alignment of instructional practices to the school's expectations. The preceding sections detailed the assets and challenges that may influence the success and outcomes of this PAR project. The next section states the significance of the project and potential impact on teaching and learning at the school.

### **Significance**

The goal of the FoP was to influence teachers' practices through conversations about useful and precise observational evidence. To address a secondary goal, I designed the project and incorporated tools that would acknowledge equity as a key factor. For principals to effectively influence teacher practices, they need to implement a range of observation tools and techniques to generate data and engage in conversations about practice (Acheson & Gall, 2003). Further, the PAR project yielded a novel model of effective instructional leadership for the school's context, and the school could choose to act on recommendations that emerged from the implications and re-design the evaluation framework to promote teacher growth and development. Another international school could do as Paryani (2019) did in her research to enact a different evaluation system that is more useful to the participants, one that recognizes a major criteria of PAR research: Are the findings useful to the people they most affect (Hale, 2008)?

Conducting a PAR project with teachers is important work for principals and schools searching for effective ways to support teachers' professional capacities (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Militello et al., 2009). Since the substance of feedback conversations has not been studied thoroughly, the study contributed to the overall body of research of instructional leadership and provided a unique perspective (Khachatryan, 2015). Given the qualitative nature of a

participatory action research project, the teachers, with my support, took up innovations I introduced and began to investigate their practices. As a result, we began to adopt more equitable teaching practices aligned across the school, supporting teachers' development of knowledge-in and knowledge-of-practice (Kelly, 2006). In addition, by using the dynamic pedagogies associated with Community Learning Exchange (CLE) (Guajardo et al., 2016), improvement science principles, evidence-based observation tools, and conversation processes that value collaborative inquiry, the PAR project began to diffuse practices across the school that reflected more equitable access to and increased rigor in learning.

Two goals of my work as principal and a researcher were developing a collaborative culture of learning and striving to collaboratively create a climate hospitable to equitable education. Because we needed to fully address access and rigor in classrooms, I considered how I could work with teachers to address these equity concerns. One challenge was to find ways to advance the knowledge and skill of the teaching staff in a manner that was collaborative, effective, and grounded in constructivist learning theory. A theory of action, such as this, supported some teachers to take action for their own learning (Militello et al., 2009). Further, when teachers began to direct their own professional learning, they contributed to designing and implementing a professional environment driven by teacher agency and evidence of student learning (Grubb & Tredway, 2010). As teachers practiced autonomy in their own professional learning and growth, they improved their instructional practices. The continuation of our innovation supports us to improve the conditions in which students receive equitable access to and increased rigor in learning.

## Purpose, Research Questions, and Study Design

The purpose of this participatory action research study was to better serve the school population by increasing the opportunities for teachers to improve their instructional practices and, thus, to improve the conditions in which students receive equitable access to and increased rigor in learning. My purpose was to ensure that the conditions that I organized for teacher learning matched the equitable processes that I wanted teachers to use. Modeling for transfer to teachers and then to students was a primary strategy. I proposed to address the focus of practice by engaging in a participatory action research (PAR) project with teachers in three iterative cycles of inquiry. I worked with teacher participants who engaged with me in observations and conversations about classroom evidence in an experimental approach to improving. Gradually, as I used iterative evidence to better understand what to do and how to do it, teachers developed more trust in the approach and, by PAR Cycle Three, we had a process for moving forward that would better serve our students.

The PAR project attempted to address the following research question: *To what extent can the school's instructional leader support teachers to transform their practice?* I designed the sub-questions to consider the normative practices of the teachers and principal that may improve as a result of the PAR project:

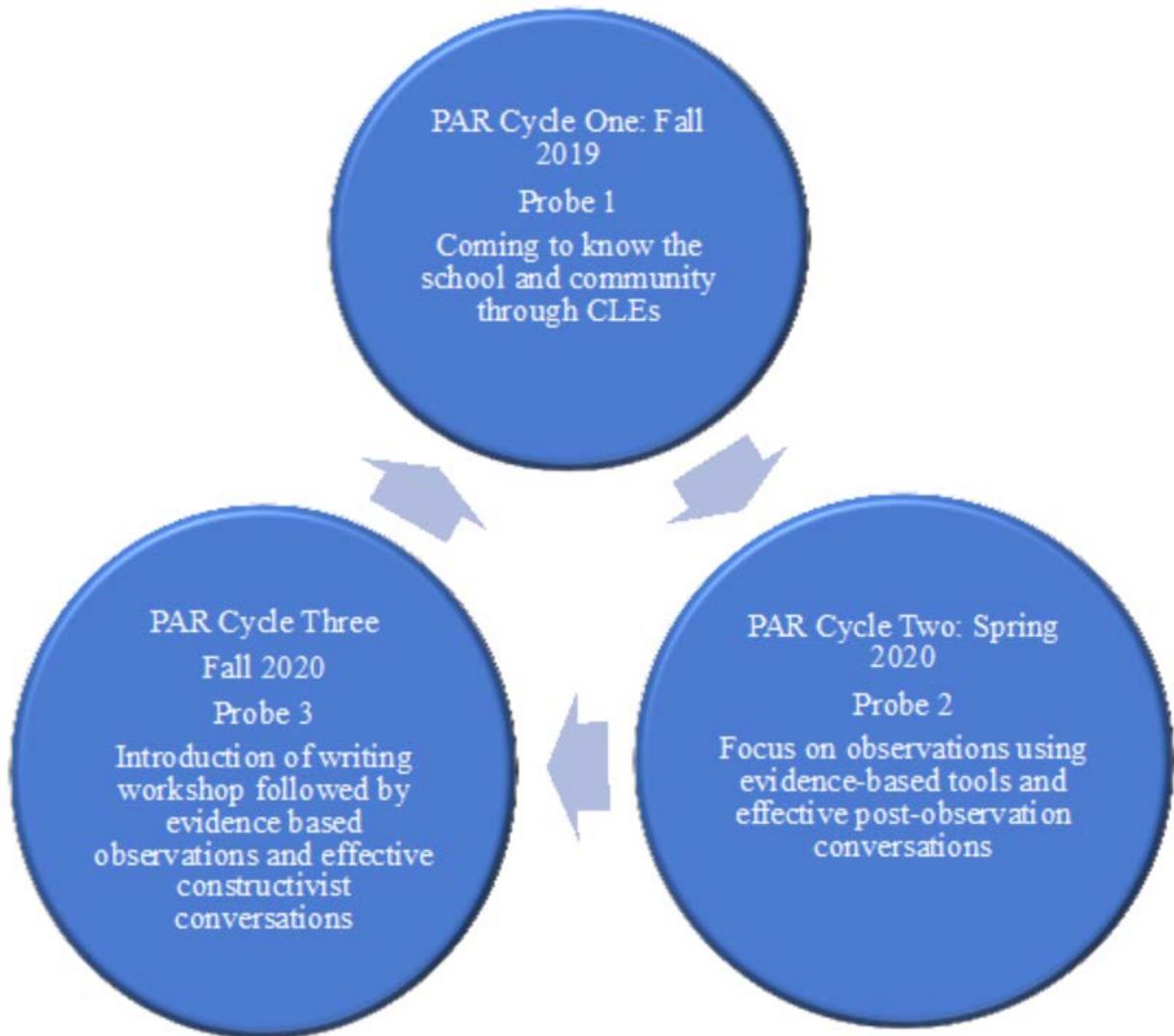
- How does a principal new to a school build relational trust and discover teachers' beliefs and values?
- How do the principal and teachers collaboratively develop their knowledge and skills for approaching classroom observations and conversations?
- To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?

Working with teacher participants and guided by the principles of improvement science and the axioms of the Community Learning Exchange, I intended to answer the research questions through a process of collaborative inquiry that supported the professional learning, growth, and development of teachers (Bryk et al., 2015; Guajardo et al., 2016). The PAR purpose and focus were directed at finding relevant and meaningful solutions to the focus of practice by engaging the people closest to the issues through a participatory action research project.

Next, I discuss the project design and the primary and secondary drivers for the PAR (Bryk et al., 2015). A more detailed methodology is discussed in Chapter 4.

### **Participatory Action Research Project: Overview of Design**

The PAR project focused on my work as the principal at an independent K-5 school, working with a group of teacher participants to improve the conditions in which students receive equitable and effective instructional practices. Utilizing an experimental approach, I introduced teachers to novel and innovative ways to engage in learning so I could learn more about the teachers and the school, and ultimately support the growth of teachers' knowledge and skills in the school context and provide them with a pathway to improvement (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The project included three iterative cycles of inquiry of 12-14 weeks each and included ten participating teachers as well as other teachers who attended CLEs and who I observed. Figure 2 provides an overview of the activities and goals in each PAR Cycle. Each cycle included CLE meetings, observations, post-observation conferences, data collection, and analysis of the data which informed the next inquiry cycle. The collection and use of practice-based evidence supported the improvements that emerged from each inquiry cycle (Bryk, 2017).



*Figure 2: Activities during three cycles of PAR.*

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In using the CLE pedagogies with the teachers, I honored the wisdom of people and place and supported their thinking and learning within the three ecologies of knowing: self, organization, and community (Guajardo et al., 2016). A more detailed description of the project methodology is in Chapter 4.

The theory of action rests on this axiom: If a principal engages teachers in a collaborative process of diagnosing and designing instructional responses, then teachers will develop their instructional knowledge and improve instructional practices. Further, I led with a collaborative stance toward the inquiry and sought a local solution to the focus of practice by providing teachers choices that resonated with their levels of readiness (Militello et al., 2009). The experimental approach of safe-fail probes led some teachers to discover the optimal conditions in which they were ready to learn and make changes to their instructional practices (Little, 2011; Snowden, 2007).

Primary and secondary drivers for change were expected to sustain the improvement aim of this project (see Table 1). As we reorganized instructional systems to increase equitable access to the learning for students, we shifted teachers' dispositions about observation and conversations toward a model that is based in relational trust and leads teachers toward their next steps and away from the *pro forma* evaluation and post observation feedback processes that were the primary organizational changes that framed the project. The processes and people support and extend the project aims and provide a framework to further guide the people closest to the issue.

As the lead researcher in the PAR, I worked in collaboration with teacher participants during the fourteen months collecting and analyzing data that supported the project's aim. The PAR project design supports adaptation as we used the evidence from iterative cycles to direct

Table 1

*Driver Diagram: The Primary and Secondary Drivers of the Focus of Practice*

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Aim statement

To increase teacher and leader capacity to have effective conversations about teaching and learning that lead teachers to improved classroom instructional practices and, therefore, instructional choices for students to receive equitable access to and increased rigor in learning.

Primary Drivers	Secondary Driver: People and Processes
<p><b>Instructional Systems</b>            Re-organize instructional systems to improve equitable student outcomes in K-5 classrooms by increasing student engagement to ensure student access to the classroom discourse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data from classroom observations by school leader to determine patterns of instructional practices on which teachers want to focus change efforts.</li> <li>• Teachers co-analyze practices and make decisions about shifts in their instructional practices.</li> <li>• School leader(s) assesses organizational structures that support or impede the project and shifts structures to support teacher interaction.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Observations</b>            Shift the school leader observations from evaluative to growth and support system using evidence-based tools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader investigates, proposes and uses evidence-based observation tools.</li> <li>• School leader engages in an evidence-based observational routine by engaging in praxis - reflection to action.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Productive Conversations about Practice</b>            Reframe the post-observation conferences for the school leader to be collaborative and focused on observational-evidence; these conversations offer opportunities for co-analysis of evidence from classroom observations that inform teacher decisions about changing instructional practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader investigates and implements coaching practices that support collaborative inquiry in 1:1 and group conversations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Professional Learning</b>            Foster a robust culture of professional learning in a K-5 school through safe-fail innovations that reflect teacher choice and teacher analysis of the usefulness for changing their practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School leader analyzes and presents aggregate results of observations that guide professional learning.</li> <li>• Support professional learning <i>in situ</i> on the basis of CLE axiom that the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to their concerns.</li> <li>• Use CLE pedagogies in group meetings and professional learning meetings for the full school</li> </ul>

the actions for successive cycles. Finally, I address the confidentiality and ethical considerations as well as factors which may contribute limitations to the study.

### **Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations**

The security of the data and the confidentiality of the participants were of the utmost importance in this study. Pseudonyms were utilized for the teachers. In addition, the transcription of interviews and recordings, field notes, and documents were stored in a secure, locked location. Additionally, the school director and Board of Governors received an executive summary report on the study. Finally, none of the material collected from the study participants will be replicated or disseminated in any way and, after three years, I will destroy the data. In Chapter 3, I discuss in more detail the consent forms for the project.

### **Study Limitations**

Issues of credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), confirmability (objectivity), and construct validity were addressed in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014). I addressed the study's construct validity and credibility by using multiple sources of evidence collected, by prolonged engagement in the field, through the analysis of patterns in the data, and through the member checks (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Such a design assures that the inquiries reflect the respondents' views and disengage the research from any bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The transferability of this PAR was for the context of my school. The project may be transferable because I triangulated the data giving the research both democratic validity and relevance to the local setting (Hale, 2008). In Chapter 4, I discuss the limitations in more detail.

## Summary

The principal's job as instructional leader is to co-create the conditions in which teachers can develop their knowledge and skills of teaching and provide students with equitable rigor and access to learning. Teachers are a school's greatest asset, and effective principals know their role is to leverage the assets teachers bring to the classroom for the purpose of continuous instructional improvement. Teaching is a learning profession, and it is vital that teachers continue to collaboratively learn about and improve their instructional practices. To meet the challenge of school improvement, principals must develop their knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Elmore, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Militello et al., 2009). As an instructional leader, part of my work is to learn alongside teachers and use participatory action research based in the improvement sciences to probe and gently nudge teachers toward making improvements to their practices.

The chapter outlined the PAR project and study, which was based on the assets and challenges that exist in my school. The three iterative cycles of inquiry and safe-fail probes were based on the improvement sciences (Bryk et al., 2015), and were fully informed by the processes and pedagogical approaches of community learning exchanges (Guajardo et al., 2016). I acted as the lead researcher working with participant teachers in the school. The following chapters, 2 through 7, provide a review of the literature, an in-depth description of the context of the school, the methodology for the PAR, and all three PAR cycles. The final chapter summarizes the implications of this PAR on practice, school policy, research, and the ECU EdD framework.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The goal of this study was to explore a new pathway to instructional improvement through observational feedback that teachers use to co-construct knowledge of instructional practices and improve the conditions in which students receive equitable access to and increased rigor in learning. I intend to accomplish this goal by engaging in a process of collaborative inquiry to co-construct knowledge of best instructional practices based on evidence gathered from and conversations about classroom observations. *Pro forma* systems of observation and evaluation, with standardized methods for collecting evidence and feedback models that are supervisor-driven, have not yielded measurable instructional improvements; at best, improvements have been marginal (Paryani, 2019; Rowan & Raudenbush, 2016). Teachers should be given opportunities to make improvements based on evidence-based observational feedback and evaluation instead of supervisor judgment (Davis et al., 2002; Little, 2011; Sullivan & Glanz, 2013; Toch & Rothman, 2008; Zepeda, 2012). As instructional leaders, principals need to change the ways in which they collect, co-analyze evidence, and provide feedback. Instead of a unidirectional process of giver to receiver, instructional leaders need to use more effective observation tools and look toward effective conversations that support teachers' decisions about what practices they intend to change. Thus, the observational evidence should be central to conversations with teachers so they can reach higher levels of learning and instructional improvement (Acheson & Gall, 2003; Nelson & Sassi, 2000; Saphier, 1992).

Teachers have not found support for instructional improvement nor increased student achievement from the traditional classroom observations nor the now-popular walkthroughs with checklists (Grissom et al., 2013; Khachatryan, 2015; Rowan & Raudenbush, 2016). Moreover, while teachers report that they are eager to receive feedback on their work, they rarely receive

the kind of substantive feedback from their principal or supervisor that leads to shifts in practice (OECD, 2014). Often, principals are required by their districts or the school in which they work to use *pro forma* or cookie cutter evaluation tools to conduct observations of teaching practice so that there is a common set of evidence about all the teachers. Toch and Rothman (2008) term this type of evaluation “drive-bys” since the evidence needed for the *pro forma* process is so basic it can be gleaned in what they term a fleeting classroom visit. These types of observation systems that, in turn, inform evaluation reports are common in schools.

The PAR proposes to pay deliberate attention to the dynamic nature of each classroom and develop tailor-made observations that provide evidence-based information to each teacher (Paryani, 2019). To improve instruction, principals and teachers need to reimagine a climate that is conducive to learning and professional growth (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Teaching is a learning profession, full of complexities that can only provide instructional improvement if the feedback is related to the dynamic conditions of the classroom instead of a pre-designed data collection instrument. Conditions that permit teachers to solve instructional problems through a collective capacity to learn are more conducive to teacher learning and teacher change (Little, 2011).

In this chapter, I examine the literature on how teachers construct knowledge and learn best. The review begins with an examination of the literature on learning theory as a basis for principals to understand how adults learn, including the importance of psychological safety and informal learning. Secondly, the chapter addresses the ways in which instructional leadership can promote teacher learning that includes an understanding of situated learning and the role of a principal in teachers’ learning. Further, I examine the role of feedback as a vehicle to promote learning and the challenges feedback presents to teachers and principals. The literature review

scrutinizes *pro forma* evaluation and analyzes the tensions principals face in redefining the role of instructional leader as both clinical supervisor and evaluator. Finally, I examine how a reimagined process of conversations based on constructivist feedback can effectively support teachers' learning. To conclude, the literature review identifies gaps in the research and allows me to position the study within the extant literature and demonstrate how the focus of practice addresses the need for action research that leads teachers to improve their instructional practices.

### **Learning Theory**

The purpose of school is learning. Therefore, as a learning organization, the school has a responsibility to ensure learning is taking place for students and teachers. Normative practice in education maintains that the principal is responsible for ensuring that the teaching staff are on a path to continuous professional learning by knowing the subject content as well as developing their instructional practices (Little, 2011; Nelson & Sassi, 2000). First, I explore learning theory as the basis of teaching and the key components of adult learning that principals must use to best support teachers' professional growth and development. Second, I examine how instructional leadership has the responsibility to promote more effective situated professional learning for teachers.

### **Learning Theory as the Basis of Teaching**

Teachers must understand how people learn, both the students they teach and themselves as learners, to be successful. Further, effective principals who understand how teachers and students learn best know how to create the optimal conditions for learning. Since the conditions required for students to learn are in some respects the same for adults, the learning environment must attend to both sets of learners (Bransford et al., 2000). Moreover, aspects of adult learning or andragogy and how communities of learners develop mentoring communities are important

for distinguishing the ways teachers learn best (Drago-Severson, 2009; Knowles, 1984).

Collaborative learning is at the core of the work in mentoring communities in which teachers and principals support and challenge each other to grow. The school leader needs to know that, while learning theory certainly applies to adults, some factors that are particular to adults. Next, I discuss general principles of learning that apply to both teachers and students, the importance of psychological safety, and informal learning.

The general principles of learning as set out by Bransford et al. (2000) can be applied to nurture the development of a learning centered school for teachers, students, and administrators (Bransford et al., 2000). To optimize learning, schools need to be learning centered in deep and meaningful ways that promote growth and development. Second, the school must be knowledge centered for teachers to develop their knowledge-in- and knowledge-of-practice (Kelly, 2006). Third, the school must be assessment centered, a place where teachers can try new techniques, make mistakes, and receive feedback. Finally, schools need to be community centered since teacher learning, as with children's learning, is social as they learn from each other in formal and informal settings (Bransford et al., 2000; Drago-Severson, 2009; Knowles, 1984; Supovitz et al., 2010). I have more to say about school as a center for learning in the discussion on situated learning. Now I turn to the importance of psychological safety in school as a catalyst for learning.

### ***Psychological Safety***

Effective principals ensure the school is psychologically safe for children and adults because, like children, adults need to feel emotionally secure in order to learn (Aguilar, 2013; Prolman, 2017). Learning involves taking risks and, therefore, psychological safety in the learning environment is critical. One pathway for principals to cultivate instructional

improvement efforts is to focus on developing positive relations with their teachers. Positive relations motivate teachers to develop their practices while overemphasizing teacher accountability undermines relationships and leads to psychological fear among staff (Prolman, 2017; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). The Tuytens and Devos (2011) study on the impact of evaluation on teacher learning concluded the obvious -- that school leaders need to develop good relations with teachers. Moreover, their analysis of survey results from more than 400 teachers in Dutch secondary schools in Belgium found that when principals are actively engaged in observations, feedback, and goal setting, teachers feel more emotionally secure. Principals who prioritize learning environments built on trust are positioned to influence teachers to make changes to their instructional practices. Supovitz et al. (2010) studied the impact principals have on instruction in 52 mid-western U.S. schools. They found that principals have an overall positive effect on instruction in English language arts and mathematics. Further, when the results were coupled with the indirect effect principals have on instruction via teachers influencing teachers, the effect size increased significantly (Supovitz et al., 2010). Socio-cultural or non-formal learning – the prior knowledge and experience learned outside of school --is another key aspect of learning theory that augments psychological safety.

### ***Teachers' Non-Formal Learning***

Teachers must attend to the fact children do not arrive in classrooms each year *tabula rasa*, and the same should be true for a principal's view of teachers. Students and teachers possess knowledge and understanding in a range of cognitive and skill areas; they are not blank slates (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2018). Teachers bring a plethora of personal and professional experiences that contribute to the school community. While developing their instructional capacity is central, addressing what Drago-

Severson (2009) terms their developmental capacity is critical: capacities “[d]evelopmental capacity concerns the cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal that enable us to manage the demands of leadership, teaching, learning and life” (p. 8). In fact, the distributed leadership model is premised on a high level of adults fully engaging in the school community as their leadership is a resource for all adults (Spillane et al., 2001).

Secondly, effective teaching grounded in learning theory requires the teacher to understand the individual learner’s socio-cultural profile and history, and the principal should similarly deeply know the adult learners in the school (Gutiérrez, 2016). Gutiérrez points out the necessity of paying attention to the context in which learning is taking place since learning occurs both in and out of school. At the local playground with friends, at home with family, in a place of worship, or within the broader context of society, the ecologies of knowing the self, the organization, and the community represent the multiple influences on our learning (Guajardo et al., 2016; NASEM, 2018).

Teachers are able to develop positive and supportive relationships with students when they understand the importance of a learner’s socio-cultural profile and history and the ecologies of knowing and take time to understand their students’ interests. Powell (2019), in her work on teacher knowledge about students, engaged five teachers in developing cultural maps for each student in their classrooms best plan personalized learning for English language learners that actually matched the students’ profiles. In this way, she found a concrete way to enact the cultural funds of knowledge to develop strategies to best serve the students’ learning needs. Principals need to pay attention to teacher interests and assets in order to draw on their funds of knowledge in the same way. Moll et al. (1992), the originators of the funds of knowledge concept, conducted an ethnographic study triangulated with one hundred observations of twenty-

five families in Tucson and found that by “capitalizing on household and community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds the quality of rote-like instruction” (p. 132). In much the same way that teachers should rely on the knowledge of students and families, principals should rely on the funds of knowledge teachers bring to their work. As insiders in the work, teachers’ knowledge and skills are rarely tapped in ways that honor their experiences. The principal needs to know what excites the teachers about teaching and learning and what animates and directs their teaching practices, an awareness and understanding that goes beyond teachers’ personal identities or out of school activities (Grubb & Tredway, 2010).

Principals should mine teacher knowledge for a deeper vein of experience and skills that can be shared across the school; they are co-leaders in the school in ways we insufficiently draw on for making decisions and enacting reforms. Spillane et al. (2001) and Wegener and Petty (1994) provide support for a theoretical frame of how leadership is cognitively distributed. School leaders have a responsibility to draw on the knowledge and skills of all adults to create the conditions for a successful school that is community centered. Positive teacher-student relationships have an impact not only on student learning but on the learning environment and the success teachers can have toward developing a community of learners in classrooms as well as the professional community to which they belong (Bransford et al., 2000; Cappella et al., 2016; Hattie & Yates, 2013). Similarly, positive adult relationships constitute the foundation of teacher productivity and sense of purpose in their work. Principals too must recognize the importance of teachers’ socio-cultural histories and their stories as assets in the learning process and the process of change and draw on the reservoir of skills they possess to co-create optimal conditions for a learning-centered school.

Teachers need to understand the basic principles of learning to be effective in the

classroom. For principals to be effective in their support of teachers' learning, they need to apply these same principles of learning to the adults in the school. For teachers to learn in non-formal ways on a daily basis, schools need to be learning focused. Teachers learn best when there is a strong principal-teacher relationship built around a psychologically safe school environment that supports collaboration and risk-taking (Bransford et al., 2000; Drago-Severson, 2009).

The preceding section examined the general principles of learning as they apply to students and to teachers and how this knowledge supports teacher learning. I now turn to the ways in which instructional leadership can promote teachers' learning.

### **Instructional Leadership that Promotes Teacher Learning**

First written about in 1911, Taylor's scientific management theory posited that greater efficiency in organizations resulted from managers planning and training and workers performing the tasks. As a result, school districts adopting Taylor's business model took on more bureaucratic tones. The shift to a more top-down managerial structure signaled to teachers that a hierarchy of experts could and should make decisions and that a flattened hierarchy of expertise across an organization was less useful. This management concept theorized by Taylor nearly 100 years ago has persisted in the form of market-driven approaches to school reform (Anderson et al., 2013; Nasir et al., 2016; Taylor, 1993). Opposite of Taylor is the model of distributed leadership promoted in Spillane et al. (2001) who contend that all adults have the capacity of leadership and co-constructing the knowledge and skills necessary for school reform efforts. Instructional leadership that promotes teacher learning is based firmly on the foundation of distributed leadership and situated learning.

Effective principals know the best place for teachers to learn is in their place of work, verified by the Grissom et al. (2013) study of 127 principals in Dade County in which the best

professional learning was found to rest in the school leaders' ability to observe instructional practice and aggregate the evidence from classrooms to make decisions about internal needs for professional learning. Outside expertise for particular learning may be necessary if no one in a school possesses the knowledge and skill, but more often than not, the most important source of learning is overlooked; situated learning with colleagues builds internal capacity and transfer is more likely to happen.

The PAR focused on working on change from the inside-out, a focus of the normative literature on how change and coherence happen (Fullan, 2007; Grubb & Tredway, 2010). Though there can be relevance to teachers learning outside of the schoolhouse, the best learning must be designed for a specific situation (Putnam & Borko, 2000), and the people who know that best are those closest to the assets and challenges in a particular school. Professional learning in the context of the school has a greater impact on improvement and meeting students' needs because needs are being met as they appear (Fullan, 2007). Fullan advocates for a new paradigm of professional learning that recognizes the importance of teachers learning at work and through their work. Additionally, Putnam and Borko (2000) describe how knowledge is situated in the context; therefore, most teacher learning is more effective if it takes place within the walls of the schoolhouse and relies on local knowledge and skill for its inception and implementation. When teachers engage in professional learning in school, they begin to develop knowledge and skills that are relevant to their work.

I begin the discussion with an examination of the ways in which situated learning relates to teacher learning and the principal's responsibility for magnifying teacher learning. Second, I examine the ways in which an effective principal can support teacher learning that actually changes practice. I outline how current practices of feedback could be more effective and how

evaluation, a required role of the principal, can be altered to advocate for a growth and development model. Principals can use these approaches to create conditions for teachers to achieve instructional improvement despite the fact that each approach continues to present challenges as principals attempt to redefine the role of instructional leader as both clinical supervisor and evaluator.

### **Situated Learning**

Sending teachers to professional development workshops outside of the school does not have meaningful impact in the classroom and teachers often complain that professional development outside of the school and classroom is ineffective (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Learning to improve instruction within the walls of the schoolhouse supports teachers by engaging them in a process of solving instructional problems from the inside (Barth & Guest, 1990; Drago-Severson, 2009; Russ et al., 2016). While educators and researchers have known the value of inside-out for many years, the preponderance of the outside-in approach persists. However, we know that teacher learning is more often intertwined with knowledge and skills that are specifically grounded in the classroom and their everyday work. In other words, in coining the terms situated learning or situated cognition, Brown et al. (1989) and Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as situated within the context of place wherein the attendant learning is responsive to the cultural and social context. The learners co-construct knowledge and engage in distributed cognitive activities to bolster their movement in peer interaction from the current knowledge to a greater degree of expertise. Thus, learning *in situ* mirrors the Vygotsky (1978) zone of proximal development of relying on peer interaction, or intersubjectivity, to build capacity collaboratively and intentionally, although much of the learning is unintentional at the start. Lave and Wenger (1991) term this legitimate peripheral participation.

Situated learning theory holds that knowledge should be delivered in an authentic context.... [L]earners should be involved in authentic settings of daily practice, applying knowledge, and making use of art[i]facts in productive but low-risk ways. This usually requires social interaction and collaboration within the ‘community of practice.’

However, learners gradually move away from this community to become engaged in more dynamic and complex activities, and transition into the role of the expert (Besar, 2018, pp. 49-50).

Thus, the teachers are the most legitimate knowledge agents, and by incidental, often non-formal, and lateral ways of coming together, they can support each other’s sensemaking of classroom practice.

Fullan (2007) argues that educators who work behind closed doors can challenge teacher learning and, therefore, principals must work hard to deprivatize teacher practices by creating conditions that promote teacher learning within a community of learners at school. The principal can create the conditions conducive to learning by focusing on the organizational aspects of the school that permit teachers to engage in collaboration and learning. The principal’s responsibility is to (a) aggregate the evidence from classrooms in an accessible way for teachers to use as they co-construct learning in place-based professional learning and (b) look for ways to track and tether important collaborative learning that actually transfers to classroom practice (Velasco, 2009). In a participatory action research project, Velasco worked with a second-grade team over the course of a year. Her findings indicate that the leader’s role is threefold: tracking teacher talk, tethering the talk and conversation to action, and transferring to classroom practice. Tracking involves aggregating the evidence whereas tethering requires that the school leader look for sightings which, according to McDonald (1996), “are anomalous and interesting events that

occur during the change process and provide deeper understanding of a school, its student, the teachers and leaders in the school, or direction (Grubb & Tredway, 2010, p. 163).

The principal, responsible for being on the adaptive leadership balcony, responds to a new direction by tethering or emphasizing the new idea as a possible way forward. Situated learning or cognition does not mean the leader takes a back seat to the learning, but is leading from behind, so to speak, listening for moments or sightings that provide an opportunity for teachers to take the responsibility for transfer to classroom practice. Freire (1970) would call this developing the generative themes from the teacher and classroom evidence. Subsequently, the instructional leader establishes a system in which the individual closest to the work makes the decisions, with the support of the leadership in tracking and tethering, to ensure motivation and movement. In many ways, the principal can step back from the traditional role of instructional leader and create space for more effective teacher learning.

### ***The Principal's Role in Teachers' Learning***

For teacher learning to take hold, principals need to create spaces for teacher learning within the context of everyday practice (Russ et al., 2016). Effective principals provide opportunities for teachers to engage in sustained and continuous interactions with each other. As stated, the principal, perhaps in collaboration with other designated school leaders like assistant principals and instructional coaches, has the time and the responsibility to observe classrooms and collect evidence that gives voice to the individual teacher experience. More importantly, for purposes of professional learning across the school, this evidence is used to affirm the aggregate voice of teachers and students. Thus, through evidence-based observations of and conversations about teaching and learning, the principal can provide the evidence for teacher meetings in which

they collaborate on solving instructional problems (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Further, principals need to move away from narrowly focusing on one aspect of instructional leadership such as classroom observations and individual conversations and move toward broadening the focus toward organizational management (Hornig & Loeb, 2010). Additionally, principals' involvement in day-to-day classroom learning has little impact on instructional improvement and improvement in student achievement unless the aggregate evidence is used to make decisions. Hornig and Loeb (2010) analyzed more than 30,000 surveys of teachers, principals, and assistant principals and 250 days of observations. They found principals who provide teachers with effective teaching and learning environments, hire exceptional teachers, and provide the necessary resources for teachers to be effective are more likely to influence teachers' instructional improvement. Thus, if principals are to transform the traditional role of instructional leader—in which the principal takes sole responsibility for instructional improvement by way of fleeting classroom observations and unidirectional feedback—then they need to set the conditions for teacher learning. The optimal conditions for teacher learning permit them to learn from each other, to participate in the learning process, and direct their own learning. Principals or other school leaders who often provide judgemental and generic feedback do not substantially improve teacher practice and can hinder teachers from transferring new understanding to practice. Next, I outline the role of feedback for instructional improvement and how *pro forma* approaches to feedback are ineffective.

### ***The Impact of Feedback on Instructional Improvement***

Feedback on our work as professionals is essential, but for teachers, feedback on their

work in the classroom is infrequent (OECD, 2014). When teachers do receive feedback, it is often delivered as a score on a rating scale or rubric and part of an evaluation process designed for use by a school district. Teachers have deemed this type of feedback superficial and generic instead of tailor-made for the individual teacher (Paryani, 2019; Rowan & Raudenbush, 2016). As a normative practice that occurs in schools, feedback is part of a school or district evaluation process and is purportedly intended to improve instruction and therefore student learning. Most feedback systems are based on evaluation systems, and are therefore a one-size fits all format. Termed *pro forma* or standard operating procedure, these follow a format that is often a checklist and viewed by teachers as judgmental rather than helpful (Toch & Rothman, 2008). In addition, *pro forma* systems of evaluation such as the Danielson (2013) Framework for Teaching are often time consuming, leading to observational feedback that is largely ineffective. Principals are required to conduct a certain number of observations and, given the time constraints they face, are unable to provide teachers with the opportunity for thoughtful discourse on their work (Mckenna, 2017). Further, when provided, feedback often describes everything the teacher is doing well and does not reveal potential areas of improvement (Fisher & Frey, 2015). In sum, most forms of feedback have not proven to be effective for changing teachers' instructional practices. Teachers often feel temporarily validated when they receive positive feedback; however, the feedback rarely leads to changes in their instruction (Khachatryan, 2015; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Next, I discuss the challenges providing feedback presents to principals and teachers.

Evidence that feedback affects instructional improvement and student learning is scarce. The variation in outcomes from feedback sessions can relate to a wide range of domains: usefulness, accuracy, evaluator credibility, and teachers' access to resources to implement given

suggested improvements (Cherasaro et al., 2016). Moreover, the conditions in which feedback is influence the outcome of the feedback session. A review of the literature on feedback by Brinko (1993) revealed more than thirty conditions that make feedback effective. With an overwhelming number of conditions influencing the outcome of the feedback event, a school is not equipped to adhere to each of these conditions with fidelity, nor find personnel trained to ensure the conditions are being met. Other literature reveals similar and wide ranging findings such as the importance of positive feedback (Scheeler et al., 2004), the usefulness and accuracy of feedback (Cherasaro et al., 2016), and the source and frequency of feedback (Ilgen et al., 1979). The range of research and findings reveals that feedback to teachers on their instructional practices exists within the “black box” of teaching and learning in which the feedback data either is or is not turned into action (Cuban, 2001). Within the black box are factors that influence the outcome of a feedback episode. Factors such as a teachers’ confidence in the credibility of the feedback source, perceptions of the feedback, and the characteristics of the person providing the feedback all contribute to the challenge of determining the usefulness of the feedback.

Regardless of the conditions and characteristics, feedback sessions often involve just two people, the giver expert (principal/supervisor) and the receiver (teacher), often viewed in these situations as the worker who knows less than the manager (Taylor, 1993). When the teacher/receiver lacks confidence in the credibility of the expert/giver, their conversation does not work to generate ideas and plans for change. Principals and teachers avoid conflict by having conversations that center on what the teacher already does well, and on students who are falling behind in their learning (Cooper, 2018). The challenge for a principal is to provide feedback that is effective and individually tailored to each teacher: a task that presents as improbable given the time required (Mckenna, 2017). Therefore, principals must begin to develop a more collaborative

and robust approach to providing teachers with feedback for it to be a useful tool that impacts instructional improvement.

The goal of feedback is to provide support to teachers following classroom observations and gently encourage teachers to develop their instructional practices (Brinko, 1993; Fisher & Frey, 2015). Therefore, I can conclude that the processes and tools used for collecting data used to give feedback need to be more robust, tailored to individual needs, and grounded in evidence that can offer insight into practice for a teacher. Providing feedback within the normative unidirectional model of giver/expert and receiver/novice is has proven ineffective and demands a new pathway for school leaders to approach supervision and evaluation.

### **Evaluation**

Teacher evaluation, like the normative model of feedback delivery to teachers, is one of many roles for principals as instructional leaders (Crenshaw & Hoyle, 1981; Grissom et al., 2013). However, teacher evaluation remains an area of tension for school districts and school leaders. The choice of an evaluation model, the time needed to conduct evaluations, and the effectiveness of discussions between principals and teachers during the evaluation process are challenges to effective teacher evaluation. Concurrently, teachers view the feedback they receive from the evaluation processes as superficial (Rowan & Raudenbush, 2016; Toch & Rothman, 2008).

I begin the section with an examination of the traditional process of teacher evaluation and the challenges of using *pro forma* evaluation models. Additionally, because I advocate for models that would be more evidence-based and useful to individual teachers and, at the same time, provide the aggregate evidence a school needs for deciding on place-based professional learning, I examine an evidence-based model of evaluation as an illustration.

## **Pro forma Evaluation**

Traditional evaluation processes involve a close inspection of teachers' work which includes planning, instructional methods, and student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 1983). Using a range of strategies such as classroom observations and walkthroughs, the principal collects data on teacher practices. The data are then shared with teachers in the form of feedback. The goal of this process in the traditional paradigm is instructional improvement that advances student achievement. However, principals and teachers often view this process negatively (Crenshaw & Hoyle, 1981). One reason for this is that the evidence is often presented as a *fait accompli*, implying that the principal has concluded what needs to be changed before the feedback conversation. These conversations, as indicated previously, are often unidirectional, and the principal does most of the talking.

Principals have a significant impact on student achievement, though this impact is most often realized indirectly through the work of a range of mediating factors including effective instruction, a focus on goals, and a mission and vision for success and others (Grissom et al., 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004). As discussed when examining the principal's role in teacher learning, principals can create the conditions in which teachers learn and students reach higher levels of achievement through effective organizational management such as staffing schools with effective teachers and supporting them with effective learning environments (Horng & Loeb, 2010). Other indirect effects on student achievement can include regularly scheduled walkthrough observations, feedback sessions, and professional development; however, the study noted that walkthrough observations without adequate follow-up conversations correlated negatively to student improvement (Grissom et al., 2013). In sum, these

evaluation activities present challenges to principals who want to impact the effectiveness of teachers through informal and formal methods.

Problems with traditional systems of evaluation include lack of consistent, clear standards of good practice and more often than not evaluations add little value to the improvement of instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Toch & Rothman, 2008). The cookie cutter approaches to instructional improvement are ineffective because they are not grounded in the place and among the people who need to engage in improvement (Bryk et al., 2015; Hoole & Patterson, 2008). Many examples of *pro forma* frameworks, such as Marzano (2014) and Danielson (2013), have multiple steps, rubrics, phases of development, and levels of achievement, and use language for ratings such as “unsatisfactory,” “proficient,” and “distinguished” to describe the outcome of the evaluation. Teachers essentially receive a report card following these types of evaluations that indicates whether they have passed or have more work to do. Most often teachers receive a positive report to some degree; both teachers and principals are complicit in the social contract for evaluations – avoid conflict and do not rock the boat (Davis et al., 2002; Gutiérrez, 2016). An exception may occur when the principal is using the evaluation process to remove a teacher; the process may then become contentious as the principal is documenting for tenure or non-renewal of contracts. Moreover, and for most teachers, the process is for improvement, but teachers do not understand the criteria for success in these evaluation processes nor do they receive regular and consistent feedback following a formal observation that is actionable (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Many evaluation frameworks that are currently in use require significant amounts of time to implement and have limited results for teacher improvement. The widely-used Danielson (2013) Framework consists of four major domains and 22 components designed to assess

teachers and move them toward improvement of student achievement. The Danielson tool, also known as a comprehensive evaluation system, attempts to measure teachers' instructional practices to advance student achievement. Though the framework does not specify a time frame for completing the evaluation, Felland (2001) notes the time needed to complete the process "far exceeds that typically allotted for most teacher professional practice assessments" (p. 70). In a study of implementing the Danielson Framework in Illinois and a study in New Jersey, participants voiced concerns that the amount of time to implement the FFT was unreasonable and expensive (Mckenna, 2017; Stallings, 2015). Principals and school administrators noted their school required significant additional resources to implement the framework. Professional development and training are required to implement the framework and one study noted the challenges they faced:

[S]ome administrators felt that the resources they received were at best inadequate and in some instances caused fear and anxiety for both participants and staff. Others felt that resources weren't being provided at the most optimal times as well, further challenging the implementation process (Stallings, 2015).

Though Danielson's model is assumed to be grounded in constructivist theory of learning, the strict nature of the rubric design does not appear to allow room for co-construction of teacher learning, nor does it indicate the importance of conversation and reflection following observations (Felland, 2001). The framework does have merit and value as a standards-based evaluation instrument. However, use of the framework has focused on teacher and principal accountability in an attempt to improve teacher effectiveness. For purposes of the work, I am undertaking in the PAR project, the Danielson instrument lacks an equity focus and, therefore, does not represent the centerpiece of equitable student access that is critical to effective learning.

Notably, the Danielson framework does account for differentiated instructional practices that address the needs of a culturally diverse student population (Irvine & Hawley, n.d.).

### **Emerging Models of Observation and Evaluation**

Clinical supervision practices offer plentiful collaborative and effective methods that aim to empower teachers in their work, yet schools and districts continue to use evaluation tools that do not support instructional improvement (Acheson & Gall, 1997; Zepeda, 2012). Evidence-based observation tools are effective because they provide teachers the direct results of their teaching. When used in tandem with effective models of teacher evaluation, evidence-based observation tools have a positive impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Briefly, I identify observation tools that are helpful, two evaluation models that provide a road map forward, and discuss how the PAR project in which I am engaging could have wider applicability, although with a small sample as indicated in the limitations.

### **Evidence-Based Observation**

Observation tools that provide evidence instead of judgment have long been a part of effective clinical supervision (Acheson & Gall, 1997; Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer et al., 1993; Saphier, 1992; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000; Sullivan & Glanz, 2013). Indeed, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development was founded in 1964 to advocate for better forms of supervision (Pajak, 2003). However, while the clinical supervision cycle or process is widely known and used, the tools used to collect and analyze classroom evidence based on individual teacher goals and evidence have largely disappeared, and many principal preparation programs fail to prepare school leaders to use such tools. International schools and independent schools rely on the well-known expert authors of evaluation frameworks such as the easily accessible Danielson (2013) FFT or Marzano (2014) to provide tools for observations connected to

evaluation. However, schools are often unaware of the other evidence-based tools that might provide principals with ways to both address time issues raised by Grissom et al. (2013) and Honig and Rainey (2015; 2020) that confound our ability to engage in instructional observations.

One observation tool, known as asset mapping (Tredway, 2018), utilizes a school wide approach to gather evidence of instructional practices. The asset map is created from the data composed of effective practices used by teachers. The analysis of the data provides teachers with their next steps and goals for developing their instructional practices. Acheson and Gall (1997) promote the use of selective verbatim for teachers to analyse their instructional practices. Selective verbatim is non-judgemental, based on the verbal activity of the teacher and provides the teacher with a focused look into one aspect of their teacher practice. In terms of process, selective verbatim is simple to use as the observer selectively records the teacher's words in a set period of time. The teacher and observer then analyze the verbatim data by looking for patterns of verbal behaviors the teacher wishes to change. The narrow angle technique of data collection developed by Acheson and Gall (1997) led them to develop a set of evidence-based observation tools that have been promoted by other authors: Zepeda (2012), Sullivan and Glanz (2000, 2013). Selective verbatim of teachers' questions and feedback to students, checklists of teachers' and students' behaviors, and the verbal flow of a discussion are examples of the narrow angle observational data that provide teachers and observers the opportunity to zoom in on a specific aspect of teaching.

### ***Effective Evaluation***

In the US, because of the standards and accountability movement from the early 1990s through the present, evaluation models have become more complex and are often state-

mandated. Because that is not the case for independent schools, and because they have more flexibility to choose how we evaluate teachers, I am relying on two frameworks for more equitable evaluation as the basis for this PAR project, one district model and two dissertations that support better evaluation of teachers and principals.

The unpublished but widely available framework that Hawley developed for the Southern Poverty Law Center supports a principal evaluation tool that focuses on equitable classroom practices (Hawley & Wolf, n.d.), and Irvine and Hawley (n.d.) (see Table 2) wrote an unpublished report for the Southern Poverty Law Center on how current teacher evaluation practices limit the ability to close the achievement gap. Their reasoning leads to an understanding of the need to reframe teacher evaluation within an equity framework, especially from a viewpoint of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), and offers a revision of the Danielson framework to include equitable practices. The example in Table 2, taken from the report, identifies how to better think about engaging and motivating students with a culturally responsive pedagogy frame. In addition, Lyman (1981), the father of think-pair-share, has designed many practice-based tools for supervision that rely on teacher problem-solving to put the principal in the place of what he terms SuperVISION, providing another set of eyes and ears to have conversations about practice. With this tool, the principal collects evidence from teaching episodes and analyzes evidence with the teacher, that in sum leads to that teacher's evaluation, based on their goal. While the tools and frameworks are unpublished, they are available through teacher and leadership preparation programs that rely on providing candidates with more effective ways to use evidence to support teacher observation and feedback.

Table 2

*Revision of Danielson Framework*

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Danielson FfT “Distinguished” Rubric	CRP Enriched Rubric
Learning activities are suitable to diverse learners and support instructional outcomes. They are all designed to engage students in high-level cognitive activity and are differentiated, as appropriate, for individual learners.	Learning activities build on the lived experiences of diverse learners and support instructional outcomes. They engage students in high-level cognitive activity and are differentiated, as appropriate, for individual learners acknowledging issues of culture, semantics, accents, dialects and language facility. Differences in student responsiveness to different types of rewards for high achievement are considered.

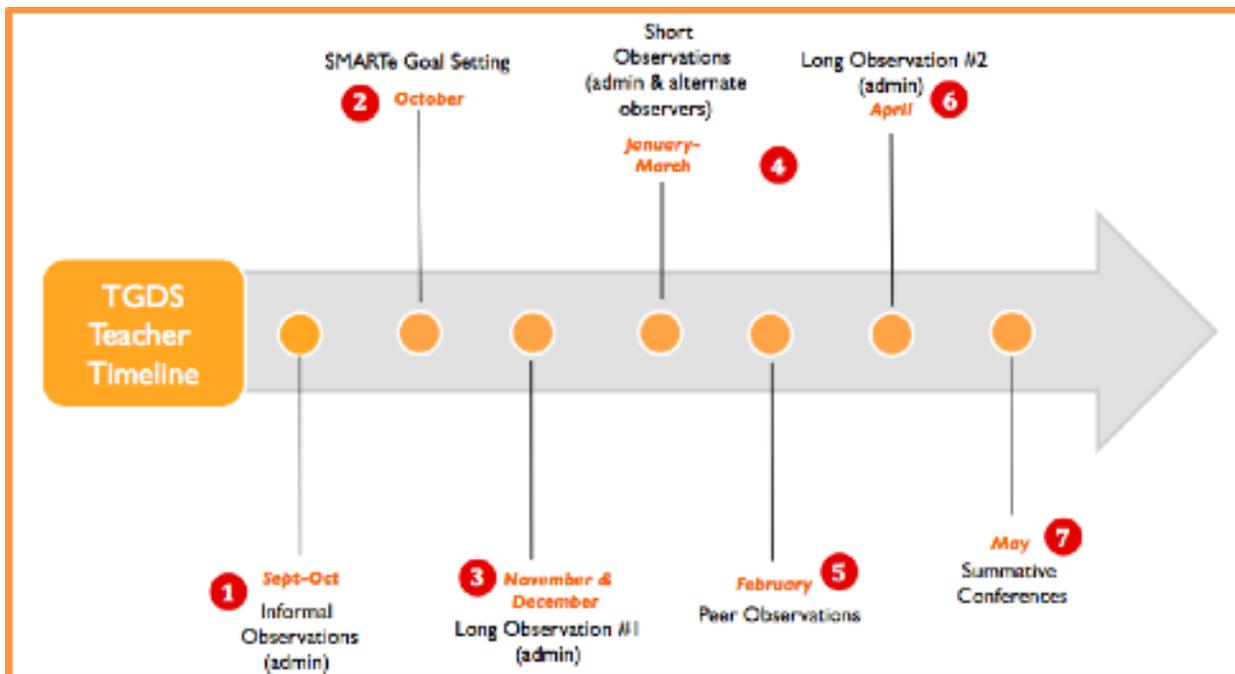
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*Note.* (Danielson, 2013; Irvine & Hawley, n.d.).

### *A Model of Effective Evaluation*

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has developed a growth and development model for teacher evaluation that is a parallel process for principal evaluation (OUSD, 2015-2016). Throughout the academic year teachers are provided with feedback and opportunities to reflect on practice. In addition, the model makes use of a range of observation types: informal, long, short, peer, and the use of alternates. Observers collect evidence of learning using the indicators from the Oakland Effective Teaching Framework (OUSD, 2015-2016). Figure 3 shows the process during the school year. In the Teacher Growth and Development System, mid-year evaluations in 2014 in that district revealed that in the sixteen pilot schools, 84% of the teachers reported the usefulness and value of the new system in which they chose, with the principal supervisor, specific goals of improvement. OUSD achieved constituent buy-in by engaging teachers in a five-year process to iteratively look at research, videotape, and analyze practices in their district, and write and pilot the situated, place-based development tool. The OUSD process was used to design place-based processes in the participatory action research project of Paryani (2019). She relied on the OUSD tools and processes to design local tools with co-practitioner researchers for the school's evaluation process for teachers. Paryani, a principal in an international school, engaged her dissertation CPR team to conduct peer observations in addition to her principal observations; they used the tools of Acheson and Gall (2003), specifically selective verbatim, teacher movement, and student-teacher interaction to design a tailor-made observation and evaluation process (Paryani, 2019).

I anticipated that these frameworks, tools, and processes would be a part of the PAR process in which I engaged, noting that, even if the process has been conducted previously, it was valuable to my context in an independent school. Every time a new group of teachers takes



*Note.* (OUSD, 2015-2016).

*Figure 3.* The Oakland USD teacher growth and development system.

on situated learning in their context, they develop themselves professionally. The principal's role is to support the direction of that learning while holding some expertise and having the advantage of observing all classrooms in the school, which is one of my roles as an elementary principal.

### Summary

In sum, evidence from the normative and research literature confirms the ineffectiveness of traditional forms of evaluation and feedback and necessitates a new model for instructional improvement that includes improved methods of observation and evaluation. The literature review reveals these *pro forma* models are not grounded in principles of learning and schools are not organized to support teacher learning.

The goal of this study was to explore a new pathway to instructional improvement through observational feedback that is used by teachers to co-construct knowledge of instructional practices and improve the conditions in which students receive equitable access to and increased rigor in learning. Further, I attempted to engage teachers in a process to generate knowledge of practice from the inside-out and answer the research question: *To what extent can evidence based observations inform and transform teacher practice?* (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Grubb & Tredway, 2010). The PAR is situated within the extant literature on feedback and evaluation and provides the opportunity to create a learning space in our school that is focused on teacher growth and development: observational feedback is most effective when it is tethered with constructivist conversations about the learning that has been observed.

The review revealed the importance for principals to have knowledge of how adults learn so they can be effectively supported to learn and grow. Equally important, principals must know how to create the conditions in which teachers can learn, grow, and improve their instructional

practices. In light of the fact that traditional practices of providing observational feedback based on cookie cutter evaluation systems continue to be used in schools and continue to be a theme for academic discourse, I believe the PAR added a new dimension to the discourse on the role of the principal as instructional leader and created an opportunity for some teachers at my school to grow and improve their instructional practices.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE STUDY CONTEXT**

The purpose of the chapter is to provide a detailed account of where and with whom the PAR project took place. The project attempted to get proximate to the work in my school by grounding the PAR in an equity stance and applying the Community Learning Exchange axioms, “the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns” and “hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities” (Guajardo et al., 2016). As a critical approach to addressing equity issues in the school, Participatory Action Research (PAR) strives for an outcome that serves the goals of the research and makes a significant impact on the instructional practices of the teachers in the school.

The chapter outlines the context and setting in which I work as the Junior School Principal in an independent International Baccalaureate school in British Columbia, where I conducted the PAR project. In the chapter, I introduce the people I work with, the educators involved in the PAR, and I outline the equity dilemmas that led me to identify a Focus of Practice (FoP), and define an overarching research question that I attempted to answer through an inquiry process with a group of teacher participants. Finally, I relate my leadership journey and outline my role in this research project with the participants and describe how I envisioned my work as a researcher-practitioner participating in and leading this project.

### **Power of Place: The School Context**

Founded in the year 2000, the school has been built on the hopes and dreams of the founders who, at that time, desired a different kind of education for their young children. The school started out in a rented space while the founders sought an appropriate site to establish the school. Once a site was identified the school grew in population and the founders set out to establish the school as a unique entity within the numerous established independent schools in

the region. Eventually, a director was hired who convinced the founders to pursue accreditation from the International Baccalaureate. The school was already licensed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education, but IB accreditation further strengthened the school's mission and vision of the future. I begin the section with a presentation of the school's context: the macro, meso, and micro influences on the school that have influenced the FoP and the PAR project.

### **Power of Place: Macro, Meso, and Micro**

The power of place examines how the three levels of context influenced the project; I examine the macro (provincial), meso (the organization), and micro (the Junior School) contexts. As indicated in the fishbone graphic and discussion in Chapter 1, there are assets and challenges at all three levels. The three levels are indeed powerful as a support, but concurrently, at times present challenges (Guajardo et al., 2016). At the macro level, the provincial government licensing process influences how the school operates. The Canadian Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) and the International Baccalaureate (IB) are two other influential organizations at the macro level. At the meso level of the school as an organization, I present an overview of the organizational elements of the school that changed significantly in the four to five years prior to my arrival. At the micro level, I outline the impact of instability that influenced the FoP and the PAR project. The section places the equity dilemma in my school (student access to equitable instructional practices) at the center of the assets and challenges of the three levels of context.

#### **Macro Level**

The British Columbia Ministry of Education provides oversight, policy, and strategic direction to public schools and independent schools in the province. The Ministry licenses all private independent schools, which are required to implement the BC curriculum, and conducts regular inspections of independent schools to review school policies, facilities, curriculum

requirements, and standards related to student safety. The MoE significantly influences the ongoing operation of the school since the school's licensure is dependent on successful compliance with the MoE inspection processes and the educational policies and guidelines for all schools in the province. The work involved to maintain the license falls within the normative practices of the school; however, the work required to be ready for the regular inspection can take up to six months. In a small school, the process hinders efforts to improve practice by absorbing time and space set aside for professional learning. In addition to comply with the MoE, the school must uphold the set of standards and practices set by the IB to maintain the right to offer three IB programs. The accreditation processes and rotation of site visits can be seen in Table 3.

Another challenge posed by the MoE is in the certification and professional development of teachers in the province. The BC MoE Teacher Certification Branch (TCB) certifies all teachers in the province. Following successful certification, licensed teachers are not required to engage in professional learning, nor are they required to renew their certification: certification is for life. While teachers in the school have engaged in professional learning through online courses and workshops offered in the region, there are no requirements for them to do so. This negative policy inducement to professionalism informed the FoP, as the PAR project aimed to improve equitable student outcomes in K-5 classrooms through a collaborative approach to instructional improvement.

Maintaining the IB PYP program requires the school to engage in a recursive process of self-study and review. The challenge for the school is that each IB program -- PYP, MYP, and DP -- requires separate self-studies. In addition to the IB inspection, the MoE cycle of review every six years has placed the school in a continuous cycle of review by external agencies. In

Table 3

*Accrediting Agencies Cycles of Review*

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Agency	Cycle of Review
Ministry of Education	Interim review every two years
	Full review every six years
Canadian Association of Independent Schools	Every seven years following initial accreditation
International Baccalaureate	Every five years

2019 the school applied for CAIS accreditation, leading to a year-long self-study involving every member of the school staff. Successful completion of the CAIS accreditation requires the school to follow yet another cycle of reaccreditation.

Accreditation processes from three different external agencies have kept the school on a constant treadmill of self-study work, accrediting agency inspection preparations, inspection team visits which take place over several days, and the subsequent work that follows the on-site inspections and visits. As an independent school, accreditations are necessary to attract families considering private independent education for their children. However, the time and resources allocated to reaccreditation--instead of addressing the knowledge and skills of the teaching staff—are a challenge for the school organization. Further, when teachers have received professional training, the purpose has been to fulfill the requirements for reaccreditation first, and for potential learning second. Two dilemmas surfaced from the maintenance of multiple accreditations and the absence of commitment to professional learning: instructional practices were not aligned in key areas of the curriculum such as literacy and numeracy, and teachers had not been held accountable to improve their instructional practices.

### **Meso Level**

The school is a member of the Independent Schools Association of BC (ISABC), an organization that supports the private independent schools in BC through networking and opportunities for collaboration. The organization has working groups in place for teachers, curriculum coordinators, principals, and school directors and once each year hosts a professional development day for all ISABC members. The ISABC offers professional learning opportunities to new teachers, to educators interested in entering into a principalship, and to principals interested in becoming a head of school. However, the organization does not provide

opportunities for principals to develop knowledge and skills in their current role. The support for school principals' ongoing leadership development is a topic I broached with the director of the organization in June of 2020:

I am wondering if the ISABC has designed a program to support independent schools' principals' growth and development. I have looked at the website and I do not see anything specific related to principals. Might you know of opportunities in BC for principals to engage in professional learning? (M. Palmer, personal communication, June 14, 2020).

At the meso level of school context, I began to see opportunity to influence the learning of others within the network of independent schools in BC. I believed the challenges at the micro level in my school existed in other independent schools.

### **Micro Level**

The school has experienced significant staff turnover in the year of my arrival. Further, teachers expressed concern about the number of directors the school had hired in a short period of time and the number of long-term teachers who had left the school prior to my arrival. The degree of change in a short period of time led teachers to feelings of uncertainty about the future of the school and their work. I observed the ways in which long-term teachers expressed strong connections to each other and to the school. They used words such as pride, trust, and tight knit community when speaking about the school. A core group of teachers upheld a unique culture that centered on their relationships and shared history. I viewed the positive shared feelings about the school as both an asset and a challenge for the FoP and PAR. The dominant culture focused on creating a strong social community among teachers, but teachers' attention to teaching and learning and, therefore, instructional improvement, was not as evident. As a new

principal, I was challenged to create a culture focused on learning. I understood the systems world needed the lifeworld; I also understood the lifeworld could flourish without the systems world (Sergiovanni, 2000). It was my challenge to leverage what was available in the systems world and use the leverage to shift the lifeworld toward a culture of professional learning and instructional improvement.

The macro, meso, and micro contexts of my school presented assets and challenges for the FoP and PAR project. I knew I needed to draw on the assets of the school to address the challenges, and that became an ongoing theme in the PAR process. The accreditations and association with the ISABC presented critical leverage points for change in the PAR project as I was able to draw from the established Ministry of Education curriculum content, IB standards and practices, CAIS self-study, and ISABC professional network to remind teachers that school is about learning. I now turn to present the people I worked with during the PAR project.

### **The PAR Participants**

My tenure at the school began at the outset of PAR Cycle One. As a principal new to the school, developing professional relationships with teachers and school leaders was a priority. After consulting with my dissertation adviser, I decided to refocus the PAR by engaging in a diagnostic approach to learn more about the teachers and the school. I used the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) framework and pedagogies to engage with teachers twice during PAR Cycle One (Guajardo et al., 2016). On October 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, I invited the Junior School teachers to participate in a CLE. The teachers who attended consisted of homeroom teachers, subject specialist teachers such as the Design class teacher, the Physical Education teacher, Music teacher, Special Education teacher, and two Resource Teachers (certified teachers who work with multiple classrooms supporting student learning in small groups and one-on-one). The

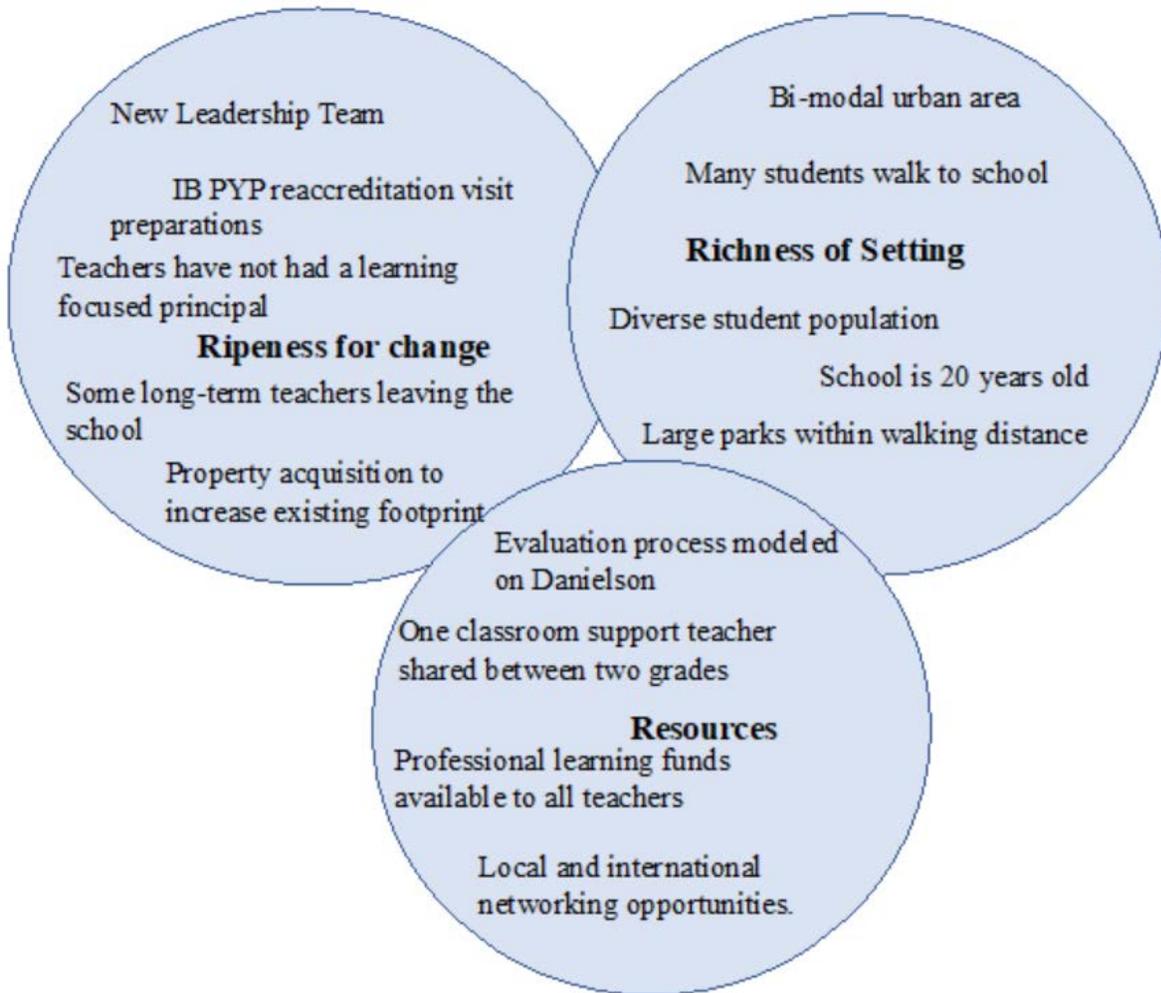
CLEs provided teachers with the opportunity to engage in a learning experience different from a typical meeting. Following the two CLEs in October 2019, I believed I had set the stage for teachers to feel comfortable to engage in some PAR activities.

PAR included active teacher participants; however, data collection was interrupted during PAR Cycle Two due to COVID-19. I continued to engage with a range of teachers through the PAR Cycles Two and Three to gather evidence of teachers' readiness to improve instruction and to focus on my ability to have post-observation conversations using observational evidence. I turn now to a presentation of the equity challenges in the school.

### **Circle of Equity**

The PAR project aimed to examine how a Junior School principal (K-5) can increase teacher and leader capacity to have effective conversations about teaching and learning that lead to improved classroom instructional practices. The section presents three elements that support students' access to equitable instruction in the school and impact the FoP: the school's ripeness for change, richness of the school setting, and resources available to teachers and students (see Figure 4). The changes in leadership provided opportunities for the director and principals to consider how they wanted the school to grow into the next phase of development. While COVID-19 presented a challenge to developing the school campus master plan, the senior leadership continued to explore ways to improve the school and one area of untapped potential was the teaching staff.

Teachers have access to professional learning opportunities through the local network of ISABC schools' working groups of teachers and subject specialists. The IB provides teachers with learning opportunities through a range of formal and informal networks such as the British Columbia Association of IB World Schools (BCAIBWS), and informal networks on a range of



*Figure 4. Circles of equity: Assets and challenges.*

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social media platforms. Due to the IB programs, the school is required to ensure all teachers receive verified IB PYP training in the form of face-to-face or online workshops. While the requirement for training is an asset for teachers' instructional improvement, teacher participation in IB PYP workshops was determined by teachers' individual preferences. Teachers attending workshops individually meant the learning often remained isolated from the other teachers.

I was pleased to learn that, prior to my arrival, the school used a framework for observation and evaluations. The Danielson (2013) Framework for Teaching provided me with a starting point from which I could learn and begin to engage in conversations with teachers about practice. Having a tool such as Danielson meant the school was interested in supporting teachers' growth and development. The challenge for a new principal is understanding how to use Danielson without having established trusting relationships based on mutual respect. While I saw the framework as an asset, I was challenged by the absence of a process in the school; there was no official timeline for implementation. I used the framework to introduce teachers to a model of evaluation they could learn from and then engage with me in developing a model that would be tailored to their needs.

The IBPYP framework provides teachers with an opportunity to develop instructional practices that are equitable and developmentally appropriate. The PYP supports a constructivist approach to teaching and learning and posits that learners construct (co-construct) meaning through a process of problem- or dilemma-posing, analyzing data, forming hypotheses, testing the hypothesis, and arriving at a conclusion. Constructivist pedagogy is not new to education and emerged from the work of Dewey, Bruner, Piaget, and Vygotsky, who promoted a student-centered epistemology. While this form of teaching is the foundation of IB, teachers were not always engaging in constructivist pedagogy promoted by the IB PYP and continued to rely

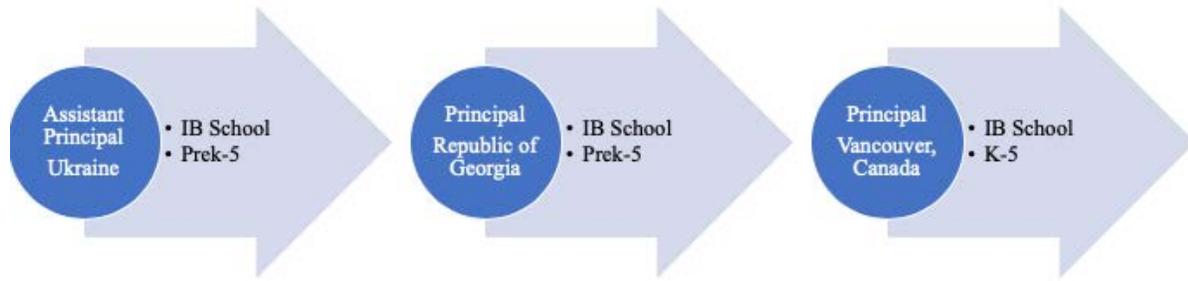
largely on teacher-directed practices that did not challenge students at high levels of thinking.

As principal, I attempted to coordinate the assets of ripeness for change, richness of location, and school resources to leverage improvements to the instructional practices in the school. The untapped potential of teachers' instructional practices formed the basis for the FoP and aim of the PAR project, and I remain hopeful that the assets can be further leveraged to influence teachers to make changes to their instructional practices following the PAR project.

### **The Role of the Researcher-Principal**

The final section of the chapter examines my role as both an educator, a school leader, and a researcher in my context. The section highlights my leadership journey, the assets I believe I bring to this work, and my work as the PAR project facilitator. My leadership journey has taken me to international schools in Ukraine; The Republic of Georgia; Istanbul, Turkey, and now to an independent K-12 school in Canada (see Figure 5). My work-related experiences, professional learning, and the learning I am engaged in as a doctoral student in the educational leadership program at East Carolina University are assets that I used as leverage to enact change in the Junior School.

In 2009, I was promoted from classroom teacher to Assistant Principal in the elementary section (Pre-K to Grade 5) at a private international school that was implementing the IB PYP. The position gave me access to professional learning experiences both formal and informal with the other administrators and with the board of governors. The Principals' Training Center (PTC), for example, offered me high impact professional development and a Certificate of International School Leadership that introduced "essential skills" for becoming an effective school leader. While in the AP/PYP coordinator role, I embraced the IB PYP and immersed myself in learning about best practices in pedagogy in all areas of the curriculum. Further, I learned about the value



*Figure 5. My journey line of school leadership.*

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of positive relationships with teachers based on mutual respect as I attempted to influence teachers' instructional practices. Though I possessed a strong theoretical foundation in school leadership and had enjoyed some extended periods of time to step into the role as acting principal, I did not have a mentor leader to whom I could turn to for guidance and support, someone I could look to for inspiration and modelling. In other words, I had the 'what' and 'why' of school leadership, but no strong models of the 'how'.

My first principal role began at an international school in the Republic of Georgia. During the first year, I introduced a few changes in the assessment processes and acquired the support of a literacy consultant to support instruction in writing. Unfortunately, I did not remain long enough to observe the impact of these changes as it became apparent that the challenges the school faced in acquiring and retaining experienced teachers for longer than 24 months resulted in little traction for new initiatives and projects. While my first principalship was rewarding and provided me with opportunities to develop a stronger understanding of the work involved in a change effort, the school's owner did not seem fully invested in improving the culture of learning at the school.

### **Summary**

Entering a new school as a new principal in 2019 was a challenge because I was entering PAR Cycle One without knowing the teachers. At this point in my career in education, I had accumulated nearly 20 years of experience working in IB schools, one of the reasons I was hired. Regardless of the depth of IB experience, international school leadership, and that I was beginning the PAR project, I experienced hesitancy from some of the teaching staff. Regardless of what I experienced, I continued working as the principal and school leader while drawing on

the assets, knowledge, and wisdom of the teaching staff by including them in planning processes and decision making.

How could I begin to see the changes I wanted to see in the school? What kinds of activities would teachers engage in so they could begin to see the value in learning how to improve? To answer these questions, I slowed down the scope of changes I wanted, continued to establish relationships with staff based on trust, and actively listened to and supported the hopes and dreams of teachers. As a result, the PAR project exemplifies the early stages of a new principal learning about the school culture and using iterative evidence to keep focused on long-term goals while adjusting immediate expectations.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Participatory Action Research**

In the participatory action research (PAR) study, I investigated a reimagined role for myself as the principal and instructional leader and determined what supports were most effective with teachers. As a principal new to the school in Fall 2019, I needed to make space for developing relational trust for teachers to gain the confidence to take up improvement practices. I began the PAR study by getting to know teachers and the school and, in doing so, I was partially able to assess the assets and challenges the teachers faced as educators in the school. As I gained insight into the school culture and the hopes and dreams of teachers and included them as participants in the study, I conducted observations and post-observation conversations as part of the study and as support for my emerging knowledge and skills as the instructional leader in the school.

During three iterative inquiry cycles, I conducted a series of experiments or safe-fail probes to determine the optimal conditions in which teachers are ready to learn (Snowden, 2007). By the third cycle in Fall 2020, as I continued to work with teachers on a writing workshop reform, I could see that to identify teacher conditions for readiness to learn, I would need to ascertain their zones of proximal learning using the tools to mediated learning (Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Indeed, the PAR process, which engaged the participants in action research as participants, is exactly what hunter et al. (2013) contends: “a messy, iterative, and generative approach that is constantly being made and remade in a place-based context” (p. 26).

In this chapter, I introduce the research design and research questions; then I describe the activities that we undertook in three iterative cycles of inquiry and the processes of data collection and analysis. I discuss the limitations of the study and ethical issues that I considered.

One of my main responsibilities as principal is to nurture a culture of learning that encourages teachers to improve their instructional practices. I chose a qualitative research design and participatory action research approach because it allowed me to act as a research practitioner and support the teachers to make changes in their instructional practices. Action research is a collaborative research design that encourages the researcher to engage others to “transform schools and educational practices” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018, p. 589). Learning emerges iteratively from the lived experiences of people who are engaged in the work (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Militello et al., 2009). Qualitative research, following the parallel process of analyzing data iteratively, allows the researcher to adapt to changes that may occur in the perceptions and experiences of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2018).

In the PAR study, I aimed to increase the knowledge and skills of teachers and the principal that would improve effective conversations about teaching and learning. Teacher learning is best realized in the context of the schoolhouse (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and, therefore, the action and research components of the PAR study proved a powerful design for answering the research questions. Further, while I facilitated three iterative cycles of PAR, I modeled best practices as an instructional leader committed to improvement and continuously pushed forward to create the optimal conditions for teachers to take up aligned and equitable instructional practices. Thus, the PAR inquiry cycles framed both action and research to engage participants in the cycles and guide them toward growth and change. As I learned about the school, the teachers, and the teaching and learning, I adapted the probes to meet the participants at their levels of readiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I grounded the PAR cycles of inquiry in improvement sciences and Community Learning

Exchange (CLE) as processes and methodology (Bryk et al., 2015; Guajardo et al., 2016). The combination of gathering evidence, analyzing, reflecting, and acting emulated the PDSA cycles of the improvement sciences (Bryk et al., 2015). PDSA cycles are short cycles of inquiry of plan-do-study-act that may not always work with the participants the researcher is attempting to involve. When I introduced the CLE methodology and pedagogies, teachers indicated they appreciated the process and requested that we continue to use these processes. My selection of CLE pedagogies as tools to mediate learning and generate qualitative data acknowledges the importance of the teachers' work and my work as an instructional leader: learning is a leadership act (Guajardo et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991).

### **Research Questions and Theory of Action**

An overarching question and three sub-questions guided the PAR. The overarching research question was: *To what extent can the school's instructional leader support teachers to transform their practice?*

The sub-questions, on which I collected and analyzed data, were:

1. How does a principal new to a school build relational trust and uncover teachers' beliefs and values?
2. How do the principal and teachers collaboratively develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for improving instructional practices?
3. To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?

The theory of action was: If a principal more deeply understands teachers' beliefs and values and builds relational trust, then the principal and teachers can collaboratively develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to improve instructional practices. Therefore, as principal, I had the

responsibility of setting and sustaining the conditions in which teachers learn to improve. Thus, the study met the necessary criteria for participatory action research by (a) the collaboration of the local community members in setting the agenda for a collaborative project and, (b) the assurance that the relevant stakeholders are able to participate and contribute their knowledge and actions (Greenwood, 2008).

### **Study Participants**

The reflexive nature of a qualitative research design recognizes how the backgrounds and experiences of participants and principal researcher contribute to the interpretations of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants in the study were teachers in the school. While a large number of teachers participated in CLEs (n=32), I worked with a smaller number of teacher participants in PAR Cycles Two and Three (n=12). I approached the entire staff with an invitation to act as participants at the outset of PAR Cycle Two and, in the end, conducted observations in a range of classrooms, including grade level content homerooms, art, music, and design.

The CLEs I held in PAR Cycle One allowed me to learn more about the teachers and the school. As I began to learn more about the culture, I was curious to know about the teaching and learning. Nearly 50% of the teaching staff had been at the school for ten or more years, half the life of the school, some had been in the school three to five years, and the balance of teachers had arrived with me for the first time in August of 2019. I came to know teachers and their work in PAR Cycle One through informal classroom observations and listening in on teacher planning meetings which provided further insight into teachers' knowledge and skills of teaching. I did not collect data from observations and planning meetings since I was in the process of developing relational trust with teachers, and any sign that I was gathering evidence may have

been perceived as evaluative or judgmental. Key to the PAR success was establishing relational trust with the teaching staff at the outset of the study.

### **Cycles of Participatory Action Research**

I framed the PAR activities from my understanding of constructivist learning theory and building a community of learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). The activities are outlined in Table 4. In understanding the importance of adult learning theory, I was interested in how the school can be knowledge-centered for teachers and develop their knowledge-in- and knowledge-of-practice (Drago-Severson, 2012; Kelly, 2006; Knowles, 1984). The major activities consisted of meetings, often in the form of the community learning exchanges, observations, post-observation conversations, and memos. From each of these I collected and analyzed qualitative data. I discuss briefly the three cycles of inquiry in which we engaged over a period of 18 months, with the caveat that in March 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all learning was shifted to virtual learning, which resulted in a short second cycle.

Short cycles of inquiry are typical of participatory action research and of the improvement science model; the participants plan and do before they study and act, following the PDSA cycle of inquiry model from Bryk et al. (2015). This model urges participants to plan and act in small ways to test out possible solutions, similar to safe-fail probes (Snowden, 2007); then they collect and analyze data (study) to make decisions about adjustments before fully acting in a decisive way to address the challenges raised by the FoP. This iterative process of diagnose and design supports participants to experiment, collect, and analyze evidence to re-design before deciding to fully act (Spillane, 2013). In the three cycles of PAR in the study, we enacted the plan-do (P-D) components of PDSA and emulated what Snowden (2007) refers to as safe-fail probes; however, teacher readiness and my knowledge and skills were not fully

Table 4

*PAR Cycle Timeline of Activities*

Goals	Activities	Key Personnel
PAR Cycle Two: January-March 2020		
Coming to know the school community, their hopes and dreams for their children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishbone analysis of assets and challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal researcher</li> </ul>
Conducted preliminary observations and have conversations with teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Learning Exchange</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher participants</li> </ul>
PAR Cycle Two: January-March 2020		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated discussions about practice by examining observational evidence</li> <li>• Learned to use a range of evidence-based observation tools</li> <li>• Began to develop facilitate post-observation conversation skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom observations and conversations</li> <li>• Analysis of evidence from observations and conversations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal researcher</li> <li>• Teacher participants</li> </ul>
PAR Cycle Three: September-October 2020		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated discussions that led teachers to take up a new instructional practice</li> <li>• Used evidence-based observation tools to support teachers' next steps in writing instruction</li> <li>• Hired a literacy coach to support teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom observations</li> <li>• Community Learning Exchange</li> <li>• Collection and analysis of evidence</li> <li>• Member check of effective conversation data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal researcher</li> <li>• Teacher participants</li> </ul>

developed within the fourteen months of PAR and, therefore, the study-act components of PDSA were not fully realized. While the study has been completed for purposes of the dissertation, I continue to support teachers in implementing the writing project which moved toward the study stage following the end of PAR Cycle Three.

### **PAR Cycle One: Fall 2019**

In this cycle, I deepened my knowledge of the school community. I used the CLE pedagogical approaches to discover and uncover some of the educational beliefs and values of the teachers through their interactions and the artifacts collected from the CLEs. In the CLE process, I gained insight to the school's culture: some teachers identified with the school as social community and others viewed the school as a learning community. The constituents in the two communities overlapped; however, the evidence that emerged from the cycle indicated that some teachers represented a growing interest in professional learning.

CLEs provided me the opportunity to become acquainted with the school as a community of learners and generated initial data on all of the research questions. In addition, I wrote reflective memos about my impressions and sightings to triangulate the evidence. I then coded the data using an open coding method (Saldaña, 2016). As I reviewed the data, I refined the codes and reflected on the research questions to set the stage for PAR Cycle Two observations and post-observation conversations.

### **PAR Cycle Two: Spring 2020**

At the outset of the second cycle, I invited teachers to participate (n=8) in observations and conversations about the observational evidence. I consulted several research-based tools that featured in the practice literature and began with a feedback tool and teacher utilization of space tool (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013). The tools provided evidence that prompted teachers to consider

the feedback they were giving to students; however, the tools allowed for a level of subjectivity that I was not comfortable with. I then turned to my dissertation supervisor for advice. She recommended selective verbatim (Acheson & Gall, 2003) as a powerful evidence-based observation process. Once I began using selective verbatim, the conversations with teachers focused more on the evidence and their practices. In addition to gathering observational evidence, I began to use the Effective Conversations Guide (Tredway et al., 2020) as a diagnostic to track my effectiveness in post-observation conversations. The tool includes 24 pre-determined codes as criteria. I used the codes as a self-reflective tool to determine my effectiveness in each of the criterion. I continued to use the tool in PAR Cycle Three to determine the areas in which I improved. As a result of the evidence from PAR Cycle Two, including class observations and discussions with teachers, I decided to engage a consultant to prepare the staff to use the Lucy Calkin's Writing Workshop method.

### **PAR Cycle Three: Fall 2020**

Due to the late school start, September 9, and the ever-changing parameters set by the Ministry of Health, I had a short amount of time for PAR Cycle Three. However, I facilitated a CLE with teachers on September 8 prior to the school opening as a way to meet with teachers in their preferred format to learn from them better ways for me to engage in observations and conversations. The evidence from this cycle of PAR provided further support to the research sub-questions and highlighted the ways in which my instructional leadership practices had become more consultative and collaborative.

The teachers also had the first sessions of the Writing Workshop at the beginning of the school year. To monitor its success, I decided to focus on a small group of teachers who were excited about its implementation and I observed their work and the assets they brought to the

teaching of writing. I continued to use selective verbatim to gather observational evidence of teacher practice, and I continued to use the Effective Conversations Guide during post-observation conversations. Notably, following the introduction of Writing Workshop, teachers arrived at the conversations already knowing their next steps. By focusing on a teacher's assets during observations, post-observation conversations were not guarded, in sharp contrast to the guardedness I encountered in PAR Cycle Two. During the final of three cycles of PAR, I began to see the intersection of teachers' readiness and the principal's skill set.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Qualitative research is focused on the participants and their perceptions and experiences. I used multiple data sources and analyses of these sources in order to make sense of the data and the meaning that emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research included an analysis of several forms of qualitative data related directly to my role as a principal and researcher: (a) classroom observations; (b) post-observation conversations; (c) meeting notes; and (d) reflective memos. Within each cycle of PAR, I analyzed the data from CLE artifacts, classroom observations, and post-observation conversations, and I coded data first using a process of open coding and then using axial coding, a way to create links between the codes. Then, I was able to determine categories of codes to emergent themes and then findings (Saldaña, 2016).

In the section, I describe each of the data instruments in more detail.

### **CLE Protocols as Artifacts**

CLE pedagogies are dynamic and iterative and provide visual and written data on participants' experiences, attitudes, and understandings. The CLE pedagogies supported PAR as an inclusive methodology for the teachers and I to learn more about each other and develop relational trust. From CLEs, I gathered artifacts that included photos that teachers captioned,

poems that they wrote, and criteria they developed for the principal to use for observations and post-observation conversations. The CLE artifacts provided data on the teachers' shared experiences and generated conversations around teachers' beliefs and values. Further, CLE pedagogies were new to teachers at my school and, following the first two CLEs in Cycle One, teachers asked for more. In PAR Cycle Three, during a CLE, teachers commented that CLE was a good way to engage teachers in observations and conversations about student learning. Using the CLE pedagogies throughout the PAR provided me with a sustained inclusive methodology that contributed to the study findings: CLEs supported teachers' readiness to learn and the development of the principal's knowledge and skills.

### **Classroom Observations and Post-Observation Notes**

In classroom observations, I collected data on teachers' instructional practices using tools that generated evidence that I then analyzed to answer the research questions. Initially, I experimented with various tools and then settled on using selective verbatim to support teachers and create the conditions for rich conversations about classroom evidence. The selective verbatim is best suited to observe effective teaching practices as it provides opportunity for the principal and teacher to work "together to generate more effective teaching techniques" (Acheson & Gall, 2003, p. 147). The aggregate data evidenced by observations informed conversations about instructional practice. In much the same way, meeting notes from the post-observation conversations provided a source of data about my ongoing discussions with teachers and the effectiveness of the conversations.

### **Memos**

Throughout the research process, I wrote reflective memos following CLEs, observations, and post-observation meetings. As part of my course work, I wrote additional

memos on my learning about school leadership. Memos provided space for me to reflect and acted as evidence of my growth as an instructional leader. To address the research questions framed around my growth as a school leader, I coded reflective memos to identify themes and patterns that led me to better understand my professional growth and, further, helped to answer the overarching research question. Writing memos about my experiences and learning provided evidence for and insight into the research questions. I utilized reflective memos from my observations, post-observation conversations, and CLEs. This data source was vital to measure the extent to which I was able to answer the research related to my leadership and supported triangulation of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) likens the analysis of the data in an action research project to peeling back the layers of an onion. For the PAR, the process included organizing and preparing the data, coding, generating a description of the data, identifying patterns and themes that emerged from the coding, and displaying data in tables, figures, and other visuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). Each research question was associated with data sources and triangulated by reflective memos as outlined in Table 5.

As I collected each piece of data, I used an open coding process to understand and make meaning of the evidence I had gathered. The coding process was iterative. As I worked with the data, I was able to refine codes through two or three coding cycles. Some data were easier to code than others; however, the open coding process allowed me to arrive at the categories. In PAR Cycle One, I generated a list of codes that were unique to the cycle because the evidence I gathered from the CLEs was different from the evidence gathered using selective verbatim.

Table 5

*Research Questions and Associated Sources of Data*

Research Question (sub-questions)	Data Source (Metrics)	Triangulated With
How does a principal new to a school build relational trust and uncover teachers' beliefs and values?	CLE Artifacts	Reflective Memos
How do the principal and teachers collaboratively develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for improving instructional practices?	Observations Post-observation meeting notes	Reflective Memos
To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal	Observations Post-observation meeting notes	Reflective Memos

Data from observations and post-observation conversations led to codes related to teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions. I continued to use PAR Cycle Two codes in PAR Cycle Three. However, an additional set of unique codes surfaced from the CLE I held on September 8, 2020. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe two of these types of codes: surprising codes that could not be anticipated before the study, and unusual codes sometimes termed outliers as they spark interest and may lead to new knowledge (Saldaña, 2016). In the end, I analyzed data sets that were unique to each PAR cycle.

Finally, as I analyzed the data from three cycles of inquiry, I found that I needed additional analysis tools to fully understand the nature of participatory action research and the iterative processes. I used the fail-safe probe analyses of Snowden (2007) and Riddell and Moore (2015) to fully understand how to engage in a social innovation at the school site. As I used these systemic analysis tools to examine the data and emergent themes, I saw a different pattern of activity that revealed the importance of what I can do to understand the findings: meeting teachers at their level of readiness was critical for improving teacher practice.

### **Study Limitations**

Limitations to this study may be found in more than one of the contributing elements. In the section, I discuss the role of insider as researcher, the size of the study, and validity issues. As the principal research practitioner, I acted as a committed insider studying my practice as a school leader and the practices of the teachers in my school. I was aware that my positionality may have some influence on the outcomes of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2014). In particular, the biases I hold, my beliefs and values about education, and the fact that I am the school principal may have influenced behaviors of some of the teachers during observations and post-observation conversations. I declared my bias at the outset of the project and referenced my

positionality in reflective memos, yet evidence in PAR Cycle Two—teachers’ dispositions obfuscating the conversations about the observational data—suggests that my positionality did have some effect on the PAR. Further, I had recently returned to Canada after several years of teaching and leading in international IB schools. The context of the school was new to me in September 2019, when I began PAR Cycle One and, thus, may have influenced my expectations for the PAR. Arriving at a new school as a novice principal with a PAR project to conduct added a layer of complexity that I had to monitor throughout the process. However, I believe my role as research practitioner added value to the research process.

A second limitation is the size of the study, which affects its generalizability. The cycle of inquiry process is common in schools and using specific CLE pedagogies to enact the cycles of inquiry is a process that is generalizable to other contexts. The processes of observation and post-observation conversations are normative practices for principals and teachers and, therefore, generalizable. Because the sample size is small, I cannot make claims about the study’s usefulness on any large scale. However, I believe it can provide a process for others to undertake in their situated settings as I have drawn on the processes of other research practitioners (Paryani, 2019; Powell, 2019; Velasco, 2009).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) refer to qualitative validity and qualitative reliability in qualitative research. Herr and Anderson (2014) argue that a qualitative research study generates new knowledge and, therefore, the study may have dialogical and process validity for the participants. Since this study has contributed to the education of the researcher and is relevant to a local setting, the study has catalytic and democratic value. Finally, because I used sound methodology, the study has process validity.

The criteria of usefulness to participants in participatory action research is the key criteria

for validity (hunter et al., 2013), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the trustworthiness of a research study that is established, in part, by the study's credibility and confirmability. Hale (2008) says that "activist research methods [like participatory action research] have a built-in test of validity that is much more demanding and stringent than conventional alternatives" (p. 12). He contends that the primary validity standard is usefulness to the participants with whom the study is engaged.

I used these processes of triangulating data, clarifying bias, and developing thorough and detailed descriptions of the research setting as ways to ensure qualitative validity as well as credibility of the research. To ensure qualitative reliability and confirmability I have added to the Appendix an interview protocol and observation protocol that were used as means to gather data. Further, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the study, CITI certification, and consent to conduct research at my school are measures of credibility (see Appendix A and C).

### **Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations**

I obtained consent forms from all teacher participants (see Appendix D). At any time during the study, a participant could choose to stop participating and withdraw consent without reprisal. The study was flexible enough that new participants could join at any point. As both research practitioner and principal where the study was being conducted, I took responsibility for ensuring proper use of confidentiality agreements and research waivers. All data were held by me either digitally or in hard copy form and kept in a secure location. Participants were given pseudonyms, and sensitive data that can reveal identities of specific persons is obscured from the research report. I intend to destroy all the data after three years.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined the reasons for choosing a qualitative research design to answer

the research questions. Participatory action research is a practical method of answering the research questions and is well-suited to this study, since the research focused on a practical problem to which I sought a practical solution. As such, the participants were those fully involved in the school with direct access to addressing the focus of practice. I used three iterative cycles of inquiry for the PAR project and study that generated qualitative data, and the entire process was grounded in the experiences of the participant teachers at my school. Data gathered from multiple sources, including classroom observations, memos, and meeting notes were coded and analyzed to inform the next cycles of inquiry. In three iterative cycles of inquiry, I developed categories in Cycle One, emergent themes in Cycle Two, and findings in Cycle Three. Following the final inquiry cycle, I formulated claims and recommendations on how the research results can be used in the school and similar contexts. The three phases of PAR began with PAR Cycle One, on which I report in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5: PAR CYCLE ONE**

In the previous chapter, I outlined the rationale for a qualitative participatory action research design. Participatory action research (PAR) is a practical research method for examining a focus of practice grounded in day-to-day work (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). The PAR project was divided into three iterative cycles of inquiry over approximately fourteen months during which I collected and analyzed data from multiple sources to inform the iterative cycles of inquiry. In the first cycle of inquiry, I was a new principal in the school; thus, I focused on forming relationships by engaging with teachers and learning about their work. First, I outline the PAR Cycle One process that includes a description of the actions which I facilitated as the practitioner-researcher (see Table 6). Second, I present an analysis of the coded data and categories that emerged from the preliminary data. Finally, I examine the implications of the PAR results for the focus of practice, leadership, and PAR Cycle Two.

### **PAR Cycle One Processes**

The teaching staff (n=32) and I engaged in a process of developing relational trust while I gained a deeper understanding of the school through two Community Learning Exchanges (CLE) on October 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (Guajardo et al., 2016). The section describes PAR Cycle One activities, including the CLEs and the evidence that emerged to support the categories of codes presented in the analysis section, *Building on the Assets of People and Place*. Then, I describe the coding process and the codes assigned to the data.

### **PAR Activities**

Initiating a PAR cycle as a new principal at the school was more challenging than I anticipated. Early in PAR Cycle One, I understood I needed to revise my approach and took the

Table 6

*Summary of Activities in PAR Cycle One*

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Activity	Participants	Title	Summary
Community Learning Exchange #1	Teaching staff (n=12)	Power of place	Used a version of photo voice to capture the meaning teachers attach to the school.
Community Learning Exchange #2	Teaching staff (n=11)	Wisdom of the people	Used the poem <i>I come from a place where</i> to reveal teachers' hopes and dreams.
Reflective Memos			Wrote memos following CLE and observations.

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necessary time to learn about the school culture and context to build relationships that were fundamental to sustaining the project. To engage in the PAR work, I knew that I needed to pay more attention to first developing trust with teachers: “I continue to do my best at building trust with teachers and coordinators, listening and validating their work” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, September 20, 2019). I began to appreciate and more fully understand that teachers needed time to adjust to a new administrator before committing to being co-practitioner researchers; thus, I shifted from PAR inquiry to a diagnostic approach.

In this section, I present an overview of the PAR activities that provided initial evidence to answer the research questions:

Overarching research question: *To what extent can the school's instructional leader support teachers to transform their practice?*

Research sub-questions:

1. How does a principal new to a school build relational trust and uncover teachers' beliefs and values?
2. How do the principal and teachers collaboratively develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for improving instructional practices?
3. To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?

The PAR Cycle One activities from which I recorded and analyzed evidence included two meetings purposefully designed to produce evidence for the PAR, and reflective memos. I begin with a presentation of the Community Learning Exchange meetings which provided me with preliminary evidence about the culture of the school.

## Community Learning Exchanges

On October 16, 2019, I initiated the PAR with an invitation for teachers to engage in a Community Learning Exchange. A CLE provides an opportunity for teachers to engage with each other in ways that may be unfamiliar while allowing them to make meaning as a community of learners (Guajardo et al., 2016). Twelve teachers participated in the first CLE titled *The Power of Place: Uncovering the Power of [School Name]*. I invited teachers to take photographs of places in the school which represented their perspectives on the strengths of the school. At the CLE, each teacher captioned their photo with an explanation of how the photo represented the strengths of the school. They then shared the photos and captions in small, self-selected groups. The groups of four engaged in animated conversations about the photos, captions, and the meaning they derived from the photos. Participants placed the photos on a poster paper then recorded connections and commonalities between the captions. Following the conversations, participants summarized in a word or phrase the essence of the poster. One group attempted to synthesize a range of words into an equation: play and risk + growth and change + collaboration and community = school's culture (see Figure 6). The photos, captions, and connections revealed that teachers have a relationship with the school that is personal, professional, and community oriented.

Following the October 16<sup>th</sup> CLE, I understood I needed to look further into the hopes and dreams of the teachers at the school. I knew that the teachers had hidden talents, wisdom, and ideas about how to grow and improve. I sensed from the first CLE that the teachers who had a long history at the school may overshadow newer employees' desires to grow and learn. Further, with more than 20 years of experience working in schools, I understood the importance of creating the conditions for teachers to feel safe to take professional risks within the social culture

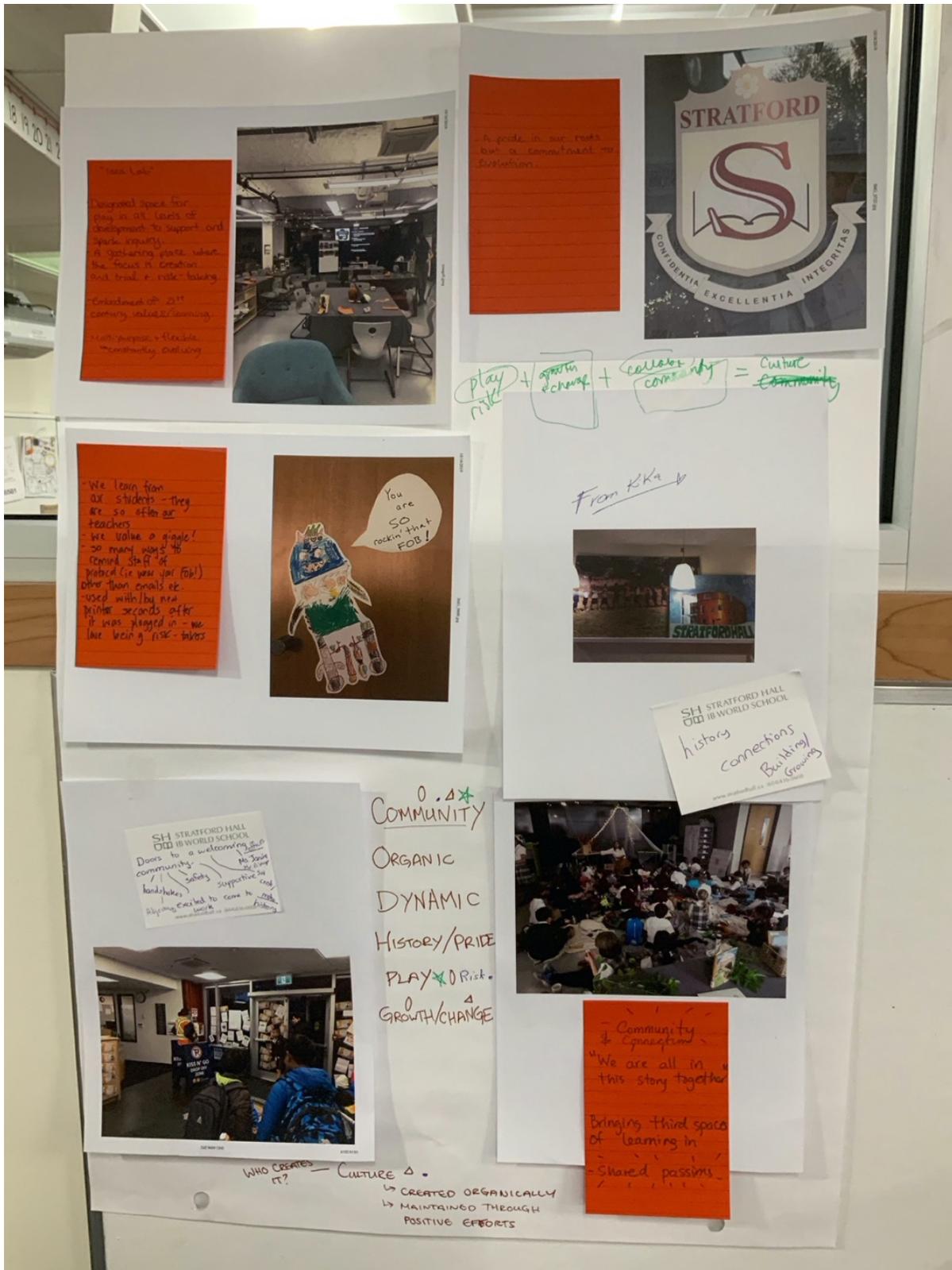


Figure 6. Power of place photo-voice activity poster.

of the school. Further, I had witnessed how teachers resist taking risks because “putting themselves out there feels too risky” (Harrison-Berg, 2019).

On October 30, I held a second CLE titled, *Wisdom of the People: Being Present to Deepen our Collective Work Together* as an attempt to mine the collective wisdom of teachers within the psychologically safe context of a CLE. I invited participants to write a three-stanza poem, one stanza for each line, beginning *I come from a place where, I am in a place where, and I am going to a place where* (with the third stanza written from their personal perspective as an educator). First, participants shared their poems in small groups; then, they wrote comments and words of support to their colleagues on each other’s chart paper (see Figure 7). Participants then chose one or more of the words such as *sharing, pride, creativity, inclusivity, and vulnerability* that teachers used to describe the best of the school in the *Power of Place* CLE. Teachers placed cards on the poems making a connection between the word from CLE #1 and the words of support written on stanza three of the *I come from a place where* poems. The teachers then discussed how they could transfer what they had learned about their colleagues to their work in the classroom. Table 7 shows the connections made between the third stanza of the poems, the attributes generated during the October 16<sup>th</sup> CLE, and the suggested support from the teachers on October 30<sup>th</sup>.

### **Reflective Memos**

Writing memos during PAR Cycle One provided me with a safe space to reflect on my impressions of the school, the teachers, and the work they engaged in with their students. In addition to reflecting on observations, the memos provided an opportunity for me to be vulnerable to myself in a psychologically safe way. As a new principal, new to the school, and to the district, I reached out to my dissertation supervisors for advice, guidance, and support:

I am going to a place where  
there will always be more  
wondering than answers  
Where others will touch my  
life in unforeseen ways and  
where I will leave fingerprints  
Where I will dive into pools  
where I hope to leave heavier  
than when I arrived

*Love this* (with a heart and arrow pointing to 'wondering')

*MORE ? THAN ANSWERS* (written above 'wondering')

*Support the unknown. The space where questions brew* (written below 'wondering')

*Knowing what makes a difference. Invite in alumni* (written next to 'fingerprints')

*#I'll go with you* (written above 'heavier')

*That says!* (written below 'heavier')

*reflecting on the start of a journey and the end* (written below 'arrived')

*#9* (written above 'arrived')

Figure 7. I come from a place poem with words of support added.

Table 7

*Transferring Hopes and Dreams to Classroom Practice*

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Stanza three: Hope or dream	Connection to <i>The Power of Place</i>	Suggestion of support
Support and challenge others	Tight knit	Proactively seek out a teacher to support initiative
Share my experience with others	Trust	Take the time to share something with another teacher and ask for feedback
Where I will learn and grow	Vulnerability	Spend time in another teacher's space

---

So far, the struggles I am having are internal as much as they are external. I have recently had a visit from my advisor who I asked to help design a Learning Exchange that I would lead with the teachers as a launch for my PAR I cycle of inquiry as I have been struggling with exactly how to get started. (M. Palmer, reflective memo, October 13, 2019).

The analysis of the reflective memos supported the categories of codes that surfaced in the PAR Cycle One, and provided initial evidence toward answering the research sub-question on leadership: *To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?*

### **Transferring Hopes and Dreams to Practice**

Prior to my arrival at the school, I was informed that teachers collaborate well together, regularly observe each other, and spend time in each other's classrooms, which led me to assume that an established dynamic culture of collaborative learning existed at the school. The ways in which teachers may transfer support from colleagues to classroom practice validated teachers' beliefs in the possibility that they can learn from each other. One teacher stated that "teachers think positively about what's happening" at the school, and "there's a lot of passion being put toward what's happening at the school" (Teacher 9, meeting notes, November 8, 2019).

However, the suggested practices for transfer are a further indication that collaboration between colleagues is not as strong as teachers perceive since each example is focused on individual efforts and not whole school collaboration.

Teachers stated a belief that they can learn from each other, and they articulated a willingness to support each other. However, they did not yet seem to be knowledgeable about the ways in which they can use their relationships as assets to transform their beliefs into actions, which would lead them toward deeper collaboration that supports meaningful changes in

classroom practice. The suggestions of support required a deeper look and more time than PAR Cycle One allowed. Normative practices such as professional development, guest speakers, and mentoring support growth and development of teachers, while suggestions such as “bring each other up when we are not ok” and “bring and share some of your own passions” refer to personal supports, but do not correlate to instructional improvement efforts (CLE artifacts, October 30, 2019). The two CLEs, practice interview, and memos provided a preliminary set of data to support an analysis that led to a set of codes and categories that serve as initial evidence to support the PAR.

### **Initial Coding**

Learning to code was a challenging process because I was learning to be specific in attempting open coding (Saldaña, 2016) (see Table 8). I needed to step back from the evidence to more deeply analyze how the evidence suggested more than the surface word or phrase, as I stated in a memo about my experience with the coding process:

[t]he challenge for a novice coder, or more precisely decoder, is getting to the terms that succinctly describe the underlying meaning of the data. In the first Community Learning Exchange, I noted overlapping data from the teachers’ words and experiences; I can see a bigger picture, but I cannot as easily see the words and phrases that capture these experiences. (M. Palmer, reflective memo, November 8, 2019).

Thus, the process required me to engage in a second and third analysis of the evidence to begin to make the connections and understand the evidence more deeply.

Several iterations of codes applied to the data from the two learning exchanges. At first, I observed only categories or overarching representations of codes, such as collaboration, vulnerability, and inclusivity. On a second pass, I stepped back and analyzed the data more

Table 8

*Initial Categories and Codes for PAR Cycle One*

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School as a social community	Frequency	School as a learning community	Frequency
Feelings of safety	5	Seeking personal growth	7
Feelings of pride	5	Seeking professional growth	10
Playing together	2	Seeking community	8
Collaborating together	3		

---

holistically and coded the photographs and captions with more specific phrases, such as working on safety, personal pride, making meaning, and feelings of ownership. The coding process revealed two categories: school as a social community and school as a learning community. I discuss this in the second section of the chapter; Building on the Assets of People and Place. I recognized that the initial codes and categories may change as I continued to engage in the PAR process; the categories represented what surfaced most frequently from the initial data gathered from the two CLEs.

As a result of their participation in the CLE processes, teachers began to open up about the school; but, as the new principal in the school, I was aware I had just begun to develop the relational trust needed to secure a commitment from teachers to participate in the study. The notion of relational trust is an abstract resource that must be cultivated over time; we cannot buy it (Grubb, 2009). Rather, I was attempting to co-create the conditions for fostering and sustaining the necessary trust to make substantive change. I had not yet acquired the confidence of the teachers for them to fully believe in my character and competence as a principal. Aguilar (2018) reminds us of the importance of relational trust in building healthy communities of people who work together and I knew I could not simply wait until the time was ripe. I began, as Aguilar states “to actively seek out and build trust with colleagues” (p. 100). The CLEs provided a process to learn more about the school and the teachers in a non-threatening setting that had low personal risk evident in the quotes from the CLE poems: “I am going to a place where I hope to learn more about myself,” and “these wisdom exchanges are the right place to do that” (CLE artifact, October 30, 2019). In the next section, I discuss the categories and the codes that resulted from the data collected during the PAR Cycle One.

## **Building on the Assets of People and Place**

Two learning exchanges brought teachers together to uncover their beliefs about the school and the ways in which they may support the hopes and dreams for themselves, each other, and their students. The PAR activities and reflective memos revealed two categories of codes: school as a social community and school as a learning community. The coded data from the activities demonstrate preliminary evidence about how the school is perceived by some teachers as a social community and, for others, how some teachers believe the school can support their growth and development as educators. Together, the two categories appear to determine conditions that support movement toward a stronger and more focused culture of learning (see Table 9).

### **School as a Social Community**

The first CLE on October 16 revealed the affective aspects of the teachers' experiences at the school. Feelings of pride emerged: the feelings are attached to the school's location in the community and to the teachers' feelings about their connection to the community and the school. Feelings of safety in the school are attributed to photos of physical places within and around the school building. Playing together was a code captured directly from words used by teachers and from the manner in which they engaged in discussion about the images and captions. Play was chosen by teachers as a significant feature in the culture of the school. Collaborating together referred to physical spaces such as the school staff room, and the sense that there is a mutual affectation among teachers. Subsequently, I discuss each code in more depth.

### ***Feelings of Pride***

The teachers and other members of the school community articulated three types of pride: pride in the neighborhood, pride in the school location in the neighborhood, and pride between

Table 9

*Definitions of Codes*

Category	Code	Definition
School as a social community	Feelings of safety	Teachers feel the school is a safe and welcoming environment.
	Feelings of pride	Teachers are proud of the school and surrounding environment
	Playing together	Adults enjoying being playful with each other while at work
	Collaborating together	Teachers believe in the collaboration among themselves.
School as a learning community	Seeking personal growth	Refers to teacher's aspirations toward a personal goal
	Seeking professional growth	Refers to teachers' desire to grow and learn professionally
	Seeking community	Teachers make reference to community to support each other

teachers in the busy-ness of their daily work. During my initial introduction to the school, the school governors, leadership, teachers, and parents made it clear they were proud of the school, not particularly for its academic rigor and teaching programs but for how the school's location contributes to a strong sense of community among all the members of the school. Teachers, the director, and parents spoke with great enthusiasm that the location made the school unique; they used elevated tones when referring to the neighborhood amenities such as restaurants and coffee shops. While the teachers and others referenced the location as a source of pride, the actual neighborhood of the school is a bimodal community with positive aspects of an urban neighborhood, but with some areas that mark less than desirable aspects of urban living. Thus, the emphasis on location as a source of pride is real, but I was interested as we moved forward in how pride translated to other aspects of school life.

The teachers communicated pride in the location of the school in photographs and captions that stated how they are "proud to be part of the (street name) community" (CLE artifact, October 16, 2019). The street outside the building is perceived as a strong symbol of the community, and the location of the school was described as the heart of "urbanization". Feelings of pride for the school's interior spaces and the activities within the spaces were revealed in the statement "we are all in this story together" as well as in reference to the learning spaces which are considered to be unique and the "embodiment of 21<sup>st</sup> century values/learning" (CLE artifact, October 16, 2019). Further, teachers perceive that the school is committed to change and innovation. Before I arrived, teachers, parents, and school leaders talked of the unique learning spaces at the school and a newly created multi-purpose learning space with a focus on design and technology. The multi-purpose learning space is considered a show piece for parents and the Board of Governors, while teachers articulated a belief that the space represented innovation in

teaching that is not bound by content and encourages teachers to be creative and take risks.

Again, while the source of pride in the spaces was real, I wondered how teachers would use the spaces to innovate.

For the teachers, a sense of pride in their daily work emerged from observations and conversations during the PAR Cycle One. Teachers are frequently in a hurry moving between spaces and meetings, and they seem to pride themselves on this busy-ness, reflected in a memo: “My school is busy and while people pride themselves on their busy-ness, I find that some of the activities which keep us all saying we are busy are not always of value educationally” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, October 13, 2019). The sense of pride in the school and its location is further deepened by the sense of pride in being busy throughout the day; however, pride does not necessarily translate to effective instructional and planning practices, leading to what may possibly be a false sense of pride.

### ***Feelings of Safety***

The feelings of safety expressed by teachers offered a platform for taking more professional risks to improve teaching practices. Emotional and psychological safety are critical for adult learners (Aguilar, 2013; Prolman, 2017). Learning involves taking risks and, therefore, taking care to create an environment for learning that is emotionally and psychologically safe is fundamental for teachers’ learning. Teachers in the school speak favorably about each other and the school as positive and supportive. During the PAR Cycle One, many activities in which teachers engaged showed multiple ways they support each other with food, gifts, thank you notes, and thank you emails. Teachers used descriptions such as amazing and brilliant and you are a star when speaking to each other. A culture of positivity appeared in many conversations and observations early in the PAR cycle. However, there was a noticeable absence of cohesive

and coherent risk-taking that leads to instructional improvement. While teachers expressed a need for emotional and psychological safety, I was curious to see how the feelings of safety would transfer to taking professional risks that led to meaningful changes in classroom practice, reward teachers with a sense of professional capital and, subsequently, lead to increased student achievement (Harrison-Berg, 2019).

Safety and trust are critical elements in the culture of any school and form a foundation for teachers to take risks, try something new, and challenge themselves and others to improve (Aguilar, 2013; Deal & Peterson, 1991; Prolman, 2017). At the CLE on October 30<sup>th</sup>, teachers offered each other support to achieve their goals and spoke of the importance of caring about someone in order to support others' goals. A level of trust needs to be present among the adults in the school before teachers challenge themselves and each other to take professional risks. Teachers expressed their professional aspirations in poems they wrote about the places they are going to as educators using words such as vulnerable, safe, share, and comfortable to describe the preconditions they need to grow and change as teachers. Teachers are supportive of each other's aspirations to grow and change because they believe they are part of a "tight knit" community (CLE artifact, October 16, 2019) that is supportive of personal and professional aspirations. One teacher noted the intersection of personal and professional aspirations among teachers, stating "there's a lot of passion being put toward what's happening at the school, what's happening with our careers here and going in a positive direction" (Teacher 9, meeting notes, November 8, 2019).

The sense of positivity that permeated the conversations, observations, and artifacts from the learning exchanges verified how teachers view progress at the school. Teacher 9 sensed that "something positive" is happening and teachers, in particular new teachers, see themselves

growing and learning at the school. During the two learning exchanges, some teachers took a lead in starting conversations and expressed strong opinions about their hopes and dreams and how they may grow and learn. Further, I reflected on how the learning exchanges revealed leadership potential in some of the teachers who attended: “I have led two learning exchanges now and I can see the leadership potential in a few staff members based on the conversations they were having with colleagues during the learning exchange” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, November 10, 2019).

A set of questions emerged from the preliminary evidence that needs to be considered when planning for the PAR Cycle Two: How can the opportunities for growth and learning, and the sense there is something positive happening in the school, be mined for development? How can I support teachers to feel safe to take pedagogical risks and step outside of their comfort zones, in those moments they recognize an opportunity for students to learn? Teachers require support that stretches them further than the informal feedback they regularly receive from their colleagues. With the most positive of intentions, colleagues often support each other by way of agreement and, like most evaluation practices, provide comments stating the instruction is satisfactory (Toch & Rothman, 2008). However, I felt that we needed to arrive at a place in which teachers can be warm demanders and critical friends of each other in improving practice (Blake & Gibson, 2020; Bondy & Ross, 2008).

### ***Playing Together***

The school’s social environment is one in which teachers enjoy humor and laughter and engage in activities that invoke a sense of play which is a positive capacity for learning in the school (Aguilar, 2018; Deal & Peterson, 1991). Teachers see themselves as fun and playful; they believe that, when they demonstrate their playfulness to students, the students are inspired and

engaged. That self-image was captured in a photograph of teachers performing for students at an assembly and from a caption written about a fondly remembered event that stated the teachers “value a giggle” (CLE artifact, October 16, 2019). Additionally, teachers expressed the need for fun in the poems from the October 30<sup>th</sup> CLE. I observed a sense of playful experimentation in the conversations as teachers spoke of “swapping” classrooms (CLE artifact, October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019), engaging in sharing sessions at lunch, doing yoga together, participating in teacher-led fitness classes, making food for each other, and engaging in staff sharing circles. The social environment depends on the sense of play and fun, and any strong learning environment should have a play factor as part of the instruction; however, at this point I had not observed the use of play as a pedagogical approach in classrooms. Teachers did not appear to bring their commitment to play into their classroom in meaningful ways as an approach to teaching and learning.

### ***Collaborating Together***

Teachers use the term collaboration as a catchall term to describe activities that focus on planning for learning, sharing practices, and talking about issues and concerns. Prior to COVID-19, most of the collaboration occurred in the teachers’ lunchroom. The space served multiple purposes: a staff lunchroom, photocopy room, meeting space, offices for the librarian, curriculum coordinator, and a work space for the Additional Language teacher. The photograph of the space from the CLE showed most of these purposes and was captioned as a place where teachers come together to ‘collab’. However, the caption stated the lunchroom provided space for teachers to come together to vent and create -- assigning more than one meaning for the kind of collaboration that can be seen and heard in this space. Collaboration is seen as a source of

pride among teachers: they believe they collaborate well together and claim they collaborate to “meet our students’ needs” (CLE artifact, October, 2019).

Teachers expressed a desire to work in a place where there is collaboration. They recognize the importance of working together to support each other’s growth, and acknowledge the assets each brings to the school. Further, teachers aspire to support each other and believe collaboration can be achieved by scheduling time to meet and share their skills and knowledge with each other. One teacher expressed the desire to have more opportunities to get together and collaborate this way: “Well, I think that there needs to continue to be an emphasis on collaboration and finding time that we can sit with one another. I think that there may need to be more time” (Teacher 9, meeting notes, November 8, 2019). Another teacher suggested adopting a mentor program, while others proposed that staff meetings should provide teachers with the opportunity to share and the school should provide more professional development and guest speakers. Generally, teachers are aware they need to spend time together to grow and learn; however, the specific purpose and outcome of the learning did not emerge from the preliminary data.

The evidence for school as a social community suggested that the social and emotional needs of the teachers may be a key element of PAR Cycle Two. As I contacted teachers to participate in the study, I considered how to build on the positive sense of a social community. Further, the evidence initially indicated that teachers are aware of the importance of collaboration and were currently engaged in some collaborative practices; however, the practices did not lead them to take action toward instructional improvement. I understood that teachers hold onto their fear of taking risks by obfuscating efforts to collaborate more deeply with colleagues. Teachers silo themselves in their classrooms and “invent strategies to address

challenges that are common to their colleagues” and avoid open discussion about their strengths and successes with their students (Harrison-Berg, 2019). The evidence under the category school as a social community provided insight into the social culture of the school and the desire among teachers to grow and change and take social risks. My observations allowed me to consider ways that I may support teachers to go further by taking professional risks that can improve their instructional practices.

### **School as a Learning Community**

Early in PAR Cycle One, I noticed from classroom observations that teachers’ instructional practices in math, reading, writing and inquiry were not aligned across the school; however, teachers were not speaking to me about learning to improve their instructional practices. Although teachers had a high degree of professional knowledge and skill in key instructional areas, they were not engaged in collaborative learning about each other’s practices. As I developed relationships and listened to teachers individually and collectively, data in PAR Cycle One revealed a desire for personal growth and professional growth. The poem *I come from a place* that teachers wrote during the October 30<sup>th</sup> learning exchange provided most of the data to support the analysis. The artifacts showed how teachers may seek opportunities in the school to grow and learn; and the ways in which they believe the school is a supportive and safe place where they can try to improve their teaching practices.

In the section, I discuss the evidence that emerged from the learning exchanges that supported the category of codes, school as a learning community; seeking personal growth, seeking professional growth, and seeking community.

### ***Seeking Personal Growth***

Teachers demonstrated that engaging in personal growth was a precondition to engaging

in professional growth and learning. Moreover, they wanted to make personal meaning of their lives, become better people, improve as educators, learn more about themselves, and have their dreams realized. I needed to pay attention to the close connection between personal and professional growth. Teachers sought “joy in the balance” and an opportunity to make meaning for themselves, and had given thought to their career trajectories as educators. Words and phrases from teachers’ poems captured the depth of thought: “courage to be vulnerable,” “finding balance,” and “where others will touch my life” (CLE artifacts, October 30, 2019) (see Figure 8). Teachers shared their personal desires because they had the opportunity to step outside of their comfort zones and publicly record and share their personal feelings, hope, and dreams, and be acknowledged for who they are as people. Further, they expressed aspirations to learn more about themselves, “become a better version” of themselves, seek personal growth in a safe and familiar place where they can begin to make meaning, be noticed for their gifts and talents, and make a difference in the world (CLE artifacts, October 30, 2019).

### ***Seeking Professional Growth***

The *I come from a place* poem signaled that professional growth was tied closely to personal growth. Teachers expressed an interest in professional growth and learning that was general in nature: they wanted to make a difference, utilize potential, share experiences, and have an impact on others. One teacher expressed a deeply personal wish to “challenge my current teaching beliefs, philosophies, and practices,” to which another teacher responded with the suggestions of professional development and inviting guest speakers. Making an impact was both a personal and a professional goal for a teacher wanting to make personal dreams come true by being the best possible teacher: “Where I can learn to be the best teacher and student so I can

I am going to a place where  
 I will push myself out of my comfort zone

↳ I think you are already!

↳ Look at other school programs observations!

↳ no-D guest speakers

↳ Try speaking out of the box by speaking with a professional who's not a teacher!

↳ Where I will challenge my current teaching beliefs, philosophies and practices

↳ teach a different subject?

↳ co-teach / class swap

↳ Our membership so we can try things together and help you get there

↳ Where I will be comfortable being a student of inquiry as our students are

↳ - allow for it to make you a better inquiring teacher too!

↳ bring your own passions into the classroom and share.

↳ questions/action

↳ Where I will become a better version of me

↳ - if you're here you are your way

Figure 8. Teacher's aspirations expressed in I come from a place poem.

educate and be educated” (CLE artifact, October 30, 2019). In addition, teachers wanted to make an impact on their colleagues and students and support others in the school community.

Professional growth requires teachers to take risks and be vulnerable to others; however, taking risks or trying something new was not precisely defined by teachers. Examples included taking the time to visit another classroom and inviting a colleague in to observe a teacher’s attempt at introducing a new instructional strategy. Additional examples suggested playing improvisational games so students can get to know each other, taking breaks during the day to feel more balanced, and to “keep innovating.” The activities required teachers to be vulnerable and not be afraid to seek out feedback from colleagues. Vulnerability is something teachers mention as important when taking risks. In PAR Cycle One feelings of safety that are needed in order to be vulnerable figured prominently in both the school as a social community and in the school as a learning community.

### ***Seeking Community***

CLE participants voiced a desire to seek opportunities to grow as educators within a supportive community where they feel emotionally and psychologically safe and connected to the place and to the people. Teachers who attended the CLEs expressed a belief that personal and professional growth can be realized in a supportive community. They recognized the importance of their collective and individual strengths and assets, they believed that they can learn from each other, and that the school community is welcoming. One teacher wrote about their interest in sharing their experiences so others can be successful, and another expressed a similar thought, stating they could support others to “make their journey easier,” and another revealed they seek a place “where I stand out for my creativity” (CLE artifact, October 30, 2019). To learn and grow teachers need to feel they are in a safe and trusting community that welcomes opportunities for

a range of fun, community-based activities such as yoga, book clubs, and socials, and where they can bring their own passions and interests into the classroom (CLE artifact, October 30, 2019).

An important question arose from the first round of evidence: Does the evidence suggest the school environment is ripe for meaningful teacher growth and development? Teachers' desire to grow and learn surfaced in a meeting with a group of teachers who had been part of a leadership team prior to my arrival. Following the first meeting I attended with them I reflected on the positive attitudes they expressed about school improvement:

There was a lot of energy in the room and interest in moving forward with changes.

Teachers seem to want to control more of the culture in the school. There are so many projects in this school, so many initiatives that pop up but there are few visible results from these initiatives. This group would be an asset as a catalyst for change and growth of teachers. (M. Palmer, reflective memo, December 4, 2019).

Within this learning community, some teachers have articulated an interest in learning and growing as educators. However, at this point in the process I was not sure if teachers knew how to go further than employing familiar strategies and activities within their current conceptual understandings. School as a learning community requires a disruption in which the teachers can begin to create new meanings with the hope of driving to a different future. At this point in the research effort, and recognizing that I was new to the school and still investigating, I was not clear about how to translate the strong social feelings into a professional learning community.

### **Implications**

In the previous sections, I discussed the data that I collected, coded, and analyzed in PAR Cycle One. Two categories emerged: school as a social community and school as a learning community. The categories revealed that within the established culture of the school there was

the possible growing desire on the part of some teachers to rise above the current paradigm. In the section, I present the implications of PAR Cycle One on the research questions, leadership, and PAR Cycle Two. I begin with a discussion about the learning I have engaged in during the PAR cycle and the implications of the learning for PAR Cycle Two.

### **Learning from PAR Cycle One**

Since I was new to the school and an outsider during the first PAR cycle, I needed to gain and sustain the trust of the teachers. The CLE pedagogies I used to discover a deeper understanding of the school culture did not, at first, seem to answer the research sub-questions. However, the emerging evidence provided an insight to the school culture and connected to the research sub-question: How does a principal new to a school build relational trust and discover teachers' beliefs and values? The evidence revealed teachers' collective aspirations about school as a social community, and just below the surface of those aspirations, I observed a potential leverage point for deepening the learning possibilities for teachers and, thereby, to increased access to high impact instruction for students.

The balance of teachers new to the school and teachers who have been at the school for three to five or more years presented an opportunity for growth and change as new teachers negotiated through the culture of school as both a social community and a learning community. I better understood the importance of supporting teachers' assets and using the current culture as leverage to negotiate a new shared vision of school as a learning community (Deal & Peterson, 1991). The school was not yet a community of learners; however, the pre-existing conditions for growth and change signalled hope for the school and for PAR Cycle Two. I learned the value of going slow by taking the time to build the relational trust necessary for teachers to be interested in CLE as a methodology for building and sustaining communities that can work together, learn

together, and change together. As a school leader, this valuable lesson was re-emphasized and grounded me in hope. I knew there was a lot of work ahead; however, I remained optimistic as I mentioned in a reflective memo:

I have patience for the kind of change I want to see. There is a lot of good work to be done and declaring this as a positive for staff, some of whom may fear change. I believe the tide (is) beginning to turn toward the kinds of changes the staff both old and new are ready for. (M. Palmer, reflective memo, November 10, 2019)

### **Implications for Leadership**

Leadership is a complex concept that does not come with a standard set of rules, processes, and procedures (Deal & Peterson, 1991). The development of my leadership skills in the role of principal is shaped by the context in which I find myself at this school. Early in PAR Cycle One, I tuned into the context of the school and my initial observations and conversations revealed what I needed to learn – and how quickly I needed to learn to be successful. “It has been overwhelming at times due to the information overload. There are a lot of people doing a lot of different things here and many of those things I was doing by myself at my previous school” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, August 25, 2019). Simultaneously, I acquired a sense that the school was in a transitional phase and different perspectives and forces were at work to provide the school with the direction it needed going forward: “[T]here are a number of people in the school who may not want to see changes take place, or maybe they will resist changes. There are definitely converging communities within the teaching and non-teaching staff” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, August 25, 2019). Developing a shared vision of a school which all stakeholders could commit to was a leadership challenge I was committed to developing alongside teachers.

The two communities are: (1) the teachers and leadership who recently arrived at the school and (2) the teachers who have been at the school three years and longer. Early in the PAR Cycle One, I realized I had to attend to the needs of both groups and at the same time begin to learn about the pedagogical approaches of all the teachers.

School leaders must pay attention to instructional practices and assessment data. When school leaders are not in classrooms observing, nor having conversations with teachers about practice, and not listening in on conversations about learning, they are not in a position to question teachers' instructional practices. (M. Palmer, reflective memo, September 29, 2019)

Observations revealed the need for important change work in the areas of literacy and the use of assessment data. However, while I noted the need for change, communicating what to do at this point would have been premature. The leadership challenge was knowing how to best communicate what I had observed and what work I believed was needed to move forward in these two areas.

The tension between my role as instructional leader and researcher emerged early in PAR Cycle One and highlighted how my positionality could influence the outcomes of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2014). In a memo dated November 5, 2019, I noted an awareness of "how my stance or positionality may be influencing the experience of the findings." I ended this same memo with the statement "[t]his is hard work."

I took small but meaningful steps to cultivate the necessary leadership skills for a principal new to a school during PAR Cycle One, and in PAR Cycle Two, I confidently continued on the path to providing a vision and hope for the school that would support real and lasting change.

## **Implications for PAR Cycle Two**

I planned to conduct classroom observations using evidence-based tools to gather data for engaging in conversations with teachers. Further, I intended to gather evidence to answer the research sub-questions. One strategy that has provided teachers opportunity to explore their beliefs and values is the Community Learning Exchange framework and the way the dynamic critical pedagogies of the CLEs engage teachers in thinking about their work as educators and their role as members of a learning community (Guajardo et al., 2016). Further, the CLE framework supports the ongoing building of trust between and among community members. Some participants commented positively that the CLE is a novel way to engage teachers in conversation and hope for “more opportunities like this one to improve how we communicate without fear” (CLE artifact, October 30, 2019).

In my dual role as supervisor and researcher, I planned to continue to reflect on my work in these roles and endeavor to bridge the work through reflective practices such as memo writing and fully engaging the teacher-participants in PAR Cycle Two. Reflective memos provided me with a timeline of growth and change in my leadership and allowed me to comment on the ‘aha’ moments or sightings, which are observations that comport with values I was trying to forward about the value of collaboration and use of evidence to inform instruction. In addition, I first concentrated on deepening professional relationships with teachers by participating in and contributing to the school as a social community and supporting the development of social capital between and among teachers. Second, I continued to support the teachers who may be less likely to think they need to improve practice and change the paradigm of always doing things the same way.

## **Conclusion**

I planned to engage all staff in Community Learning Exchanges in PAR Cycle Two in an attempt to shift the school culture toward a new paradigm in which all teachers see themselves as learners who can develop their instructional knowledge and improve practice. At the same time, just as I did in PAR Cycle One, I intended to take the pulse regularly to analyze the speed of moving forward. I learned that patience and attention to all levels of teachers' readiness is critical. I planned to be at the school for several years, and the groundwork during the first year was key to long term change. The level of incrementalism required to gradually shift the school culture was hard to sustain as I saw the urgency for students, but slow and steady is critical (Gawande, 2017).

## CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE TWO

As a novice principal in a new school and as a practitioner-researcher leading a PAR project, I needed to enter the school and the PAR slowly. In PAR Cycle One, I engaged in an introductory investigation into the school's culture that highlighted two distinct sub-cultures within the teaching faculty: school as a social community and school as a learning community. By moving slowly, I had numerous sightings about the school culture—what McDonald (1996) refers to as “a rare glimpse of values operating below the surface of espoused beliefs” (p. 23). After the initial cycle of inquiry, I was interested in focusing on increasing teacher and leader capacity to have effective conversations about teaching and learning that might support teachers to improve classroom instructional practices. In particular, I was focused on instructional choices that would result in more equitable access to and increased rigor in learning. I was dedicated to a collaborative improvement because, as Bryk et al. (2015) state, “too many efforts at improvement are designs delivered *to* educators rather than developed *with* them” (p. 34). Developing change *with* teachers meant I needed to learn more about their work and the cultural standards and norms of professional and social behaviors in the school. Further, I needed to approach my investigation with a lens of inquiry as well as the lens of adult learning to facilitate conversation and dialogue (Aguilar, 2013; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016; Guajardo et al., 2016).

Of course, the COVID pandemic issues that erupted in schools across the globe had an effect on the ability to fully engage teachers in PAR Cycle Two. However, Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs), observations and post-observation meetings with teachers, and my ability to investigate the emerging themes continued, and contributed to the development of my understanding of the school and teachers. In this chapter, I outline the PAR Cycle Two process

by providing a description of the actions I facilitated as the practitioner-researcher with the participants, including participant group meetings, classroom observations, post-observation conversation notes, and memos I collected and analyzed for sets of evidence. Secondly, I present an analysis of the categories of codes that emerged from the data and of the emerging themes in PAR Cycle Two. Finally, I examine the implications from the PAR cycle on the focus of practice, leadership, and PAR Cycle Three.

### **PAR Cycle Two Process**

In the section, I first detail the activities in which I attempted to engage with teacher participants (n=8) and other teachers using CLEs and observations and post-observation conversations. Despite efforts to conduct multiple observations, I was unable to fully sustain the process largely because of the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, I discuss the evidence that emerged from the activities and the processes I used for the analysis.

### **PAR Activities**

In mid-January 2020, I recognized the importance of inviting participant teachers who have a long history at the school and those who had recently arrived; in other words, I wanted to create a balance in the participants' experiences, knowledge, and skills of teaching and learning. PAR Cycle One revealed the established culture of school as a social community that prided itself on being welcoming, trusting, and safe. However, some teachers may have been uncomfortable with the potential changes a new principal brings to the school. Although I recognized this culture to be real and saw that I could effectively leverage the strong connections to the school to enact change, the dominant culture presented a possible "challenge for a principal who wants to see improvement in instructional practices" (M. Palmer, reflective memo,

January 19, 2020). Therefore, I made a conscious effort to strike a balance when I invited teachers to participate in the study.

I approached eight teachers from the Junior School who agreed to participate in observations and post-observation conversations for the purpose of the study. Soon after agreeing, some of the participants (n=5) gathered at a Community Learning Exchange to learn about the aims of the project, the outcomes of PAR Cycle One, and the goals of PAR Cycle Two. During the CLE held on January 24, 2020, participants reviewed the PAR Cycle One evidence of school as a social community and school as a learning community and examined examples of evidence-based observation tools from Sullivan and Glanz (2013) and Acheson and Gall (1997). Although the work of evidence-based supervision has been known for over 40 years, none of the teachers had previous experience with the examples I presented. The participants met formally twice during PAR Cycle Two. Teachers' time constraints and, later in the PAR cycle, the COVID pandemic interrupted the second cycle. Table 11 summarizes the PAR Cycle Two activities: two Community Learning Exchanges and eight observations and post observation conversations with teachers.

### ***Participant Meetings***

Teachers continued to respond favorably to the Community Learning Exchange meeting processes. In the first CLE on January 29, 2020, I introduced poetry as a provocation to engage in personal reflections and to frame our work together with the CLE axiom "conversation and dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23). Teachers read a poem prior to the CLE and chose a key word or phrase that would operate as criteria for the evidence-based observations. Play, open-mindedness, and gentleness aligned with words

Table 10

*Summary of Activities in PAR Cycle Two*

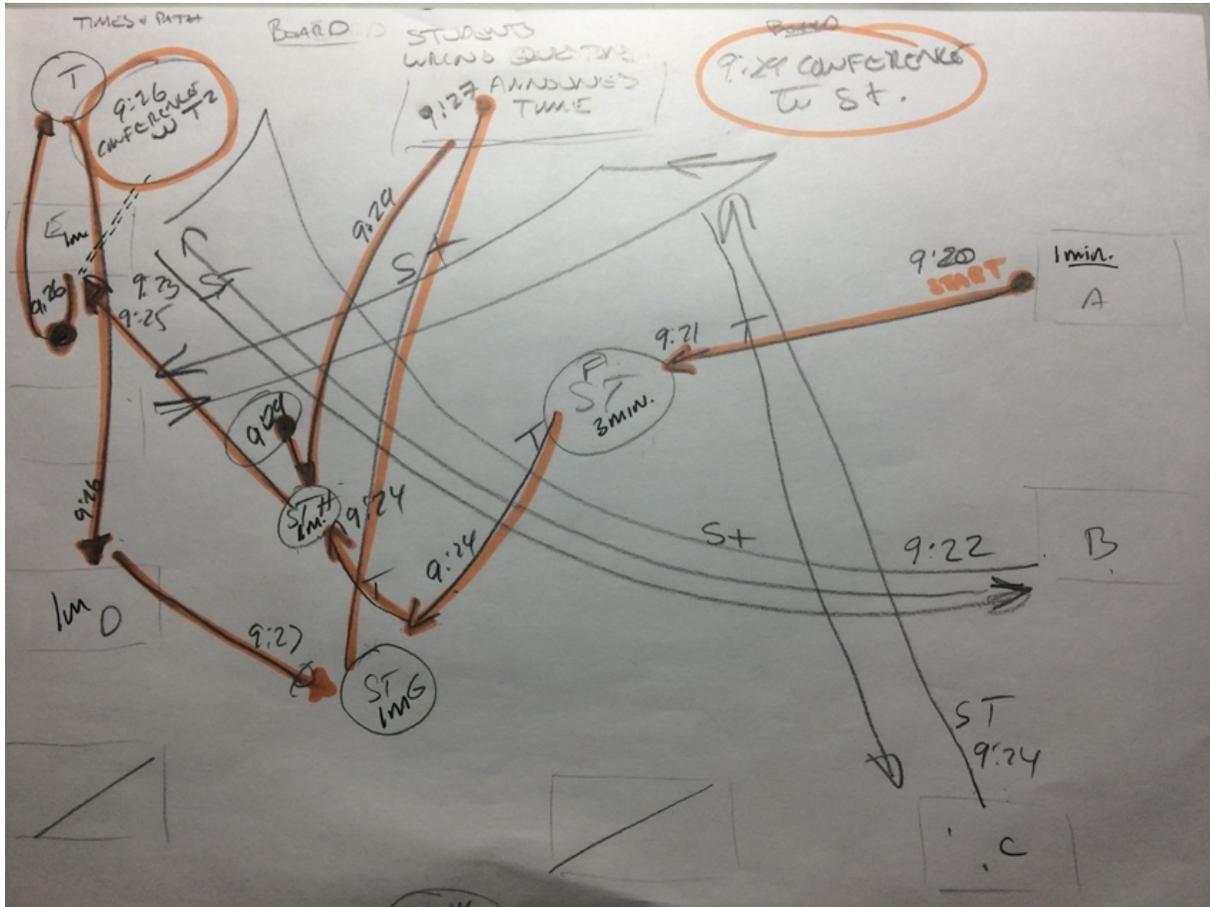
Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
CLEs (n=6)	●						●			School Closure	School Closure	School Closure	School Closure
Observations (n=8)			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	School Closure	School Closure	School Closure	School Closure
Post- observation conversations (n=8)			●	●	●	●		●		School Closure	School Closure	School Closure	School Closure
Reflective Memos	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

teachers used to describe the school as a social community in PAR Cycle One. As a prerequisite for participation, teachers set the parameters within which they agreed to being observed.

In a second smaller learning exchange with the participants (n=4) on February 26, I intended to draw out interest in developing a tool that focused on observing how teachers provided feedback to students. By this time, I had conducted several observations and post-observation conversations. Participants viewed initial data from observations and expressed an interest in the feedback tool and suggested the group focus on one of the five types of feedback. The Sullivan and Glanz (2013) feedback tool features five categories of feedback: prompted, probed, encouraged, positively reinforced, and discouraged pupil. The tool provided a set of codes to use during an observation; however, the codes do not have definitions and thus allowed for a wide range of variance when assigning a code to the teacher's feedback to a student. The participants were invited to add definitions and developed the tool with a more robust set of codes and definitions. However, from this point the collaborative work on a feedback tool did not progress in the ways I expected.

### ***Observations***

Early in PAR Cycle Two, I learned that prior principals had conducted no observations of this nature and the entire process was new to the teachers. Yet, they readily accepted my requests to be observed and I used the observations to learn how I could support them in my role as principal. The participant teachers were eager to try the evidence-based observation tools I introduced. In the first weeks of PAR Two, I used tools from Sullivan and Glanz (2013), and selective verbatim (Acheson & Gall, 2003). In an initial attempt at using evidence-based observations (see Figure 9) (Sullivan & Glanz, 2013, p. 84), I used a tool which requires the observer to create a visual representation of a teacher's movement around a classroom during a



Note. Adapted from Sullivan and Glanz (2013).

Figure 9. Diagram of teacher utilization of space.

specified period of time. I observed the teacher for ten minutes and recorded their movements. Experimentation with evidence-based observation tools added to my knowledge and skills as an instructional leader.

As a novice principal interested in developing my knowledge and skills with evidence-based observations, I understood the necessity of utilizing a model as a jumping off point; however, I did not intend to use the *pro-forma* approach used widely in schools for evaluation (Danielson, 2013; Marzano, 2014), which Rowan and Raudenbush (2016) cite as not useful for supervision. I needed first to become familiar with the process of conducting observations using evidence-based tools, while teachers needed to become accustomed to me taking notes during an observation. Experimenting with evidence-based observation tools provided opportunities for teachers to learn about their practices. As Teacher 3 stated in our post-observation conversations: “I feel provoked by this a little bit to think about how I can best use my time” (M. Palmer, meeting notes, February 10, 2020). Further, classroom observations provided opportunities for me to practice gathering evidence and engage in conversations with teachers about the evidence. As an observer, having this tool in my hand made the work more understandable.

The evidence-based observation tools in Sullivan and Glanz (2013) interested the participant group and proved to be a valuable starting point. However, in using the tool, the observer may subjectively interpret the types of feedback thereby resulting in a post-observation conversation that lacks depth because the data lacked depth. To engage in more impactful post-observation conversations, I began to write down the verbal activity of teachers and students. Selective verbatim helps the observer focus on one aspect of verbal activity and provides the teacher with a focused look at “particular aspects of what they say to students or on what

students say to them” (Acheson & Gall, 2003, p. 149). Clearly, I was learning to be a better observer at the same time I was involving teachers.

### ***Post-observation Conversations***

At first, following the standard normative model of pre-observation conference, formal observation, and post-observation conversation, I attempted to talk with teachers about the evidence from classroom observations (Marzano, 2014; Rowan & Raudenbush, 2016). As I proceeded during the semester, my reading and conversations with my advisors reinforced my concern that normative practices were somewhat deficient in achieving the important outcome of teachers taking responsibility for changing practices (Acheson & Gall, 1997; Crenshaw & Hoyle, 1981; Darling-Hammond et al., 1983). I developed an interest in having a different type of post-observation conversation with teachers which would stem from a need to “build a set of evidence that can serve both the teacher and the administrator for the formal evaluation process” (Tredway et al., 2020, p. 1). As a result, I began to experiment with methods that use evidence from the observation to begin the conversations and support a cognitive coaching model that more fully engages teachers in conversation, in problem-posing about their practices, and in setting goals about change based on their decisions (Freire, 1970; Lyman, 1981). This is in contrast to the more typical feedback for teachers that is part of most post-observation conversations. To this end, I provided teachers with the observational evidence prior to our conversations, and I attempted to engage them in conversation about the evidence. I then audio-recorded the conversations to analyze and code and further determine how I needed to change my practices as the principal-coach. As a novice principal who was practicing reflective conversations with teachers, I understood I needed practice to become more skilled.

## ***Reflective Memos***

I wrote memos throughout PAR to reflect on observations and conversations with teachers. Memos provided me with a safe place to express my thoughts and ideas on the activities and helped me triangulate the different data sources, verify the evidence collected, and offer perspectives on the process of working with participants and other teachers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The evidence from memos informed the process I engaged in with teachers during observations and conversations and other interactions and activities during PAR Cycle Two. Further, reflective memos provided me with a record of my learning and how the PAR supports my growth and development as a school leader. Thus, the observational evidence, post-observation conversation meeting notes, and reflective memos together formed a codable data set and revealed categories of emerging themes. In discussing the evidence, I present the categories that emerged from the activities in PAR Cycle Two (Saldaña, 2016).

The activities in PAR Cycle Two provided preliminary data on my growth as an instructional leader and principal-coach. Additionally, the participants decided to focus on teachers' use of feedback to students during an observation and I used the selective verbatim which presented new opportunities to engage in deeper post-observation discussions.

## **Evidence and Coding**

The data collected from observations, post observation meetings, and reflective memos revealed two categories (see Table 11), teacher knowledge and skills and teacher dispositions. The evidence served three distinct purposes in PAR Cycle Two: (a) to provide me the opportunity to become more skilled at using evidenced-based tools; (b) to support teachers who were interested in improving their instruction; and (c) to leverage post-observation conversations to focus on the data. I used open coding to analyze teachers' reflections on the observational

Table 11

*PAR Cycle Two: Categories of Evidence, Definitions, and Frequency*

Category	Evidence	Definition	Frequency
Teacher knowledge	Learning Objectives	Teacher speaks of the goals or objectives of the lesson.	81
	Research Based	Teacher refers to research based pedagogical approaches.	45
	Naming practices	Teacher's use of generic words and phrases to name practices.	61
Teacher skills	Organizational management	Teacher refers to managing students or some organizational aspects of the lesson.	54
	Use of feedback	Teacher uses basic feedback, praise as feedback, and no feedback.	72
Teacher dispositions	Guardedness	Includes teachers' self-consciousness and privacy of practice related to observations and post observation conversations.	148
	Aspiration	Teacher speaks conditionally about their teaching.	69

data, and I used a set of pre-determined codes to analyze my effectiveness in the post-observation conversations. First, I coded conversations that revealed an initial set of codes about teacher knowledge and skills. I further refined the codes revealing two initial categories that I merged as I better understood how teacher knowledge and skills are inter-connected. As I gained more insight through the coding process, a set of codes surfaced that indicated teachers' attitudes toward observations and post-observation conversations, which I named *teacher dispositions*. After further refining, I then split the transcripts and coded my part of the post-observation conversation separately using the criteria for effective conversations (Tredway et al., 2020). Finally, I coded the reflective memos I wrote as a method of triangulating the data and verifying the codes ascribed to teachers' reflections on the observational evidence. In the next section, I discuss the categories and the codes that rose from the data collected during PAR Cycle Two.

### **Uncovering Assets and Challenges**

Observations afforded me a closer look at the teachers' instructional practices and their interest in evidence-based observation tools. In this cycle, I was able to uncover both assets and challenges in the instructional capacity of teachers and myself. First, the coded data from conversations provided insight into teacher knowledge and skills and dispositions that were paradoxically obstacles to professional growth. Second, I witnessed teachers trying to understand the purpose of observational data during post-observation conversations and being guarded about the observational-evidence I had collected from the lessons I observed.

In PAR Cycle Two, in contrast to the initial evidence from PAR Cycle One, teachers did not articulate an interest in growing and learning during the initial post-observation conversations when we were discussing specific ways they might change practices. At this point in the research process, I could not tell if the guardedness I observed during post-observation

conversations emanated from resistance to professional growth or surfaced from a natural process of developing different relationships with teachers. The data from observations and post-observation conversations revealed the key categories of evidence: (a) teacher knowledge and skills; (b) teacher dispositions; and (c) principal knowledge and skills. Particularly in light of my tenure at the school as a novice principal working with a new staff, I had yet to acquire the knowledge and skills to engage teachers in effective conversations.

### **Teacher Knowledge and Skills**

Teacher knowledge and skills refers to the words and phrases teachers used to describe their movements, activities, and choices when examining evidence from a lesson observation. The words and phrases suggested teachers require time and practice to effectively develop their knowledge and skills of new instructional strategies. In the post-observation conversations, teachers expressed basic knowledge and skills of teaching and learning; however, teachers distanced themselves from meaningful discussion about practice by speaking retrospectively about the observed lesson and more generally about past lessons and experiences. The limited knowledge and pedagogical skills required for effective instruction prevents teachers from examining practice and engaging in deep conversation about teaching and learning.

During post-observation conversations, evidence of the knowledge of actual learning objectives was limited: teachers expressed beginning knowledge of research-based pedagogies; teachers used common vocabulary as naming practices to describe learning during post-observation conversations; and teachers' use of feedback and questions showed a reliance on teacher-directed instruction versus student-centered and inquiry-based practices that align with IB. Post-observation conversations revealed teachers' emphasis on organizational management

prior to observations and during post-observation conversations. In the aggregate, teachers revealed a narrow range of knowledge and skills of practice (see Table 12).

### ***Learning Objectives***

Planning for learning is an area of growth for teachers. Early in PAR Cycle Two, I rushed into classroom observations and did not always request a formal lesson plan; however, I learned teachers do not always plan lessons nor state specific learning objectives prior to the observation of a lesson. Teacher 4 agreed to an observation and informed me the students were engaged in reflections, goal setting, and preparation for conferences and that I was welcome to “work on [my] selective verbatim in [her] classroom” (personal communication, February 23, 2020). The teacher mentioned she would read to students to develop their listening comprehension skills and “learn to annotate as they read” (Teacher 4, personal communication, February 23, 2020).

Another teacher provided basic information about a lesson prior to an observation: “I am teaching a Grade 2 [lesson title] on Thursday morning where students are creating non-fiction Zines that you can pop by for” (Teacher 2, personal communication, March 2, 2020). For me, however, neither of these statements about learning objectives constitute lesson planning that is intentional enough to assess formative learning. In fact, the teachers treated the actual learning as accidental.

In fact, during post-observation conversations, teachers’ expressed surprise when students demonstrated prior knowledge during a lesson. Teacher 6 spoke of a math and literacy connection made by a student during a phonics lesson stating she was “pleased with that cross connection” (meeting notes, February 20, 2020). Further, Teacher 6 used the words “glad,” “pleased,” and “I realized” while speaking about responses students had provided during a lesson on phonemic awareness: “I was glad there was cross connection between different subject areas”

Table 12

*Evidence from Observations and Post-Observation Conversations (n=8)*

Teacher Knowledge	Frequency	Teacher skill	Frequency
Learning objectives	75	Organizational Management	43
Research based pedagogy	45	Use of feedback	72
Naming practices	61	Use of questioning	156

(Teacher 6, meeting notes, February 20, 2020). Students making connections seemed to surprise Teacher 7 when her class provided answers which she had not thought of beforehand: “So when the children say something I haven't thought of it surprises me. A pleasant surprise” (meeting notes, February 20, 2020). Teacher 1 spoke of learning objectives with ambiguity: “They are just kind of using the iPad as something to play with,” and how the students working in groups “kind of communicate together and find out each other’s thoughts about music they are listening to” (meeting notes, February 6, 2020). Use of the linguistic phrase ‘kind of’ suggests students did not fully engage in the planned learning, and the teacher may not have had the pedagogical knowledge to name what the students actually did in the lesson. In most, but not all, of the eight conversations, learning objectives surfaced as an afterthought and as if learning happened by chance.

### ***Research-Based Pedagogy***

Teachers referred to research-based pedagogy in basic ways during post observation conversations. Teachers made reference to Dweck’s (2016) growth mindset work, de Bono’s (2017) Thinking Hats, the use of think time, maker mindset, and the use of body language as feedback to students. Teacher 1 learned about De Bono’s Thinking Hats by chance: “I came across (de Bono) from researching online so I started looking into them and how they work” (meeting notes, February 6, 2020). Teacher 2 spoke of developing students’ maker mindset in reference to a book she had read titled “Maker Centered Learning” (Clapp, 2016).

Additionally, the observational evidence prompted Teacher 6 to affirm her use of non-verbal feedback which did not appear in the selective verbatim transcript: “I remember giving them feedback nonverbally and I realized I do give a lot of nonverbal feedback” (meeting notes, February 20, 2020).

Teachers' references to research-based instructional practices could have provided an opportunity for deeper conversations about practices that promote learning. However, I did not yet have the skills to redirect the conversation to focus on teaching and learning practices. In these conversations I tended to take responses at face value as I was still in the process of building relationships. If the teachers were to view any part of this as judgmental or if my probing suggested that, I might have lost an opportunity to continue. In those moments, I think I was learning more about coaching in effective conversations than teachers were about interrogating their practices.

### *Use of Common Vocabulary to Name Practices*

The teachers' use of common vocabulary to describe learning was a surprise in the evidence. Teachers used common words, such as build and touch base, to describe actions they took to address the learning needs of their students. In some ways, the limited knowledge of naming the actual practices and learning that happens obfuscates discussion about learning and, therefore, teacher's readiness to improve instruction. For example, teachers used the phrase "touch base" to describe a brief conversation with a student during a lesson or learning activity. While examining the utilization of space data, Teacher 3 noted "I was able to touch base with each of them on what they were working on, making sure they were on the right track" (meeting notes, February 10, 2020). I observed teachers touch base when they stood next to students and asked questions and listened to students respond. When teachers touch base with students during activity-based lessons, the teacher may briefly speak to the student to find out if the engagement is aligned with the teachers' expectations.

Additionally, teachers used the words "build" and "building on" to describe a process of supporting the development of student knowledge, skills, and understanding. Teacher 1 revealed

some insight into how building is used to describe students engaging in discussions during a music lesson. I observed students blurting out responses to questions asked by the teacher 37 times during a 10-minute period of observation. While the repeated calling out by a minority of the students was in my view disruptive, the teacher shared a different perspective: “They blurted out, but I don’t mind because one was kind of building on another” (Teacher 1, meeting notes, February 12, 2020). Similarly, Teacher 7 used build to describe how students add to each other’s ideas during a discussion: “I feel like when we do it this way, [teaching phonemic awareness] we’re really honoring the inquiry and building on other people’s ideas and making connections and communicating” (meeting notes, February 18, 2020). Teachers’ use of common vocabulary highlighted a variety of ways how teachers perceive what learning looks like. Further, the description of the students’ building on does not actually denote specific learning objectives.

### ***Organizational Management***

Organizational management refers to managing students’ behaviors and movements during a lesson observation, which teachers discussed in post-observation conversations. Teachers’ knowledge and skills of the organizational elements of learning are an indicator of readiness to make changes to their practices. Observations revealed that teachers attended to the organizational management of a lesson in favor of focusing on actual learning objectives. Further, teachers seemed more comfortable during an observation when their students were well-behaved; in fact, teachers may plan activities at the lower levels of cognition to ensure students are well-behaved during observations (Bloom et al., 1956). Teachers revealed how organizational management leads to activity-based lessons versus learning experiences that are inquiry based. When debriefing on an observation, Teacher 3 mentioned how an activity-based lesson set the stage for well-managed students because “part of the nature of this activity is that

they all knew what they needed to be doing” (meeting notes, February 10, 2020). Activity-based teaching, rather than learning-centered teaching, supported Teacher 4’s action of placing students in groups to have them move around the room to different stations which she named a “movement activity.” Teacher 6 provided an example of organizational management as a type of learning objective when referring to a student who shared some knowledge during a lesson: “I’m really conscious of trying to be aware of the positivity towards [student] so that he feels confident enough to share his knowledge with everybody” (Teacher 6, meeting notes, February 20, 2020). Following an observation of Teacher 1 using another tool from the grant project in which my adviser is involved, the calling on observation tool (Tredway, 2018), I wrote a memo about his classroom management. It appeared that management of student behaviors during an observation causes some teachers to be nervous while others are comfortable with a level of disruption: “It was evident that the teacher has some work to do with classroom management, but at the debrief he mentioned that he was comfortable with the blurting out” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, February 12, 2020). As indicators of teachers’ readiness to learn, *organizational management* of student behaviors and movements during an observation may supplant academic learning objectives, just as teachers’ use of common vocabulary for naming practices obfuscates analysis of the observational data.

### ***Feedback to Students***

Feedback is an essential ingredient for both teacher and student learning (Boaler, 2019; Little, 1999; NASEM, 2018), and a teacher’s use of effective feedback is an indicator of student-centered learning—particularly when the feedback is specific and can be used to repeat the action in the future. In the evidence from ten observations between February 6 and March 6,

2020, teachers provided two types of feedback to students—basic feedback and praise as feedback—or no feedback at all (see Table 13). Basic feedback included the use of thank you, you are right, and ok. Generalized feedback included you have been focused, awesome, and thank you for sharing, without being specific about what actual action or statement prompted teacher praise. Examples of praise as a type of feedback included words such as excellent, good, sounds good, and you are totally on track. However, more frequently teachers provided students with no feedback during lessons. Teacher knowledge of pedagogy, which includes the purposeful use of feedback to support learning and the skill of providing detailed narrative feedback to students, is an area of growth for teachers.

### *Use of Questioning*

Teachers' use of questions to promote inquiry-based learning and to model effective student inquiry are expected teacher skills in an IB PYP school. When teachers ask robust questions, they learn more about what students know and what misconceptions they may have. Further, effective questions move learning forward and support students as they refine their understanding of skills and concepts (Fisher & Frey, 2010). The selective verbatim from 20-minute observations in ten different classrooms revealed that teachers asked almost 1.5 times more closed questions than open questions. At a basic level, open questions prompt students to answer in sentences and provide teachers with deeper insight into a student's understanding while closed questions elicit 'yes' or 'no' and other single word responses. The IB PYP advocates for teachers to be both knowledgeable and skillful in the ways they model questions to students:

Table 13

*Evidence of Types of Feedback from Observations (n=10)*

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Observation	Basic feedback	Praise as feedback	No feedback provided
1			
2			5
3	3		
4	2		
5	3		6
6	4	2	5
7	3	2	9
8	4	4	8
9	1		6
10	3	2	

---

We must also be mindful of the example we set in the questions we are posing to our students. The roots of learning are cultivated in a mindset that sees value in actively pursuing questions—which is something the teachers must also model themselves.

(International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020)

The evidence of teachers' uses of questioning further highlights the need for teachers to develop inquiry-based and student-centered instructional strategies that promote higher levels of student achievement and align with IB PYP practices. However, reflections during post-observation conversations were relatively superficial, and teachers were not yet ready to transfer their analysis of the observational data to new instructional practices. I now turn to a discussion of the dispositions that emerged as evidence from post-observation conversations.

### **Teacher Dispositions**

Specific dispositions emerged from the eight post-observation conversations in which teachers spoke about the observed lesson and the evidence. Further, when entering into a process of observation, teachers displayed a range of dispositions; the evidence suggests that teachers need time to acquire a level of confidence to improve their instructional practices. Without relational trust between me and the teachers, they did not fully commit themselves to an analysis of the observational data; in particular, they seemed to avoid taking responsibility for the evidence. In these areas, the teachers displayed dispositions that require attention if we are to improve instruction: (1) Teachers tended to articulate a guardedness prior to and following the observations; (2) Statements of guardedness included privacy of practice references by teachers who did not want to be observed and statements that indicated teachers were self-conscious during an observation; (3) Aspirational statements muddled the conversations about the observational evidence as teachers spoke of trying rather than actions taken.

## **Guardedness**

Guardedness refers to the reluctance to take ownership of the observational evidence and, therefore, hinders teachers from making a change to their instructional practices. Guardedness, as I observed in the evidence, further included teachers' privacy of practice and self-consciousness about being observed and participating in an analysis of observational evidence. Additional dispositions included aspirations that teachers expressed toward their practices and what they would like to do in the future; teachers spoke conditionally about their teaching practices. Conversations with teachers about observational data can be challenging, especially when teachers feel they are being evaluated on their work. While PAR Cycle One activities provided teachers with an opportunity to declare their hopes and dreams to work in a place that supports teacher learning, creating the conditions for professional learning takes time and a willingness to be vulnerable. The general guardedness I encountered during PAR Cycle Two post-observation conversations suggested more time is needed for teachers to feel safe and comfortable enough to engage in open and honest conversations about their practices. Further, following several observations and conversations with teachers, Teacher 3 communicated on behalf of others, "I think that ongoing observation is something that some teachers might be hesitant to pursue" (personal communication, April 18, 2020). The evidence suggested some other areas for attention and deeper understanding of this element of teacher disposition.

## ***Privacy of Practice***

Early in PAR Cycle Two, I held a meeting with teacher participants and introduced them to examples of evidence-based observation tools. Teachers at first expressed interest in observations; however, as the observations proceeded, they increasingly expressed reservations about being observed. Teacher 2 suggested that she gets very nervous about being observed

because at one time in the history of the school teachers were told their work had to be of a certain caliber for them to continue their employment” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, January 29, 2020) and Teacher 7 indicated her need for privacy of practice during a post-observation conversation, “I get very nervous when somebody else is in the room too, whether it's an observation or not” (meeting notes, February 20, 2020). At the outset, the privacy of practice may have been related to the lack of experience with supportive observations and conversations.

### **Self-Consciousness**

Being observed is nerve-racking for teachers; tension for the teacher can be quite high, particularly if trust between the observer and the teacher has not been fully established. Prior to and during PAR Cycle Two, teachers expressed self-consciousness as a type of guardedness toward observations using words such as nervous and self-conscious to describe their feelings around being observed. Notably, I encountered guardedness well in advance of observations during the CLE on January 24 when Teacher 3 mentioned “being nervous about being observed. She needed to be reassured that being observed did not mean being evaluated” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, January 29, 2020). Additionally, teachers expressed nervousness and self-consciousness toward the observational data during post-observation conversations. Teacher 6 expressed feelings of nervousness in response to the selective verbatim when the evidence indicated she had not acknowledged one student’s response during a lesson on phonemic awareness: “Usually I do acknowledge everybody, but I definitely felt like I had nerves knowing that I was being observed” (meeting notes, February 20, 2020). Self-consciousness can lead to teachers being protective and guarded and, therefore, hesitant to fully engage in conversations about the observational data. Again, as the new principal who was engaging in unfamiliar

leadership behavior, I recognized that the change process might take longer than I thought or wanted.

### **Aspiration**

Teachers seemed to avoid talking about the observational data during post-observation conversations in favor of talking about trying as if they were in the process of developing the conditions for actual teaching and learning. Teacher 7 responded to the observational-data that showed she had missed hearing a student's answer to a question: "I try my best to acknowledge children obviously and make sure everything they say is validated, at least to a certain extent, even if it's just not verbal" (meeting notes, February 20, 2020). During our post-observation conversation on February 6, 2020, Teacher 1 stated he was trying to teach his students to take more responsibility for their learning and, yet, is not aware of the learning that may or may not be occurring with his students:

I'm trying to get them to take responsibility for their learning. That's what I was trying to do with this [lesson]. I try to get them to think about it and then ultimately get them to share their experiences. And I think it's working. (meeting notes, February 6, 2020).

By this time in PAR Cycle Two, I had expected more significant changes in teacher practice, but I realized the conditions in which teachers are ready to accept feedback needed to be further developed knowing that the conditions in which feedback is provided impacts the effect of the feedback (Brinko, 1993). Aspiration may be a first step to changing practice, both for teachers and the principal and, while I wanted teachers to move faster from idea to practice, I recognized that incrementalism is real, and moving too quickly damages possibilities of future work. In education, the metaphoric graveyard of initiatives that did not take or stick because of quick implementation is not uncommon (Cuban, 1990).

Teachers' dispositions suggested reluctance to accept the observational data due in part to the absence of relational trust of a principal new to the school and that observations prior to my arrival led to evaluations of teachers' work and possible dismissal if the work did not meet a certain standard. Teacher reluctance to engage in deeper conversations about the observational evidence may stem from a self-consciousness about their work, I reflected in a memo: "Teachers may not yet be at a point to accept the verbatim as is, accept what it reveals, and consider ways this process may have shown something and help them be more attentive to their practice" (M. Palmer, reflective memo, March 20, 2020). Part of the principal's work as an instructional leader is to develop the knowledge and skills required to support teachers to become more comfortable with observations and post-observation conversations. I turn now to a discussion of the work I engaged in during PAR Cycle Two to develop my knowledge and skills of effective post-observation conversations with teachers.

### **Effective Conversations**

Principals must become skilled at engaging in post-observation conversations for teachers to develop the knowledge and skills to analyze observational data that prompt them to make improvements to their instructional practices. In the conversations, I utilized the four criterion for effective conversations: (1) opening coaching stance, (2) process and strategies of conversation, (3) focus on evidence, and (4) body language, tone, and seating. I utilized these pre-determined codes as criteria for analyzing effectiveness and identifying areas in which I needed to improve (see Table 14). In the four criteria, I demonstrated moderate strength in process and body language, tone, and seating, but in the areas of opening stance and focus on evidence, I needed much more practice to improve. The learning process for me as the instructional leader in

Table 14

*Effectiveness Scores in Post-Observation Conversations (n=8)*

Effective Conversation Guide Criteria	Item	Score
Opening coaching stance	1.	0
	2.	5
	3.	3
	4.1	2
	4.2	0
Process and strategies of conversation	5a	1
	5b	5
	6.	0
	7.	4
	8.	6
	9.	3
	10.	6
	11.	2
12.	3	
Focus on evidence	13.	2
	14	7
	14a	7
	15	3
	16	4
Tone/body language	17	8
	18	7
	19	3
	20	6
	21	7

*Note.* (Tredway et al., 2020).

developing new ways to observe and have conversations may have been a key factor in the teacher dispositions to the conversations.

### ***Opening Coaching Stance***

Principals, like teachers, can be nervous during a post-observation conversation and as a result have less of an impact on the goal of the conversation: to move teachers toward instructional improvement. I did not follow the criterion strictly during my initial attempts largely due to nervousness, was evidenced by the fact that I began all eight conversations without greeting teachers. My nervousness surfaced in my first conversation with Teacher 1 that began with a question from me: “How do you think it went?” which is a question that the Guide does not support as a strong opening for an effective conversation. On February 10, 2020, I again did not provide an opening greeting and question for Teacher 4 and instead launched directly into an examination of the teacher’s utilization of space: “So today I mapped your movements for approximately 20 minutes. Just to orient you to the map, that’s the door” (M. Palmer, meeting notes, February 10, 2020). While I did not attend to greeting teachers directly, I did address the data at the outset in five of the eight conversations. Further, I attempted to take a collaborative coaching stance with teachers during the opening of the conversations by informing the teacher about the purpose of selective verbatim as observational evidence. I had assumed teachers were knowledgeable about observational evidence and that they would quickly engage in a two-way collaborative discussion. My assumptions and lack of familiarity with conducting post-observation conversations contributed to low scores on the opening stance criterion.

### ***Processes and Strategies of Conversation***

A key element of an effective post-observation conversation is the principal-coach using

paraphrasing and questioning to direct the teacher toward a deeper understanding of the observational-evidence. I asked open-ended and clarifying questions in most conversations; however, questions such as “How do you think it went?”, “What (from the data) stands out for you?”, and “Is there anything (from the data) that comes up for you?” did not lead to deeper discussions because teachers were unfamiliar with analysing observational data and my questions did not lead them toward a more focused analysis.

### ***Focus on Evidence***

Similar to quick turnaround on analyzing observation evidence, a code under the focus on evidence category relates directly to asking an opening question about the evidence early in the conversation. My opening questions focused on the data but did not have enough of a focus and, therefore, teachers did not respond to the evidence. “Can you tell me something about your thoughts and feelings about what I have written down? Can you say a bit more about that?” were opening questions that did not lead to a focused response (M. Palmer, meeting notes, March 3, 2020). Zooming in on the observational evidence is a challenge when teachers are not ready to directly analyze the data and the principal-coach has not prepared a set of guiding questions in advance of the conversation. Next steps were not fully realized following the eight conversations, and, therefore, did not conclude with a plan for improvement.

### ***Tone and Body Language***

Seating, the use of non-verbal communication, words of support, and conducting the interview in a non-threatening, positive, and safe space did not pose a challenge. However, since teachers were unfamiliar with the process of observations and conversations about evidence, relational trust had not been fully established and, therefore, teachers did not directly analyze the observational data. I found the code on the use of asset-based language challenging because I

often defaulted to the same type of feedback teachers provided their students: praise. In conversation with Teacher 8, I responded to her with “that sounds good” and “that’s interesting,” comments that do not lead to deeper discussion.

Conducting effective post-observation conversations that lead teachers toward instructional improvement is challenging and rewarding. Practices that are new to the principal and teachers require time to adjust to before engaging in a different kind of conversation. The Guide has not been designed to provide rules to follow; thus, the effective principal-coach must approach the conversation with enough knowledge and skill to nimbly move between a directive approach and a collaborative approach that is focused on the observational evidence. I continued to use the Guide and the four criteria in PAR Cycle Three post-observation conversations to further measure my knowledge and skills in this area. In PAR Cycle Three, post-observation conversations changed since teachers began to use a strong instructional resource that provided them with a pathway to improvement. Thus, in PAR Cycle Three, teachers were more tuned into the selective verbatim and participated in deeper conversations about student learning. I now turn to an examination of the implications that have surfaced from the analysis of data in PAR Cycle Two and the impact of the emerging themes on the research sub-questions, my leadership, and PAR Cycle Three.

### **Implications**

In the previous sections, I discussed the data that I collected, coded, and analyzed in PAR Cycle Two. From this, two emergent themes surfaced: Teacher changes in practice require time and trust in different processes, and the reflective practitioner who is the principal must develop the skill for observations and post-observation conversations as a pre-requisite for fully engaging teachers. However, the only way the principal can become a more competent supervisor who

supports teacher growth and development is by practicing with teachers, making mistakes, showing vulnerability, and learning in public. As I present the emergent themes, I highlight the implications of PAR Cycle Two evidence on the research questions, my leadership growth, and the activities and goals of PAR Cycle Three.

### **Learning from PAR Cycle Two: Trust, Time, and Skill**

The themes that emerged from the PAR Cycle Two evidence suggest that the theory of action is at a preliminary stage. For teachers to engage in evidence-based conversations about practice and become inspired to develop their instructional knowledge and improve instruction, they require trust, time, and practice. Trust and time are interdependent as time is needed to develop relational trust with the observer and practice is required for teachers to develop the skills needed to analyze observational data. Teachers are interested in learning and they remain the school's greatest asset for school improvement. However, teachers need to develop their understanding of professional learning in the context of school: most teacher learning is more effective if it takes place within the walls of the schoolhouse and relies on local knowledge and skill for its inception and implementation (Fullan, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Further, teacher dispositions are an important sighting that surfaced from the two categories of codes. Dispositions are the attitudes teachers bring to discussions about observational evidence which hinder or facilitate the development of their knowledge and skills of teaching and learning.

Working with teachers to support the PAR proved to be challenging due to time constraints and, therefore, PAR did not provide enough evidence to more fully support the research questions. Finding evidence to support the research questions takes significantly more time than I had initially anticipated. Further, teachers required time and practice to become

familiar with the purpose of engaging in conversations about learning that focus on the analysis of observational data, and principals need time to acquire the knowledge and skills to leverage conversations and support teachers to take their next steps.

Additionally, the school was not yet a learning community focused on instructional improvement and, further, teacher dispositions toward observations acted as somewhat of a barrier to improvement. Early in the PAR Cycle Two, I did not fully appreciate the challenges classroom observations and conversations about learning posed for teachers and I did not yet know the teachers' individual knowledge and skills of teaching and learning. I understood aspects of adult learning or andragogy (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016; Knowles, 1984) which is important for distinguishing the ways teachers learn best. However, I made initial assumptions that teachers would be interested in engaging in learning through an investigation of their instructional practices. I learned that it is best for a new principal to continue to go slow by taking time to fully prepare for engagement in conversations with teachers about learning. For teachers to learn they need to feel emotionally secure, and they need time and practice to understand that professional learning opportunities take place in school and are woven into the fabric of their everyday activities (Aguilar, 2013; Grissom et al., 2013; Little, 1999; Prolman, 2017; Russ et al., 2016). Concurrently, the principal must go slowly and take the time to continue building the relational trust necessary for teachers to engage in conversations about learning through a process of experimentation and tethering (Snowden, 2007; Velasco, 2009). Adopting an experimental approach to improvement and tethering the incremental learning to best practices such as CLEs and Writing Workshop may lead teachers to an instructional improvement that they use to move forward. However, the result of learning to proceed slowly during this PAR project has implications for the end goals of the PAR project: while we did not

achieve perhaps all I hoped for, we are continuing this process after the formal study, and a key implication for me is that trial and error is part of the process.

### **Implications for the PAR Research Questions**

At the outset of the PAR Cycle Two, I had hoped to answer research questions with the evidence collected from classroom observations and post-observation conversations. However, my enthusiasm did not align with that of the teachers: “I absolutely have to get on to observations and feedback. I just do not know how to start. No one is asking for feedback. Maybe I should not expect teachers to ask” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, January 20, 2020). I required more time than the PAR Cycle Two allowed to answer the research sub-questions.

Of course, the school closure in March of 2020 during the global pandemic redirected my attention as principal. I needed significant time to engage in observations and post-observation conversations. While I put time into both of these efforts, finding evidence of how the principal and teachers collaboratively develop their knowledge and skills for approaching classroom observations and conversations required much more time than I had anticipated. Moreover, teachers had negative feelings toward observations because in the past a poor evaluation could lead to dismissal.

Reflective memos allowed me to focus on my leadership and learning and contributed to the sub-question: *To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal?* At this point, I understood better that I needed to take a slow approach if I wanted to see the kind of instructional improvement I envisioned. The research questions remained relevant to the PAR project; however, I required more time to continue probing for evidence that supported the research questions.

## **Implications for Leadership**

Leading school change through a PAR project had both rewards and challenges. The rewards included learning more about the teachers and their work, becoming more skilled at using evidence-based observation tools, and developing the knowledge and skills to become better at effective post-observation conversations. Challenges I encountered included time constraints, teachers' knowledge and skills, teachers' guardedness toward ongoing observations, and the COVID crisis. While I began PAR Cycle Two excited about the inquiry into observation tools and conversations, I did not anticipate how teachers would respond to the tools or the evidence the tools generated since teachers had varied ideas about the purpose of observations. Working on change from the inside-out is a key focus in the PAR. I know effecting change is an important part of a principal's work, but teachers may not have the same commitment: "I wish the teachers at my school saw themselves as agents of change. I do not believe they do. I believe there is a fear amongst all of them to truly step outside of their comfort zones" (M. Palmer, reflective memo, March 12, 2020). The evidence from PAR Cycle Two reinforced the import of two areas of focus: developing my skills as a principal-coach, and providing teachers with reassurance that the purpose of observations and post-observation conversations is improved student learning and not teachers' evaluations. Thus, PAR Cycle Two presented opportunities to make small steps toward developing a culture of collaboration that considers instructional improvement.

## **Implications for PAR Cycle Three**

PAR Cycle Three aimed to utilize the assets of the established culture of the school and individual teachers to engage in further experimentation that would reveal the optimal conditions (the sweet spot) in which teachers would begin to improve their instructional practices. PAR

Cycle One revealed school as a social community which represented the established school culture made up of long-time employees, and school as a learning community which represented the possibilities for growth and development in the school. PAR Cycle Two revealed teachers' and principals' need for relational trust, time, and practice to engage more fully in improvement efforts. As an agent of change in the school, I continued to pay attention to sightings to learn more about the school, the teachers, and their work. I had to look for moments to connect what was happening in the teachers' experiences with their readiness to go forward and tempered my goal of changing teacher practice with an awareness of meeting teachers where they are. That knowledge prompted me to focus on the Lucy Calkins' Writing Workshop with the support of an expert consultant from outside of the school, which met two criteria for a possibility of moving forward: (1) the teachers did like to be on the "cutting edge," trying new things and (2) writing is an important instructional practice which has clear steps and teaching rituals. I believed in the resource because of past experiences with it and with the consultant and I believed in teachers' desire to improve. However, I understood the teachers had not worked with an instructional leader who was also interested in improving their knowledge and skills.

### **Summary**

The activities in PAR Cycle Two represented a limited set of experiments or safe-fail probes to discover the intersection of the principal's knowledge and skills, teacher readiness, and the use of best instructional practices (Snowden, 2007). Thus, observations and conversations were a type of trial balloon that did not quite work and so in PAR Cycle Three I returned to the drawing board.

## CHAPTER 7: PAR CYCLE THREE

In PAR Cycle Two, I gained further insight into teacher practice and their readiness to learn, and I became more aware of the importance of slowing down to cultivate relational trust and establish effective ways of working with the teachers to improve their practices. As is often the case in participatory action research, the context and the intersection of the researcher with the context matters (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013). As a result, I determined that the original project design was too ambitious for a principal new to a school. From PAR Cycles One and Two, I learned that the teachers respond well to outside experts and new ideas. Secondly, I found that the instructional program might benefit from a common focus around which the teachers could plan and implement stronger teaching practices. I used that knowledge to leverage a decision for improving instruction in writing that I knew from the research and from my teaching practice and arranged for a consultant to provide teachers with an introduction to the Lucy Calkins' (2013) Writing Workshop. The pre- and post-work required for participating afforded me an opportunity to observe teachers.

Although COVID-19 hindered fully engaging with teachers in observations and conversations, I had the opportunity to observe four teachers who were implementing the Calkin's Writing Workshop. I conducted five observations and three post-observation conversations with four teachers and utilized selective verbatim as a tool for gathering evidence in my post-observation conversations (Acheson & Gall, 2003). Implementing a research-based resource for teaching writing was a practical approach to support the development of teacher knowledge and skills and, additionally, was relevant to the teachers' needs and the needs of our students (Loughran, 2006). Further, I continued to use the Effective Conversations Guide and the collaborative approach to coaching (Glickman, 2002; Tredway et al., 2020). Both provided the

necessary supports to develop our collective comfort levels with observations and conversations about practice. As a result, teachers began to shift away from guardedness I observed in the second inquiry cycle toward a disposition in which they demonstrated readiness to take instructional risks. The meetings with teachers, observations, and conversations supported my ability to further investigate the emerging themes from PAR Cycle Two.

As I outline the PAR Cycle Three process by providing a description of the activities I facilitated with teachers and the evidence I collected and analyzed (see Table 15), I compare the themes from PAR Cycle Three evidence to the emergent themes from PAR Cycle Two. Finally, in analyzing across three cycles of inquiry, I present two key findings that are pertinent to the research and practice communities.

### **PAR Cycle Three Processes**

Returning to the school in August of 2020 was a return to uncertainty as the Ministry of Education's plan for reopening schools changed frequently. Parents were nervous, teachers were nervous, but students were eager to see their friends after nearly five months away from school. I understood the importance of reconnecting with teachers prior to students' return. However, a great deal of our time in the days prior to school reopening was spent in meetings reviewing safety protocols for students and teachers. On September 8, prior to students' arrival, I facilitated a CLE to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives and insights about classroom observations and post-observation conversations to determine how I could encourage more teacher participation. During PAR Cycle Two, I had initiated a conversation with all teachers about writing instruction and acquired Calkins' Writing Workshop resource to support teachers' instructional practices in writing. Thus, for PAR Cycle Three, I decided to focus the observations on writing lessons and the assets teachers demonstrated in their use of the writing resource. In

Table 15

*PAR Cycle Three: Summary of Activities*

Week	1	2	3	4	5
Community Learning Exchange	•				
Classroom observations		•	•	•	
Post-observation conversations	•	•	•	•	
Reflective Memos	•	•	•	•	•

the overview of the activities during PAR Cycle Three, I had engaged an educational consultant to work with teachers on implementing the writing workshop resource. Then, I worked directly with four teachers and investigated the themes that emerged from PAR Cycle Two.

### **PAR Activities**

Following the return of teachers and students to the school, I conducted observations of four teachers who were implementing the workshop units of study. I observed teachers on five occasions during September and October, 2020. In observing writing lessons, I practiced using selective verbatim to determine changes in teachers' knowledge and skills of writing instruction. The four teachers who were using the resource demonstrated practices that included clear learning objectives and, in particular, the use of academic language supported student understanding. In three post-observation conversations, I had an overall increase in my effective conversation skills as I continued to use the Effective Conversations Guide as an analytic. The evidence I collected supported the emerging themes from PAR Cycle Two and provided new insights into ways the principal can support instructional improvement.

In addition, on September 8, 2020, I met with a group of eight teachers to conduct member checks of the data I collected during PAR Cycle Two. I had used Tredway et al. (2020) Effective Conversation Guide in PAR Cycle Two to measure the development of my knowledge and skills and I shared the data I had collected using the scoring rubric in the guide. Following a discussion of the data, teachers responded to questions about how I, as principal, could better engage teachers in observations and conversations. I sought feedback in particular on the following criteria: frequency of observations, focus of conversations, and approaches that encourage teachers to participate in observations and conversations about learning.

## **Evidence and Coding**

PAR Cycle Three was a short cycle of inquiry as school opened on September 9 and much of the time in the first weeks was allocated to learning new safety protocols. The data sets for PAR Cycle Three included artifacts collected from the Community Learning Exchange, evidence from five classroom observations, notes from post-observation conversations, reflective memos, and video recorded reflections on Flip Grid. I used the teacher knowledge and skill codes from PAR Cycle Two to analyze the selective verbatim observational data and the post-observation meeting notes. During the process of gathering observational evidence, I noticed how quickly teachers' instructional practices had changed, a development I discuss in the next section. I continued to utilize the categories of codes from the Effective Conversations Guide to analyze improvements in my effectiveness during post-observation conversations. An additional set of codes emerged from the CLE I held with teachers on September 8, 2020. I coded teachers' responses to questions about observations and conversations in response to member checking the summary of data I collected in PAR Cycle Two. Finally, I coded the reflective memos and video reflections as a method of triangulating the data and verifying the codes subscribed to the observational data and teacher reflections. These data guided my analysis of key themes and the findings

### **A Focus on Assets**

Teachers require time and trust in different processes before they are ready to take up new instructional practices. Further, teachers' readiness to learn may be accelerated when they use a strong, research-based resource for instruction and have ongoing support from the principal. As I analyzed the evidence from observations, post-observation conversations, the CLE, and reflective memos, the data indicated that the intersection of teachers' readiness to

learn, the principal's knowledge and skill development, and the adoption of an innovation in the form of a specific instructional resource, produced the optimal conditions for teachers to add to their knowledge and skills. Writing instruction practices were not aligned across the grades; the writing workshop resource provided teachers with a set of accessible materials and, thus, teachers gained confidence in their writing instruction. I realized at this point I could have introduced a reading resource to teachers as well since practices in reading instruction were also not aligned. However, the writing resource held both the relative advantage (convenience) and compatibility (consistent with existing values) (Rogers, 2003) I sought. Further, the results of writing instruction tend to be immediately visible to the teacher, thus, making it more likely to be adopted (Rogers, 2003).

The analysis made use of the categories of codes identified in PAR Cycle Two and an additional set of codes that emerged from the September 8, 2020 Community Learning Exchange. As with PAR Cycle Two, the key factors emerging from the evidence are teacher knowledge and skills and teacher dispositions.

### **Knowledge and Skills of Writing Instruction**

My observations of teachers' practices in PAR Cycles One and Two exposed the need for changes in the teaching of writing skills. Teachers were teaching students how to write, but the methods were not aligned across the grades. As a school, we needed to show more systematic progression of writing skill development in the specific genres of narrative, informational, and persuasive. After the introduction of the Calkin's Writing Workshop process, teachers' knowledge and skills of writing instruction increased. While some teachers articulated uncertainty about the resource and preferred to wait until the consultant held an introductory workshop, other teachers began using it in earnest. The lessons I observed showed changes in

teacher knowledge and skills had occurred specifically in relation to the learning objectives, organizational management, and teachers' use of feedback.

### ***Learning Objectives***

Providing teachers with a research-based instructional resource, or as one teacher named it, a good recipe to follow, contributed to teachers' readiness to learn. Observations of writing lessons in PAR Cycle Three revealed that instruction included clear learning objectives and a focus on developing students' knowledge and skills of writing (see Table 16). Notably, on September 17, during a fifteen-minute observation, the teacher made 17 references to learning objectives and used specific vocabulary intended to support students' understanding of the elements of a persuasive text. The other teachers were also connecting the learning objectives to the academic language relevant to writing instruction. I made note of teachers' use of specific vocabulary such as evidence, claim, toolbox, juicy words, and writing in the air, a strategy specific to the workshop.

Further, teachers specified their learning objectives were to support students' use of a common language related to writing. Teachers' use of academic vocabulary as a learning objective specific to writing was a significant change from the activity-based lessons I had observed in PAR Cycle Two. "Did you get a sense of the claim?" and "They are hooking you in," are examples of language specific to the lesson objective from an observation on September 30, 2020. Teachers used words such as claim, evidence, and research-based for students to gain the knowledge required to write a persuasive text. Teachers' practices had changed in terms of writing learning objectives and using academic language to write them, and they pointed to the Writing Workshop as the source. During a post-observation conversation, I spoke to teachers about the highlighting of specialized vocabulary on the selective verbatim I shared with

Table 16

*Observational Evidence of Teacher Knowledge and Skills*


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Observation	Teacher Knowledge				Teacher Skills		
	Learning Objectives	Research Based	Naming Practices	Organizational Management	Basic Feedback	Praise as Feedback	No Feedback
Sept. 23	4	1					
Sept. 29	4	2	3		2		
Sept. 30	17	1	1				
Oct. 7		1		1		3	
Oct. 13	8	1	4		2	3	1

---

them, noting the change from previous observations: “They're using Writing Workshop and it's noticeable that they're using something that has structure. They are using resources that give them a lot of confidence and provide the students with tools in order for them to be successful” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, October 6, 2020). During a post-observation conversation, one teacher stated that they were not teaching writing at all last year. Was the resource contributing to a change in teacher practice? Learning objectives were embedded in the resource as were learning routines for students and, thus, provided the teachers with strategies that reduced teachers' need to attend to student behaviors and movements during a lesson.

### ***Organizational Management***

Teachers sometimes feel more comfortable with the principal observing lessons when students are self-regulating and on task. In PAR Cycle Two, observational evidence and post-observation conversations indicated teachers were self-conscious of classroom management during an observation. Of the five observations conducted in PAR Cycle Three, I observed one example of a teacher making reference to the management of student behaviors and movements. Therefore, as noted in a reflective memo, I chose to observe well-structured lessons in which teachers appeared less concerned about the organizational aspect of managing student behaviors and movements. Teachers in these observations had information about writing in charts for students to access independently, and students were in groups talking to each other.

[The classroom] was such a different atmosphere than I remember from last year. The kids were focused on the work. I noticed some artifacts that were in the room like anchor charts. There were a couple of other charts that were organized to support writing instruction. There was a brainstorming chart with words that were circled or highlighted (M. Palmer, reflective memo, October 6, 2020).

In PAR Cycle Two, I observed lessons in which the management of student behaviours and movement *was* the learning objective. In PAR Cycle Three, organizational management coupled with sound learning objectives created a classroom environment that was more focused on learning skills.

### ***Feedback to Students***

Teachers' basic feedback to students, including praise, increased in PAR Cycle Three. The workshop process prompted teachers to consider feedback during writing conferences with students. They used phrases such as thank you; you are right, and ok when conferencing with a student. In one interaction with a student, Teacher 4 provided basic feedback and praise equally. Later, during the post-observation interview, the teacher requested support from me with feedback to "really know what students need" (M. Palmer, meeting notes, October 14, 2020). The writing resource affirmed the teachers' rationale and purpose for providing precise feedback to students on their writing. Additionally, the observational evidence informed my conversations with teachers about their next steps and initiated what Acheson and Gall (2003) refer to as "one of the most rewarding parts of clinical supervision – working together to generate more effective teaching techniques and trying them out" (p. 147).

Learning to improve their practice in authentic ways alongside colleagues supported teachers by engaging them in a process of solving instructional problems from the inside out (Barth et al., 1990; Drago-Severson, 2009; Russ et al., 2016). Further, providing teachers with this research-based resource was an example of the principal supporting teachers' knowledge-in-and knowledge-of-practice (Kelly, 2006). "Teacher 3 told me she likes the prescriptive nature of the Writing Workshop resource and that she is the type of person who prefers a strong recipe"

(M. Palmer, meeting notes, September 24, 2020). A good “recipe” may be what teachers need to jump-start instructional improvement.

### **Teacher Dispositions**

Dispositions can act as obstacles to teachers’ professional growth and are an indicator of readiness to learn. In PAR Cycle Two, on some occasions, teacher dispositions obfuscated observational evidence during post-observation conversations. However, during observations in PAR Cycle Three, teachers displayed a much narrower range of reluctant dispositions toward the observational evidence. Using the disposition codes from PAR Cycle Two, I analyzed three post-observation conversations which revealed that teachers were less guarded during post-observation conversations and more interested in the observational evidence.

On September 30, 2020, a teacher regarded the evidence more critically and conveyed a general attitude of positivity. She spoke directly to the evidence from the beginning of the meeting noting she had used a word incorrectly during the lesson: she used ‘hook’ when she should have used ‘lead.’ In addition, she stated was looking forward to the consultant’s support and that she wanted to learn how to conduct conferencing with students about their writing. The teacher displayed a positive attitude toward the writing resource and a strong sense of purpose and commitment, stating she was right on schedule in her lesson progression and teaching according to the book, “Straight from the book. Right on schedule” (Teacher 3, meeting notes, September 30, 2020).

On September 30, 2020, two homeroom teachers spoke to the observational evidence and were not surprised by the selective verbatim, as some teachers had been in PAR Cycle Two. There was a direct link between what the teacher wanted to do and the evidence, which was highlighting the teachers’ use of vocabulary. Therefore, we both had specifics on which to focus

in the post-observation conversation. In another conversation on October 15, 2020, a homeroom teacher focused on the evidence and noted students' confusion about the differences between retelling a story and narrative writing. She noted her frequent use of 'I statements' as a way to encourage students to pick up taught writing behaviors. Again, teacher choice about using the writing processes was front and center, therefore, the teachers who chose to use it seemed more eager to benefit from the evidence and the conversation, highlighting what we know about adult learning: adults want clarity, and they want choice (Drago-Severson, 2012).

In PAR Cycle Two, teachers spoke about their aspirations for teaching and learning using conditional language to iterate hopes they had to improve. I hoped then that aspiration was a first step to changing practice. Aspirational thoughts, however, did not surface as significantly in PAR Cycle Three since teachers had begun to experience the desire to see concrete outcomes. Conversations about the observational evidence became deeper and more meaningful for teachers and, rather than wishing for something they were not doing; they engaged fully in the doing.

In addition to a good recipe for teaching, the principals' dispositions and approaches to observations and conversations are an important ingredient for teachers' readiness to learn. The combination of clarity of pedagogy and my improved skills supported stronger observations and conversations. I now examine additional evidence that surfaced during the CLE I held on September 8, 2020: the strategies and dispositions for the principal to increase teacher participation in observations and conversations about learning

## **Strategies and Dispositions of the Principal**

To effect change, the principal needs to co-create the conditions that promote teacher learning (Fullan, 1993; 2007;). For teachers to feel a part of the organization and of the collective inquiry, the principal needs to take the temperature of the culture in the school, rely on prior evidence about what to change and how to do it, and then plan opportunities for the teachers to take action and responsibility for the changes. Therefore, in PAR Cycle Three, the imperative for me was to model ways in which change can begin because, as Fullan (1993) states, “you can’t mandate what matters” (p. 22). In settling into Par Cycle Three and a new school year still disrupted by COVID-19, I needed to be intentional. Some teachers had expressed an interest in the CLE framework as an alternative to the standard staff meeting, and I used their responses to plan a meeting of eight teachers, some of whom had participated in observations and conversations in PAR Cycle Two.

At the CLE on September 8, 2020, I engaged teachers in a collaborative process to determine ways I may better encourage teachers to participate in observations and conversations.

I asked teachers to answer three questions:

1. What are some ways to engage teachers in taking next steps?
2. How often and when should observations take place?
3. What are some ways to engage teachers more in observations and conversations?

The data from the questions and conversations revealed two categories: strategies I should employ and the dispositions that I should maintain (see Table 17). While I could hear what the teachers wanted as the conditions for observations, I was frankly concerned that the elements they suggested would not lead to improvement. I was worried that the factors that contributed to the category school as a social community in PAR Cycle One might be all they wanted from a

Table 17

*Strategies and Dispositions to Support Classroom Observations*

Guiding questions	Strategies				Dispositions	
	Consultative	Collaborative	Formal	Informal	Personable	Vulnerable
What are some ways to engage teachers in taking next steps?	3	6	1			1
How often and when should observations take place?	1		3	8	1	1
What are some ways to engage teachers more in observations and conversations?	2	1	2	3	4	4

principal -- an open office hour and dropping by to say ‘hi.’ While social factors may be a necessary condition, the end game was still improving classroom practices. However, I took their advice to heart and began to act on recommendations.

The evidence from the September 8, 2020, CLE revealed four strategic approaches I should take to engage teachers in observations and conversations about observational evidence: consultative, collaborative, formal, and informal. Teachers desired consultation with the principal and would like the principal to be involved in their work so I would “best understand the whole picture” of their work in the classroom (CLE artifact, September 8, 2020). They wanted me to be personable and vulnerable. The strategies and dispositions are indicators of my work as the principal to nudge teachers toward readiness to learn, but I would need to consider their feedback and respond.

### *Consultative and Collaborative Strategies*

The implications of school as a social community from PAR Cycle One surfaced in the responses from teachers’ desire for the principal to consult and collaborate with them. Teachers hold a strong sense of ownership as members of the school as a social community and the data indicate some teachers’ desire to control the outcome of observations and conversations about observational evidence. Teachers’ guardedness was evident as teachers began to record answers to the questions.

At the chart papers, I noticed how teachers were unsure of how to respond to the prompts.

The teachers moved around the papers in small groups and discussed their thoughts. The quiet and guardedness at first was lifted once teachers moved in and started recording their ideas and answers to the questions. (M. Palmer, reflective memo, September 8, 2020)

Guardedness can be interpreted as resistance to change; however, in this case, teachers seemed hesitant to have the principal observe their classroom lessons. I understood teachers needed time to feel safe and comfortable with classroom observations but I did not want the lengthy process of consultation and collaboration to stand in the way a teacher's readiness to engage in improvement. Participants, for example, suggested I help teachers "connect with other staff who are doing cool things," "start with a general check in chat about anything, add an "open conversation" block of time to my schedule "for teachers to drop in as needed," and "give teachers responsibility to lead committees" (CLE artifact, September 8, 2020). In addition, teachers indicated a desire for the principal to take a consultative and collaborative approach in conversations about their next steps toward instructional improvement. Suggestions for the principal included using staff meetings to organize focus groups for teachers to discuss professional goals, asking teachers how the principal can support them, and creating an open conversation hour within the principal's weekly schedule.

None of these were directly about their teaching practices, but more about comfort in the process. I needed to take a step back from observations with some of the teachers to ensure that I consulted and collaborated with them in the ways they preferred. In addition, I needed to continue to model what I want from them: to engage in conversations about practice through observational data. I began to understand that the resistance I perceived had more to do with them not ready to be public about their teaching practices than it did with resisting.

### ***Formal and Informal Strategies***

Developing a deeper understanding of how to support a teacher's instructional capacity is critical, and lesson observations can provide a pathway to improvement when observations are evidence-based and non-evaluative (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Crenshaw & Hoyle, 1981). But

teachers preferred informal observations nearly three times more than formal observations, (see Table 18), aligning with the theme of teachers' dispositions that emerged from PAR Cycle Two. Teachers often displayed guardedness about observations, which I believe refers to teachers' levels of comfort with observations and conversations about observational data. Principals can sidestep teachers' guardedness by balancing evidence-based observations and conversations with more informal drop-in observations that are relaxed, conversational, and low pressure. Teachers' dispositions indicate their readiness to learn, and their preference for less frequent formal observations and conversations with the principal (once per year) supports the theme of teacher guardedness. Formal observations make teachers nervous because they are equated with evaluation, and evaluation leads teachers to feeling self-conscious, guarded, and hesitant to fully engage in conversations about observational data. Evidence in PAR Cycle Two indicated that teachers need reassurance that observations do not equate to evaluation: "Teacher 3 mentioned being nervous about being observed. She needed to be reassured that being observed did not mean being evaluated" (M. Palmer, reflective memo, January 29, 2020).

Teachers' preference for more informal strategies for observations and approaches to conversations is an indicator of their readiness to take the next steps toward improvement. Principals need to attend to both teacher dispositions and their own dispositions to develop the relational trust that is the foundation of any adult learning and change (Drago-Severson, 2012). Additionally, principals must intentionally move slowly with teachers who are guarded, take the time to listen for sightings into teachers' dispositions, and find the space to create connections that will ultimately support teachers to develop their knowledge and skills of teaching.

Table 18

*Strategies to Increase Teachers' Capacity for Classroom Observations*

Strategies for the Principal	Teachers' Preference	
	Formal	Informal
The ways the principal can support teachers' next steps.	1	
The frequency of observations.	3	8
The ways to engage teachers in observations and conversations.	2	3

## **Personable and Vulnerable**

A personable and vulnerable disposition was defined as someone who is informal and prepared to have “open conversations”— ready to be more relaxed and “real.” Further, someone with a personable and vulnerable disposition encourages others to be vulnerable and is described as “leading from the heart” to “create connections so teachers feel less worried about being observed” (CLE artifacts, September 8, 2020). Teachers were precise with their advice and suggested I share my goals with them. I hoped that sharing my goals would be reciprocated and “encourage teachers to be more vulnerable with their own areas of growth” (CLE artifacts, September 8, 2020). At this point, I was discovering that my learning and improving my skill set intersected with teacher readiness to improve their instructional practices: “I am not sure how much they really understand about what I am interested in changing about my work as an instructional leader. Or, are they are guarded and resistant to allowing themselves to understand?” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, September 8, 2020). I became more intentional about the work of developing skills for observing and conversing about observational evidence, and I declared my intentions prior to post-observation conversations.

I am practicing having a different kind of conversation with you about the observation, one that relies on the evidence I collected and one in which you decide what your next steps are. I have ideas, of course, but what I am most interested in is your decisions about what you want to do next as a result of the evidence from the observation (M. Palmer, email correspondence, October 5, 2020).

In addition, I invited teachers to give feedback on my goals and created an open office hour on my weekly schedule for casual conversation. Further, I invited individual teachers to meet with me to gather feedback on the changes due to COVID-19, and I asked them to bring

suggestions for me. Being personable and vulnerable with teachers so they begin to trust the principal's motives is one of many starting points for a principal new to a school (Aguilar, 2013). At this point, only a year into my tenure at the school, teachers were still learning about me and the work I was engaged in and dedicated to -- becoming a better instructional leader. Yet, observations and conversations made teachers feel vulnerable to judgment and potential criticism and, therefore, they were initially guarded and hesitant to engage. The evidence suggests teachers want to know the principal is willing to be vulnerable as a pre-condition to observations of their work in the classroom.

Principals need to set the conditions for learning that permit teachers to learn from each transforming the traditional role of a school's sole instructional leader into a more distributed approach (Spillane, 2013). Creating the conditions in which teachers are ready to learn and grow requires a principal to approach change efforts by strategically consulting and collaborating with teachers and ensuring their voices are heard and valued. Additionally, principals must be mindful of their attitudes toward the pace of change in schools and demonstrate their willingness to be vulnerable and build trust through a balance of informality and personability.

### **Connecting the Dots**

The PAR project results revealed two significant findings: (1) The principal and teachers require time, trust, and skill to collaboratively engage in evidence-based conversations about practice; and (2) to effect change in a system like a school, the principal needs to experiment with "safe-fail probes" to discover the intersections of teacher readiness to learn, the principal's skill set, and a "good recipe" in the form of best instructional practice (Snowden, 2007). The findings are based on evidence from three cycles of PAR that included several teachers as participants in a range of activities that aimed to discover the optimal location of teachers'

readiness to learn. The PAR project aimed to increase teacher and leader capacity to have effective conversations about teaching and learning that would lead to improved classroom instructional practices; however, I still needed to establish trusting relationships with teachers who identified with two distinct subcultures within the school's context to attain that goal. I learned that change in a complex system like a school is not linear and therefore requires an experimental approach.

In presenting the findings, I begin with an analysis of trust, time, and skill -- all of which are required for teachers and principals to engage in collaborative conversations about observational data. I frame the themes in the evidence and the extant literature on change and relational trust. I then turn to the bigger story of the PAR project and how "fail-safe" probes are necessary brief small interventions that draw on the PDSA inquiry cycle and how the probes work in a system (Bryk et al., 2015).

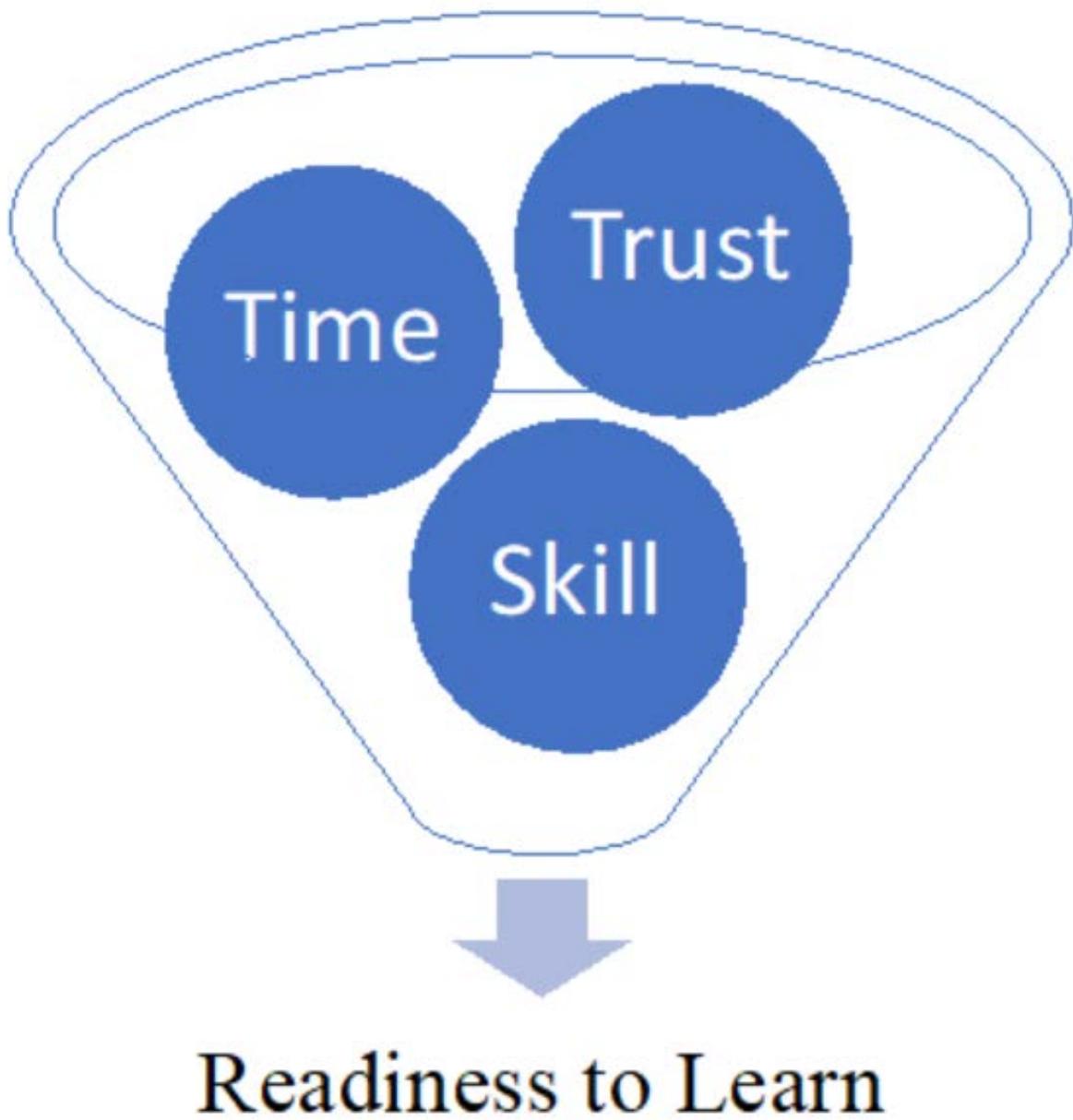
### **Finding: Trust, Time, and Skill**

Teachers, with principals, need to nurture trust and have sufficient time to learn and practice new skills so that they can carefully build their instructional practice repertoire. Evidence from PAR Cycle Two revealed that the teachers may not have had full trust in my intentions with observations; rather, the teachers may have perceived observations as a threat to their autonomy and an indication that I thought their instructional practices were incorrect. Evidence from the CLE in PAR Cycle Three suggested teachers may be more trusting of an informal approach to observations and conversations about observational data and called for the principal to demonstrate vulnerability and personability as a pre-condition to observations. Developing relational trust is a critical ingredient for the success of any improvement effort in a school (Bryk, 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Grubb, 2009; Zepeda, 2012). What became

obvious is that, in this context, as a principal new to the school, I could not rush into developing relational trust to conduct observations in an unknown school culture. Concurrently, some teachers require more time than others to develop their trust with the process of observations and post-observation conversations. The principal and teachers require the ingredients of trust and time to develop the skills to engage in a process of school improvement (see Figure 10) and I learned that going slow to go fast builds the requisite trust and skills needed to address the goals of the improvement effort. In analyzing trust, skill, and time in the authentic life of schools and teachers, I find that these three components occur dynamically and interactively. Thus, I conclude the discussion of this finding with how the three essential components of teacher change interact.

### *Trust*

Trust is critical for developing relationships and establishing credibility with teachers as a principal entering a new school. Certainly, the importance of trust aligns with the research and practice literature (Aguilar, 2013; Bryk, 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Prolman, 2017). However, as a novice principal of three years and a new principal at the school in Fall 2019, I did not fully understand the import of trust as an abstract resource that we must co-generate (Grubb, 2009). CLEs provided a means to gain insight to the school as a social community and establish and nurture trust. In particular, I adhered to the axioms that form the values of the community learning exchange. The CLE framework and dynamic pedagogies encouraged conversation and dialogue that led toward the development of relational trust. I invited teachers to participate, and those who attended engaged in dialogue about their perspectives on the power of place and revealed their desire to grow. CLEs provided space for teachers to be vulnerable and explore relatable concepts that intersected with their beliefs and values at a personal level. As the school



*Figure 10.* The essential ingredients to ensure readiness to learn.

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leader seeking to establish trust, I understood the power of the CLE axiom that learning and leadership are a dynamic social process, and, with that understanding, I learned about the power of the place and the wisdom of the people. Each CLE event led me to a deeper understanding of the school culture and the teachers' beliefs and values. Conversely, teachers did not trust the process of observations and post-observation conversations. Teacher guardedness prevented full engagement in conversations about observational data and tended to obfuscate the conversations related to issues of classroom management and aspirations for their students and their teaching practices.

### ***Time***

Teachers need time to become comfortable with observations and conversations about observational data, and I needed time, as principals do, to experiment with stronger evidence-based observation tools to lead conversations about observational evidence. In PAR Cycle Two, teachers needed assurance that observation was not a precursor to dismissal, but I did not fully understand that concern. Evidence from PAR Cycle Three revealed teachers' desire for observations and conversations within a set of conditions, and that knowledge provided me with some directions I could take with teachers. Teachers articulated a preference for the principal to make it fun, casual, and not always focused on data at a CLE on September 8, 2020, a full year after I began working at the school. Further, teachers needed the experience of observations and post-observation conversations in PAR Cycle Two to advance their readiness, and I needed the time to come to know more of the school culture and the work of the teachers.

Establishing trusting professional relationships happened in small moments with teachers during hallway conversations, or during longer conversations in which the teacher's personal life and history were topics of conversation. Once these relationships began to

form, inviting myself in for an observation was easier (M. Palmer, reflective memo, February 29, 2020).

Concurrently, I needed to learn how to use evidence-based observation tools and engage in effective conversations with teachers. I was just learning to use the Effective Conversations Guide (Tredway et al., 2020) in PAR Cycle Two as a resource to engage in collaborative and constructivist conversations about observational evidence. However, due to COVID-19 school closures, the data collection from observations and conversations was abruptly stopped and learning continued online in March of 2020. I realized, however, that I did not want to abandon efforts to get better at the conversations, but I needed to ensure that the teacher readiness for conversations was present.

### *Skill*

Teachers and principals require practice with observations and post-observation conversations to develop the necessary skills to engage fully in instructional improvement. I understood from Acheson and Gall (2003) that capturing selective verbatim of teachers' verbal communications during a lesson was not a simple process, and that even good selective verbatim took practice. I was not skilled at the process early in PAR Cycle Two, which resulted in verbatim transcripts that did not focus in on specific verbal behaviors such as providing feedback to students. In addition, teachers were unfamiliar with evidence-based observation tools, and some long-term faculty held negative feelings toward observations due to messages received from previous school leadership. Additionally, post-observation conversations require participants to be skilled in examining observational evidence. Since the verbatim transcripts did not prompt teachers to fully engage in conversations about practice, I had a clear indicator of teachers' readiness to learn from that method.

My use of selective verbatim and teachers' engagement in post-observation conversations changed with the introduction of Calkin's Writing Workshop in PAR Cycle Three. I was completely comfortable with the writing process and knew from prior use that starting with writing as an instructional activity is tangible and possible for teachers. In addition, teachers' enthusiasm for the resource changed their instructional practices in the teaching of writing and provided me with more opportunity to use selective verbatim in my observations. I observed teachers use effective instructional strategies such as guided and independent practice, modeling, and the use of technology as an instructional tool. Notably, teachers use of language specific to the teaching of writing stood out in the selective verbatim transcripts. Teachers' skills had shifted away from classroom management as a learning objective to instructional strategies that supported student knowledge and skill development in writing. In addition, the intersection of my knowledge and skill set, and teachers' use of Writing Workshop made the recording of teachers' verbal behaviors more precise and provided a transcript that led to more effective conversations.

Subsequently, post-observation conversations turned into opportunities for me to practice the skills I needed to become effective because teachers arrived at the meetings more tuned into the observational evidence and prepared to take their next steps. I focused on open-ended questions to find out how teachers were planning to go further with their learning. I asked teachers to decide their next steps and I heard them talk about their next steps. The teachers stated that conferencing with students is something they needed support with (M. Palmer, reflective memo, October 14, 2020).

Teachers and principals develop their readiness to learn and engage in the kind of collaborative work needed to change instructional practices through a variety of interconnected

processes. Principals require time to develop a range of skills in their roles in order to promote continuous learning and development of teachers' knowledge and skill (Zepeda, 2012). Teachers require time to gain the knowledge and skills they need to be ready to trust the principals' intentions. The processes of change are not linear; they are messy, complex, and dynamic (Fullan, 1993; hunter et al., 2013; Prolman, 2017). In school reform, there is no direct route to the final destination: success lies in the creative activity of making new maps.

### **Finding: The Optimal Location of Teacher Readiness – Safe-Fail Probes**

To effect change in a system like a school the principal needs to experiment with “safe-fail probes” in order to discover the intersections of a teacher's readiness to learn, the principal's skill set, and the optimal form of best instructional practice (Snowden, 2007). I understood that learning readiness, situated in the socio-cultural sphere of learning as teacher learning, depends to a large degree on context and can be enhanced by useful tools (Cobb et al., 2012; Russ et al., 2016). Thus, as a reflective practitioner, I employed a range of authentic experiments to add to teachers' experiences, knowledge, and skill with the intention of strengthening their readiness to learn. Through three PAR cycles, I engaged teachers in a non-linear process of experimentation that included community learning exchanges (CLEs), observations and post-observation conversations, and a probe to implement new approaches to the teaching of writing. By PAR Cycle Three, after analysis of the evidence, I organized an outside expert in writing instruction, which provided tools that helped to mediate learning. In examining the probes, the key elements were teachers' readiness to learn and my levels of knowledge and skill.

In analyzing the results of the fourteen months of experimentation (see Figure 11) that led to the implementation of Lucy Calkins' Writing Workshop, I observed changes in teachers' instructional practices. The change process of probes, similar to the plan-do of the improvement

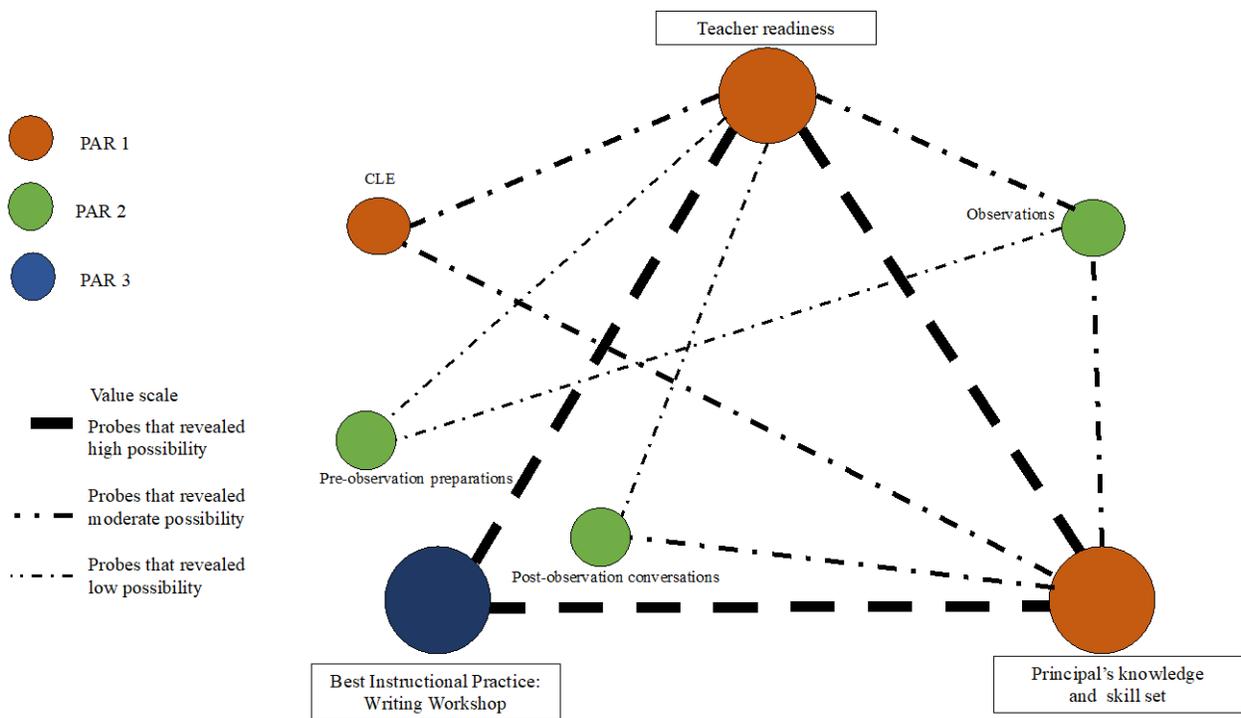


Figure 11. Connecting the dots: Safe-fail probes that revealed possibility for change.

science process (PDSA), resulted in evidence that supported the finding. Through a series of experimental probes in the three cycles, I was able to hit the sweet spot of teachers' readiness to learn.

### **Experimentation**

Principal and teacher readiness take time, trust, and skills and, especially during PAR Cycle Two, the readiness seemed elusive. In PAR Cycle One, two variations of teachers' beliefs about the importance of school community as a social community emerged, which provided direction for initial stages of the project. In community learning exchanges, some teachers valued strong social capital and traditions, and they believed in the importance of trust and safety. Other teachers concentrated on the school as a learning community. In that focus, they held hopes and dreams for their futures as teachers; they put their eggs in the instructional basket and wanted to become a growing edge of change within a strong social community. As a part of that emphasis, teachers wanted to be a part of forward-thinking efforts in educational reform. These interlocking views of the school community constituted a sighting—an epiphany that can be a guiding light for change (McDonald, 1996). In this case, as the project and study continued into PAR Cycle Three, recognizing the value the teachers placed on the social community as well as taking on new projects that they deemed professionally useful became more significant.

In PAR Cycle Two, I thought teachers were ready to participate in classroom observations and deeper conversations about learning. I thought too that the groundwork with learning exchanges from PAR Cycle One was sufficient to develop relational trust with teachers. In addition, we had the added constraint of responding to the COVID crisis and the observations, while interesting for me, did not actually lead to changing teachers' instructional practices.

Further, possibly due to conflicting interests, teachers' readiness to participate waned following eight observations and conversations: "I have learned that my positionality in the research is difficult to manage. I have also learned teachers have difficulty with positionality as well" (M. Palmer, reflective memo, March 12, 2020).

The Effective Conversation Guide and frequent use of selective verbatim for gathering observational evidence supported my emerging knowledge and skill set; however, at this point, teachers pushed back on observations. One teacher stated, "I think that ongoing observation is something that some teachers might be hesitant to pursue" (Teacher 3, personal correspondence, April 13, 2020). In mid-March 2020, every school in the province was closed due to COVID-19 and we moved to remote learning online, effectively bringing a close to the observations experiment. However, in analyzing the evidence, I took several points to heart, and that led to a decision to implement the workshop for writing lessons.

Yet, the probes in the first two cycles of PAR led me to think about teachers' readiness for more CLEs as a format to engage with other teachers and the principal in non-traditional learning processes. The observations probe had not gained traction prior to the COVID-19 retreat from the school due in part to teacher readiness and in part to my being a novice principal. I had some knowledge and skills but little experience in balancing a PAR project with the demands of a learning about the school and the daily normative work of a principal. However, the evidence from both formal and informal observations and school-based documentation highlighted the need for a strong and precise probe into the teachers' instructional practices in literacy (reading and writing). Thus, in PAR Cycle Three, after informal conversations with teachers, analysis of the evidence, and a knowledge of the two community emphases (social and learning community) that surfaced in PAR Cycle One, I introduced teachers to Lucy Calkins' Writing Workshop with

the support of an expert literacy consultant to guide their implementation of research-based writing instruction.

In PAR Cycle One, I learned writing instruction was not aligned across the school, and I decided to take an informed and calculated risk based on my knowledge and skill of best practice in writing instruction. In PAR Cycle Two, I informed teachers of my findings and contacted a literacy consultant with whom I had prior experience. In June of 2020, I acquired the Writing Workshop resources, distributed them to each of the teachers, and introduced them to the consultant. The return to the school in August of 2020 was a return to uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was, nevertheless, determined to persist with probing as a safe-fail process of experimentation. “The change in practice has been a result to my persistence and also knowing that adding the support of [the consultant] with the change initiative helps teachers feel more comfortable” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, October 14, 2020). At this point, my skills as an observer shifted due in part to the learning from PAR Cycle Two and the teachers’ conceptions of what was preferred. That had to match what was possible considering the evidence about readiness and their reluctance to engage in conversations about practice. One teacher who took on the workshop process with gusto said that she liked a “good recipe.” In addition, this method provided the element of novelty which was important for teachers in the school as a social community and the school as a learning community. In addition, the writing resource was embedded with the next steps that added to teachers’ knowledge and skills of best practice in writing instruction.

Further, I added to my knowledge and skills as an observer and as a principal-coach because I employed a collaborative and constructivist approach to post-observation conversations. In PAR Cycle Two, my skills as an observer were rudimentary, and I practiced

post-observation conversation skills and relied on hope that teachers would use the observational evidence to take their next steps. In PAR Cycle Three, my knowledge and skills advanced as I engaged with teachers who had enthusiastically taken up Writing Workshop. Teachers arrived to post-observation conversations with a clear understanding of the selective verbatim because their lessons were more intentional and structured. In addition, teachers communicated their knowledge of next steps and an understanding of the skills they needed to attend to and how I could support them. “I asked the teachers what I can pay attention to. One said conferring and the other said their use of feedback” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, October 14, 2020).

Locating the place, time, and psychologically safe space to discover the optimal location of teacher readiness required fourteen months of steady experimentation. While I was not skilled enough to predict the outcome of each probe, I had enough experience to know that the experimental approach I chose would reveal new sightings and lead to new possibilities. I now turn to the methodology that supported the experimentation and revealed a deeper understanding of a leadership approach that helped me, with teachers, uncover the sweet spot of teacher readiness.

Safe-fail probes may be the way to I continue to diffuse innovations such as the Calkin’s Writing Workshop resource (Rogers, 2003). The workshop method had the relative advantage of being perceived as doable by teachers while other innovations (lesson observations and conversations) did not match teachers’ level of readiness. Further, the resource was more compatible because it fulfilled a need for the teachers who were ready to adopt something new. The final safe-fail probe of the PAR study proved effective as an experimental method in a complex system highly sensitive to small interventions (Snowden, 2007). The safe-fail approach

ensured that failures or low possibility probes did not produce a negative impact on my work as principal and instructional leader.

### **Summary**

The professional dilemma that informed the focus of practice of this project was knowing how to successfully collaborate with teachers to activate their professional learning and desire to take risks. As a school reform story, the PAR highlighted the import for the principal to adopt a “innovation-oriented stance” (Rogers, 2003) and address the FoP from a systems change perspective, albeit at a microscopic level. Thus, effective principals know the best environment for teachers to learn is in the school house where the principal, as instructional leader, can listen and look for sightings, go slow and start small, and place emphasis on the processes of change over episodic learning experiences (Bryk, 2017; Fullan, 1993; Grissom et al., 2013; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McDonald, 1996; Senge, 1990).

## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I began this project with the belief that I understood myself as a school leader and, further, that I understood myself to be fully-formed as a school principal. I entered the school where the PAR study was conducted in September 2019 after nearly 20 years of working at international IB schools outside of Canada—in Turkey, Ukraine, and the Republic of Georgia. In the 18 months between entering the school and completing the PAR project, I have learned I am not a formed object as the principal and that my *self* is not a thing but a mutable process that, as Bateson (1994) states, is “fluid and variable, shaped and reshaped by learning” (p. 64). From the beginning of the PAR project, I understood that teachers have the greatest impact on student learning (Rigby et al., 2017) and that the principal must focus on creating opportunities for teachers to learn and grow so they continue to improve student learning.

However, as I observed instructional practices that were not aligned to the inquiry-based learning that is central to the IB, I was anxious about changing teacher practice. A central goal was to support the teachers to add to their knowledge and skills through observations and productive conversations about observational evidence. My personal and professional experiences as a teacher lacked the kind of collaborative support from principals that I desired, and, thus, I wanted to be the agent of change for the school. To carry out this mission, I engaged teachers in a process that would affect teachers’ instructional practices and subsequently provide students with increased academic rigor and higher levels of achievement. During the process of the three cycles of PAR, I learned change in schools occurs more incrementally than I imagined and requires the involvement of all teachers; the process is complex, messy, iterative, and generative (Fullan, 1993; hunter et al., 2013; Freire, 1970). Additionally, I learned the process of change is grounded in creativity and *bricolage* in which the output is greater than the input and

“there is a net gain of information, complexity, and richness” (Nachmanovitch, 1991, p. 86). As Cuban (2016) reiterates in his book, *Inside the Black Box of Classroom Practice*, there is so little change in schools because they are complex organizations with many moving parts; to change requires “constant adaptations and compromises in design and action” (p. 156). I was not quite prepared at the outset of the PAR for just how complex a process this would be, but I have learned that those adaptations and compromises require evidence and analysis as well as the school leader flexibility (Spillane, 2013). In fact, change is a process of making the familiar strange and of looking for sightings or epiphanies of practice in which one’s values match teacher readiness and to which the school leader can tether teacher dispositions to proposed changes (Guajardo et al., 2016; McDonald, 1996; Velasco, 2009). But above all, change required allowing myself to trust the process. My peripheral vision of leadership and learning has widened as a result of the learning through the PAR (Bateson, 1994).

The chapter provides a summary of the activities and the results from three cycles of PAR between September 2019, and October 2020, which coincides with my first year at the school and the start of my second year. Regardless of the challenges I faced during this time, returning to my home country to take on a new job as a novice principal in a new school, starting an ambitious PAR project aimed at transforming the classroom practices, and completing the project during a global crisis, the learning I gained has provided me with insights into the nature of change processes in schools and the importance of leadership that attends to change from the inside out and supports equity and internal coherence (Forman et al., 2018; Grubb & Tredway, 2010; Routé-Chatmon, 2019). The chapter includes an overview of the study, a discussion of the findings in relation to a reinforced theory in action, the implications of the study, and the ways

in which the study has transformed my leadership and practice. I begin with a summary of the PAR project aim and purpose.

I completed the study at an independent K–12-day school in Vancouver, British Columbia, accredited by the International Baccalaureate to offer the PYP, MYP, and DP academic programs. The school had undergone a number of leadership changes in the four years prior to my arrival and I was specifically hired to bolster in the core subjects of reading and writing, areas in which I had teaching experience and expertise; thus, I could act, as Vygotsky (1978) would name, as the more knowledgeable other. The focus of practice was geared toward collaboratively developing the knowledge and skills of teaching and learning and increasing teacher and leader capacity to have effective conversations about teaching and learning. As a result, teachers would iteratively improve their classroom instructional practices, and their instructional choices would improve the equitable access and academic rigor for students. I grounded the theory of practice in the belief that a principal who deeply understands teachers' beliefs and values and builds relational trust can work collaboratively with teachers to develop or improve their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. After informal observations of teachers in the Fall of 2019, I believed the misalignment of practices in literacy instruction were contributing to students' equitable access to rigour and subsequent higher levels of achievement.

The study began with an inquiry into the school and teachers in PAR Cycle One which led to lesson observations and an examination of observational evidence during post-observation conversations in the second cycle of inquiry. Concurrently, I closely examined my leadership practice to develop my skills to engage teachers in deeper conversations. When the COVID crisis brought observations to a close in the middle of PAR Cycle Two, I introduced teachers to a new instructional resource in writing when we returned to the school in September 2020. I invoked

my prior knowledge about effective writing processes as well as what I had determined from the trial balloon efforts in the other cycles; as a result, I thought writing was an entry point that would satisfy the teachers' desires to be current in research-based practices and fit the teacher readiness level for engaging in a program that fit with our commitment to IB principles. In addition, with my experience in Writing Workshop, I knew their consultants would be knowledgeable and that they could be a sounding board for me. Participants in the study included eight teachers who agreed to observations and conversations, and other teachers who participated in observations and CLEs. Through all three cycles of PAR, I collected and analyzed data (see Table 19) that led to emergent themes and finally the findings which I detail in the next section.

### **Discussion**

I began the PAR study thinking that observations and post-observation conversations were sufficient leverage to bring about changes to teachers' instructional practices. To a certain extent, I was right in that theory of action; but, of course, the complexities of the organization are not that simple. I was simultaneously establishing myself as principal in a new school, building trust with teachers, exploring the cultural context of the school, and then figuring out how to approach teachers on their instruction – clearly more complex than learning more effective methods of evidence-based observations and post-observation conversations. As such, I investigated ways a novice principal new to a school can work toward developing the relational trust and creating the conditions for teacher readiness to make instructional improvement and, thus, change practices. In presenting an analysis of the study findings within the extant literature, I place the findings within the theoretical framework of adult learning theory and situated learning, both of which are grounded in a psychological framework that supports the analysis.

Table 19

*Types of Data Collected in Three Cycles of PAR*

	PAR I	PAR II	PAR III
CLE Artifacts	•	•	•
Observational evidence		•	•
Post-observation conversation verbatim		•	•
Reflective memos	•	•	•

## **Time, Trust, and Skill**

Principals and teachers require time, trust, and skill to collaboratively engage in evidence-based conversations about practice. In other words, adult readiness was critical to our ability to use the iterative process of diagnosis and design, followed by implement and study, to support iterative learning on their part and mine (Spillane, 2013). Time and trust are interdependent and, fundamental to the process, principals and teachers need significant amounts of time to develop the relational trust that sets the stage for change to occur. Because trust is a central pre-condition (Bryk, 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2003), Grubb (2009) calls trust an abstract resource which cannot be purchased but can only be accrued through interactions and time. I modeled the kind of professional and interpersonal behaviors that support relational trust in a range of ways: with individual teachers, small groups, and the whole staff. To be successful, I learned to nurture trust through activities that met teachers at their particular levels of readiness through inclusive methods tailored to them.

In the end, what worked best were two practices that I imported to the school: Community Learning Exchanges (Guajardo et al., 2016) and the Lucy Calkin's Writing Workshop model (Calkins, 2013). As a result of iterative evidence and balancing different approaches that motivated teachers—those who saw the school as a social community and others who wanted it to be a professional learning community—I was able to find a sweet spot and start, in my second full year as principal in the school, to move forward instructional practices from multiple vantage points. First of all, this supported a key premise of adult learning: choice and adaptation to the person are important (Drago-Severson, 2009; Knowles, 1984). Secondly, readiness for learning is individual. Wise and Jacobo (2010), in a study on leadership coaching, speak to the importance of assessing the skill zone of development level for the adults in an

organization and using the right tools to mediate learning for them. “This zone is defined as the area in close proximity to current practice and/or knowledge where the person is most likely to learn. This learning should stretch the person, but not be too difficult or too easy” (Wise & Jacobo, 2010, p. 161). Their advice was useful for applying to teacher readiness as I supported groups of teachers to make shifts. Although they did not have a common readiness level, by approaching the process in two ways—social interactions and social construction of knowledge—we gradually made headway, even if not always in a straight line forward.

In sum, teachers’ readiness to develop their knowledge and skills of practice relates to psychological safety manifested in relational trust; trust and readiness are two sides of the same coin. Teachers and principals need time, trust, and new skills to fortify their current knowledge and skills of practice. With many teachers, I best accomplished this by relying on the social environments they had developed over many years of professional relationships. The choices for how to engage are aligned with the literature on the optimal learning environments for teachers and highlighted the importance of principals’ active involvement in creating the conditions in which teachers are ready to learn (Aguilar, 2013; Prolman, 2017; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). In the Tuytens and Devos study (2011) in particular, they concluded that teachers feel more emotionally secure when principals become actively involved in observations and provide feedback on their work. However, I found that many teachers were unaccustomed to any classroom observations; thus, they needed time and practice to adapt to a principal who is interested in observations, a finding that is not fully addressed in the literature on how to engage in school change efforts, which invariably recommends that instructional leadership include observations (Glickman, 2002; Marshall, 2009). Thus, in our context, I needed to develop trust, but, at the same time, assess readiness and make decisions about moving forward based on that

iterative diagnosis and design (Spillane, 2013). That tricky balance required that I differentiate learning for the teachers, something we know is critical for working with adults who are learning new skills (Drago-Severson, 2012; Knowles, 1984). For example, in PAR Cycle Two, I mis-assessed that level of readiness on the part of some teachers and had to make changes for PAR Cycle Three.

### **Safe-Fail Probes**

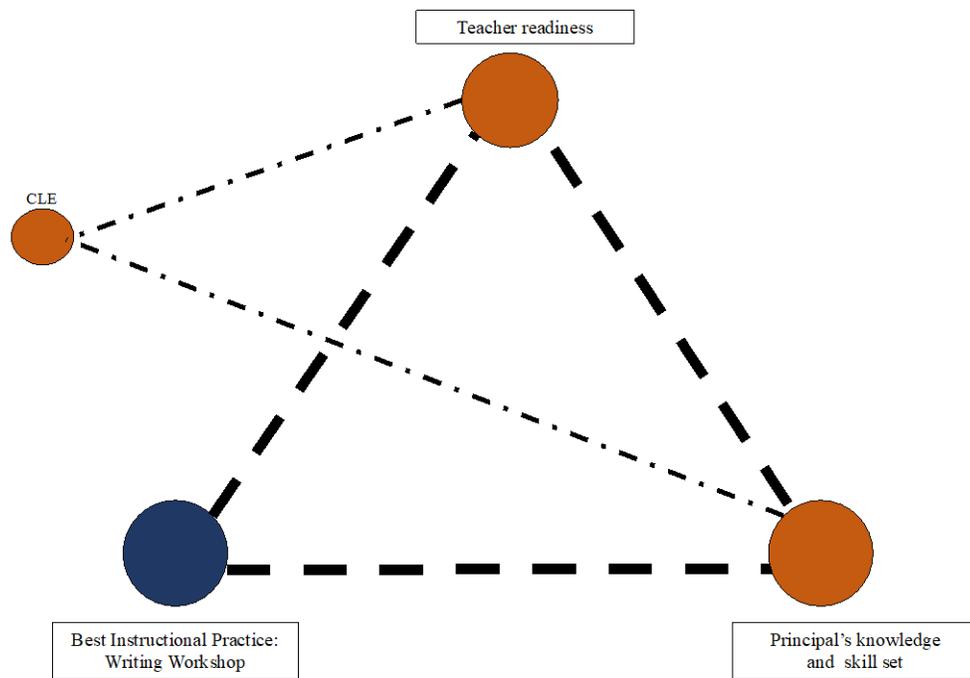
Evidence from PAR Cycle Three indicated that, through the series of experiments or safe-fail probes, I began to meet teachers at their levels of readiness. Safe-fail probes represent a revised way to approach change efforts (Riddell & Moore, 2015; Snowden, 2007); in short, instead of feeling like we did not succeed, we needed to adopt a different stance toward change efforts. By probing, we find out early on what is not quite working right. Similar to the *plan-do* steps of the Bryk et al. (2015) process for improvement sciences, I learned to give myself the safety of not necessarily failing, but not fully succeeding; by learning from the evidence about what was not quite working, I was able to compensate and move forward. That is not an easy organizational or personal shift because the tendency is to reform again and again by throwing the baby out with the bath water (Cuban, 1990). Instead, over the fourteen months of the PAR study, I had gained the courage and vision to adjust, learn, keep talking to teachers, and introduce the writing project. As a result, I was able to nudge teachers toward increasing levels of readiness.

Concurrently, I learned to implement and use the evidence from safe-fail probes, a critical tool for leaders managing school reform (Riddell & Moore, 2015). Through each PAR cycle, I continued to analyze the intersection of teacher readiness to learn, my skill set, and finding a useful form of research-based instructional practices that would appeal to teachers. I

initially followed the PDSA cycle of the plan-do of the improvements sciences (PDSA). The cycles are quick and flexible and build on the previous work of the team and, thereby, lead teachers to their understanding of the innovation. However, due to the range of levels of teacher readiness and my emerging leadership skills, the action element of the cycle was not realized in the probes with which I experimented, particularly in PAR Cycle Two. Hence, as I engaged in reflection, I did not abandon my long-term goal of teacher improvement, but found other means to achieve it.

Change processes are complex and in some ways the school leader cannot control the outcomes of the process (Fullan, 1993). An emerging model “may work in a few places, and finally to a robust large-scale improvement,” or to a new PDSA cycle (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 122), but it may not. I learned the import of not becoming defeated when things did not work and of sticking with the innovation until I found what worked.

Adhering to the axioms of the community learning exchange and my persistence at facilitating CLEs as a means to engage with teachers deepened my knowledge of teachers’ perspectives and furthered my confidence and commitment to an experimental approach. Honestly, on certain days, I felt like the poster: “nevertheless, she persisted.” However, learning the process of keeping track of sightings to move the inquiry moving forward, albeit in a non-linear manner, is valuable for me for the rest of my career. Additionally, I better understood adult learning and how teachers required the support of their principal to increase their knowledge-in and knowledge-of practice (Drago-Severson, 2009; Kelly, 2006). As I demonstrated in Chapter 7 evidence and in Figure 12, the combination of teacher readiness, principal knowledge and skill, and the writing workshop approach supported by community learning exchanges as a process for engaging are a promising trio for moving forward. By incorporating relational trust, teacher



*Figure 12.* Safe-fail probes that supported the findings.

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requests, prior evidence, and reflection on my leadership, this offers a set of tools to mediate learning for teachers and develop a common instructional practice for improving student learning (Wise & Jacobo, 2010).

Observations and conversations about the observational evidence did not necessarily add to teachers' knowledge and skills because some teachers were not fully ready to address instructional issues by discussing the evidence from the observations. Instead, because teachers had not been accustomed to observations, they demonstrated guardedness toward the process. While I attempted to create space for teachers to learn within the context of everyday practice, guardedness often prevented conversations from leading to the improvement that I know these conversations can yield when the principal and teacher have developed relationship trust and have conceptions of teaching that are developmental (Grissom et al., 2013; Russ et al., 2016). However, I was able to discern the difference between guardedness and resistance and, because of recognizing that nuance, I believed their responses stemmed from unfamiliarity. Thus, when observations and conversations did not yield an outcome in the form of teachers' next steps, I had to rethink processes for moving forward.

Because many teachers had suggested we continue CLEs, I again invited teachers to engage in this non-traditional and informal learning experience (Guajardo et al., 2016). The inclusive pedagogies associated with CLEs encouraged teachers to reveal their values, beliefs, hopes, and dreams. The CLEs actually proved an effective and inclusive methodology for teachers to engage in a psychologically safe learning environment that mirrored what Drago-Severson (2009) refers to as mentoring communities in which we hold space for each other to care about each other and learn from one another (Drago-Severson, 2012). CLEs created space for learning and, thus, a change in teachers' appetite for something new: as long as the process

was amenable to their readiness levels, teachers demonstrated the willingness to participate. Rogers (2003) claims “diffusion is a special type of communication, in which messages are about a new idea,” and, further, “is a kind of social change,” that creates a change in the social system. As teachers began to demonstrate interest in CLEs and requested more, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of their readiness and the tools that supported them to become ready and, thus, improve their instructional practices. The CLE as a process and a safe-fail probe that actually yielded productive results contained both the relative advantage and compatibility to leverage a change in teachers’ practices (Rogers, 2003). The social nature of the school culture and teachers’ preference for learning from each other supported the conditions required to introduce an innovation that met some teachers’ interest and readiness. I found that a series of non-linear experimental approaches led me to better understand factors of school reform—from teacher readiness to experimenting and not feeling defeated by missteps.

As hunter et al. (2013) stated, addressing the research questions through PAR was a messy, iterative, but generative process. As I learned more about teachers’ readiness and how I needed to develop my knowledge and skills, messiness meant I had to adapt the research questions to sightings—epiphanies in the process of change that uncover a path forward—that informed each cycle of PAR (McDonald, 1996). As for the question about how teachers valued CLEs and were comfortable allowing their hopes and dreams to surface in public, going slow and paying attention to sightings that emerged from CLEs, observations, and post-observation conversations provided evidence of knowledge and skills and dispositions and teachers’ degrees of readiness for a new innovation. The initial theory of action would be realized through PAR, but the process informed and illuminated the need for a different direction for the teachers in my school than the one I first imagined. I learned the importance of what hunter et al. (2013)

identified as reconnaissance: the time for observing the environment prior to the first cycle of PAR. In the end, the methodology that supported the research questions was social, participatory, practical, and to some extent collaborative (Hunter et al., 2013).

Further, during the PAR process, I gained insight into the schools' assets and challenges. The school desires to maintain its IB accreditation, an asset that added leverage for making changes to teachers' practice. The IB PYP framework is grounded in constructivist learning theory and promotes pedagogy based on the theories of cognitive and social constructivism, requiring teachers to be skilled in effective inquiry-based practices. I learned that evidence-based observations are powerful tools for a principal new to a school who desires to learn about teacher practices. While the Danielson Framework for Teacher Evaluation informed the standards of teaching at the school, the system is time-consuming and lacked ways to provide effective feedback. Subsequently, I learned the BC Ministry of Education published a set of conduct and competence standards for teachers that would better serve the school to ensure teachers' professional growth and learning. Additionally, knowing that schools employ teachers with varied degrees of readiness, the eight standards from the ministry serve as a more practical guide for teachers and schools, a topic I return to in the implications section. Through the PAR process I found the initial theory of action led to the development of a reimagined theory in action (see Figure 13).

### **A Re-Informed Theory in Action**

Change agents must expect what Senge (1990) refers to as dynamic complexities in the process of change, the unplanned and convoluted occurrences that interfere with the desired outcomes, or, as John Lennon said in song, "life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans." School improvement efforts, like life and people, are full of complexities;

however, I propose a re-informed theory in action that acknowledges how we can approach change to account for and leverage the complexities and influence the outcome of improvement efforts. For school leaders to stay the course in a school improvement initiative that is focused on improved student learning, they must learn to attend to the myriad of forces that factor into a proposed solution (Fullan, 1993). In my reinforced theory in action, I learned to expect complexities in advance. A vision of improved student learning requires the school leader to develop relational trust with teachers, implement safe-fail probes, and attend to teachers' levels of readiness to take up innovations and learn. The theory in action builds upon the work of Wise and Jacobo (2010) who advance a model for schools in which they name responses as resistance to change. However, they also give credence to the social construct of knowledge and choosing the right tools to mediate change, and it is at the intersection of relational trust, teacher readiness, and the leader's risk-taking responses while holding the vision that we continue to move forward toward improved student learning.

### ***Develop Relational Trust***

School leaders understand the social nature of a school faculty and, as such, the school as a social community can be a positive force for change—an attribute of this school I identified in the first cycle as highly valued in this school. Indeed, developing relational trust with the teachers is an obvious essential to the achievement of improved student learning (Bryk et al., 2010). In the reinforced theory in action, principals prioritize developing a learning environment built on trust, so teacher guardedness is reduced, and new innovations are possible. Principals who invoke a compelling vision of student learning while developing relationships in the school are better positioned to influence changes to teachers' practices that improve student learning (Supovitz et al., 2010). However, vision cannot be realized by a singular agent of change or

single innovation. Learning is social, and a team approach to enacting the vision is most effective to the theory in action model. Indeed, while the study is completed, the project of school change is not, and we continue to use CLEs, observations and conversations, and the writing resource to move the work of teachers forward together in the school as a social community and the school as a learning community.

### ***Attend to Teachers' Levels of Readiness***

The effective principal intentionally guides adult learning to widen teachers' knowledge and skills and their repertoire of practices for students to receive equitable access to learning (Drago-Severson, 2012). Further, the principal as reflective practitioner must create learning opportunities that are both formal and informal to prompt teachers to take up new innovations, increase their levels of readiness, and advance the goal of improved student learning. For adults, as Wise and Jacobo (2010) indicate, learning new knowledge or skill happens in the zone of proximal development. Thus, the principal must attend to teachers' levels of readiness within the zone by creating learning opportunities that meet them at their levels of readiness and stretch them to new levels of readiness (Vygotsky, 1978).

Schools are complex organizations and change in schools is a complex process in which school leaders must learn to adapt their leadership practices to the context. Through risk-taking leadership practices, the effective principal develops a shared vision of the school's goal of improved student learning, and continually pushes teachers toward adopting best practices. (Fullan, 2007; Wise & Jacobo, 2010).

### ***Implement Safe-Fail Probes***

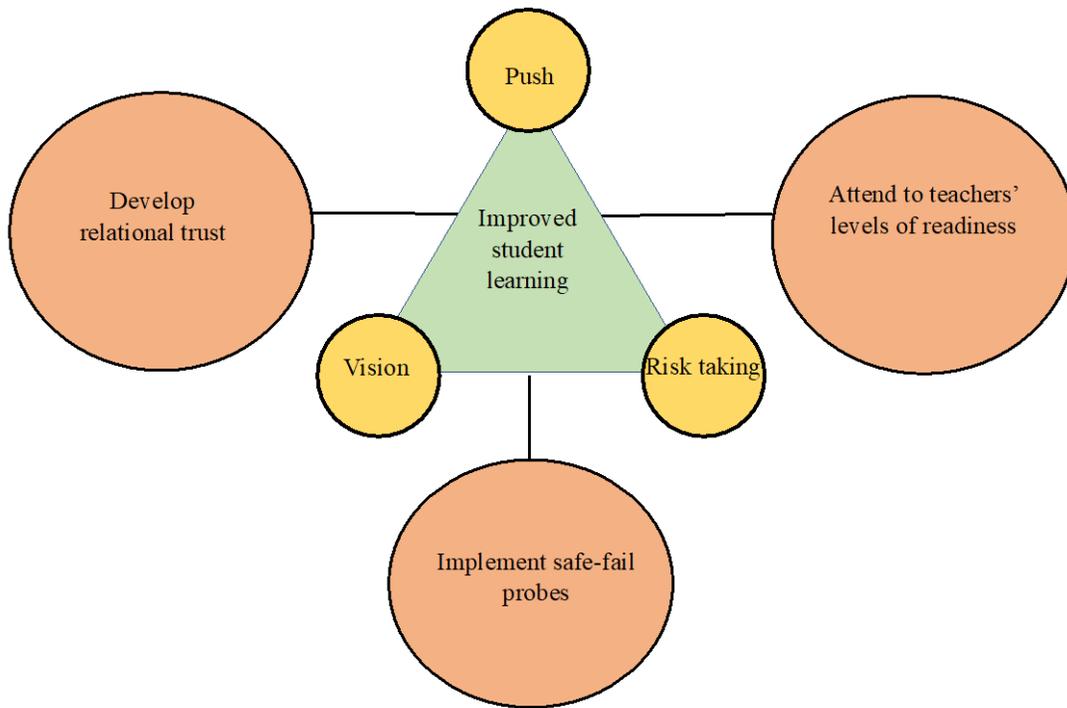
With relational trust and readiness as continuing anchors of adult willingness to change,

school leaders need to take risks to improve teaching practices using safe-fail probes that emerge through iterative cycles of inquiry. As Figure 13 illustrates, in a reformed theory of action based on Wise and Jacobo (2010), the reflective school leader, using a probe, reviews the outcomes of actions to engage teachers in change. Principals can monitor the success or failure of the experiment through evidence from classroom observations, reflective conversations, and artifacts that are generated within a specific experiment. However, the evidence from observing the responses to any probe may determine the degree to which it is adopted by teachers (Rogers, 2003). Risk-taking that is too far ahead of teacher readiness may, in the end, cause anxiety and guardedness; often, as I did in PAR Cycle Two, the principal can get too far in front of the learning readiness and have to take a step back.

Thus, I learned that if, as a leader, I focus on relationships and use many ways to meet teachers where they are, and if I use the language of safe-fail and practice what that means to not be fully successful, we can slowly but surely move forward. I know from these efforts and this theory in action that by making relevant connections we can move forward to chip away at the reality of enacting the vision for student learning.

### **Implications**

The findings in this PAR study have implications for school leadership and teacher practice, school policy, and in the research methods for practitioner researchers. In the section, I present the recommendations in the following areas: (a) the practices of independent school leaders and teachers; (b) policies that support the development of teacher knowledge and skills; and (c) the ways in which research practitioners use research to advance the goals of the school.



*Note.* Adapted from Wise and Jacobo (2010).

*Figure 13.* Reinformed theory in action: A vision for student learning.

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## **Implications for Practice**

Innovations can lead to learning. For principals interested in developing a learning organization, the principal as instructional leader must be mindful of opportunities that support teachers to develop their knowledge and skills. Further, innovations can lead to improving principal's knowledge and skill set providing opportunities to engage in leadership practices that are evidence-based. The sweet spot for improved practices depends on firmly establishing and cultivating relational trust with teachers and not feeling defeated if a particular effort does not fully succeed. That means the leader has to be a listening leader who keeps the long-term goal of equity for students in mind while ensuring that the teachers iteratively move toward stronger instructional practices, instead of fail-safe probe. Safir (2017) calls this a design for safe-to-learn inquiry. By holding space for people's discomfort or their learning disequilibrium, the principal acknowledges that what is required is more than a new skill; what I am aiming for and what principals often have as a goal is a transformation of knowledge and assumptions about learning as adult learners who influence student learning (Kegan, 2008). The writing project continued after PAR because the project met them at their levels of readiness, but also because I did not push on something that was not in their sphere of readiness. For teachers, the writing project innovation permitted them to learn about research-based practices in writing instruction and drew on their desires as a social community and as professionals who were using innovative practices. The relative advantage and compatibility of the writing project innovation has had a direct impact on teachers' planning for their next steps. Teachers and principals must utilize both evidence-based and research-based practices to advance their knowledge and skills of practice.

## **Implications for Policy**

Teacher knowledge and skill development are critical for school improvement and teachers remain the primary agent of student success in schools (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012). Thus, effective principals must ensure teachers are on a continuous path of learning so they are prepared to serve students' needs and utilize instructional practices that permit higher levels of student achievement. To ensure teachers are held accountable for student success, the school must adopt standards for teaching practice that guide and support teachers' knowledge and skill development. The British Columbia Ministry of Education's (2013) Independent School Teacher Conduct and Competence Standards and the Professional Standards for BC Educator (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019) have been designed for schools to guide and advance the work of the teachers. In adopting a set of standards, teachers may be compelled to follow the standards and principals can enact the standards as an accountability measure.

At minimum, however, policies that support teaching standards provide leverage for the school's improvement goals and the goal of developing what Abelman and Elmore (1999) refer to as the internal alignment of responsibility, expectations, and accountability. However, accountability structures alone cannot guarantee teachers' participation in professional learning and growth and a set of standards like those from the MoE may undergird a school's internal accountability structures (Abelman & Elmore, 1999). To address this, principals can use such a policy as leverage to fully enact a more coherent and useful approach to evaluation (Paryani, 2019). In fact, schools need to develop structures that support teacher growth and development in the workplace and the principal must take an action research stance and learn alongside teachers in iterative processes of designing solutions to problems of practice. When schools develop more

robust policies that support and encourage teachers to grow and learn, the principal's work is more purposeful in the area of school improvement (Grissom et al., 2013).

### **Implications for Research**

I found CLEs an inclusive methodology to collect and analyze evidence that provides insight to practice and the hopes and dreams of the teachers. The import of CLE axioms supported my work and research and, further, supported my understanding that learning and leadership are dynamic social processes and the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns. The evidence I gathered from CLEs illuminated the school context, culture, and established school norms. I needed to be nimble, intentional, and persistent in my approach to participatory action research, and the CLEs were perceived as novel and of interest to teachers. Thus, this process, as indicated in my research, offered a binding element that we used throughout the three cycles of inquiry, and I recommend that school efforts for change need a process and a methodology for collecting and analyzing evidence that fits school level time and schedules. The CLEs offered such a mechanism. In tandem with stronger clinical supervision processes by the principal, I had the necessary evidence and commitments to move the work forward.

When PAR ended, I began to observe initial signs of diffusion of practice (Rogers, 2003). I recognize how the writing resource is something we continue to use and repeat to more deeply understand how we can better transfer our knowledge and skills to other areas of teaching. Diagnosing problems and designing solutions, leading with an inquiry mindset, and the improvement sciences are practices for leadership and for practitioner researchers seeking collaborative methods to gather evidence that supports decisions that lead to school improvements (Bryk et al., 2015; Militello et al., 2009; Spillane, 2013).

Moving forward, I continue to learn about teachers, the school as a social community, and the school as a learning community through the dynamic and inclusive pedagogy of CLEs. Our change process, as noted, was sometimes a bumpy road. Thus, we need more information about how the organizational actors in real time and real situations navigate change processes, which are certainly not linear. There is room for local research to continue with further investigation of the reasons why teachers do not easily adapt to change and take up new practices. Additionally, I would be interested to learn more about teachers' perceptions of observations and post-observation conversations to better understand the dispositions I experienced during PAR Cycle Two.

The research potential for further study is limited due to the size of the study and the fact that PAR is context driven. However, the methodology is generalizable in other contexts within the independent schools in BC. Each school has its own culture and, therefore, a PAR study can incite change in other contexts. Further, a PAR study such as this adds to the body of research that examines change processes in schools.

### **Leadership Development**

Prior to taking on the roles and responsibilities of a researcher practitioner, I had been a consumer and analyzer of research by reading, mostly books, on topics in education and educational leadership, an important skill in its own right (Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2011). In September 2019, I began the work of the PAR and school leadership in a new school with enthusiasm, and both experiences have provided opportunities to practice leadership. As I continue to learn and grow following the official end of the PAR, I have gained a second wind and been moved by the PAR experience of getting close to the work of the teachers in my school; in fact, "I feel in my blood, my bones, my muscles, my brain, a wholly new and

unexpected surge of energy” (Nachmanovitch, 1991, p. 140). I am energized by the process and my learning to do more and to act differently as a school leader, engaging in the free play that Nachmanovitch speaks of—the intuitive innovations coupled with the everyday practice of organizational skills to forward our collaborative work as teachers and learners. The section presents an overview of my leadership growth as it pertains to the research question: To what extent does participation in the PAR change my leadership as a school principal? The section examines the evidence that emerged from reflective memos that I wrote during the three cycles of PAR.

### **Effective Leadership is Facilitative and Reflective**

I have learned the importance of taking a facilitative stance as a school leader who has initiated an improvement process in the school. I did not arrive at this understanding easily and quickly, as I learned by doing and engaging with teachers at their levels of readiness. In previous leadership roles, I was more directive in my approach of initiating changes and naively believing new practices would be taken up by teachers. Active engagement in the PAR process has shown that, in my being more facilitative, teachers are more receptive. Facilitative leadership required me to take intentional risks, be transparent, and be reflective. And, in fact, I became an advocate and practitioner of what Goldman et al. (1993) identified as factors for facilitative leaders who collaborate and do not dominate:

1. Creatively overcome constraints of time and information.
2. Maximize human resource synergy.
3. Maintain sufficient awareness of staff to provide feedback and coordination.
4. Span boundaries to create intraschool networks.

5. Practice collaborative politics that emphasize one-on-one conversation as well as well-facilitated larger meetings.
6. Model and embody the school's vision.

I believe risk-taking as a leader is critical to ensure that a compelling vision can be realized. To learn about my school and the people in it in a timely way, I introduced them to the CLE methodology, which became the preferred format for teachers to meet and share their experiences and perspectives. Early in PAR Cycle One I reflected: “I hope that teachers engage in the learning and appreciate the community building strategies such as Community Learning Exchanges” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, September 1, 2019). Later I noted, “so much good comes out of CLE. I think there could be more” (M. Palmer, reflective memo, May 25, 2020). The CLE practice was new to me and to the school. The PAR project design created opportunities for me to learn how to design facilitative CLEs and I continue to use the methodology to engage teachers in learning. CLEs provided me with a methodology that is inclusive and allowed everyone to be heard—an important element of facilitative leadership.

I have learned how to be more transparent with teachers while implementing a change process. I shared my vision for success upon my arrival and I declared that every student should receive excellent instruction in every class every day, a phrase I borrowed from Knight (2016) to frame my expectations. However, during PAR, I found it challenging to be fully transparent with teachers as I was developing the skills to facilitate evidence-based conversations with them. Later, during PAR Cycle Three, I found ways to be more fully transparent about the intention of post-observation conversations by writing the following in an email prior to our post-observation conversation:

I am practicing having a different kind of conversation with you about the observation, one that relies on the evidence I collected and one in which you decide what your next steps are. I have ideas, of course, but what I am most interested in is your decisions about what you want to do next as a result of the evidence from the observation. As always, I only observed a slice of your teaching practice, so if there are particular classroom circumstances with students or the lesson, please tell me as we proceed. (M. Palmer, personal communication, September 29, 2020)

This example of transparency afforded me the opportunity to listen more and speak less during post-observation conversations and, therefore, learn more about teachers' practices.

The principal as reflective practitioner was an emerging theme in PAR Cycle Three. While the reflective memos I wrote for PAR provided insight to my leadership growth, the practice of reflection is a necessary skill for my work as an agent of change (Fullan, 2007; Schön, 1982). While clearly this is not new information to the educators, learning and re-learning this as a new principal has been vital to my professional growth. In addition, the evidence I gathered from classroom observations provided insight to the teachers' practices. Evidence of teachers' work and my work allowed me to better appreciate the challenges of leadership and, more importantly, the challenge of teaching:

I am learning that teaching and learning is a complex process requiring the use of multiple skills, deep knowledge of a wide range of disciplines, and significant amounts of time engaged with students and time engaged with other teachers to plan. (M. Palmer, reflective memo, February 29, 2020)

I have come to know by being unafraid to enact a vision for student success through my leadership actions. I have learned to be patient for the kind of improvements I want to see and

know that when the safe-fail probe fails to produce the desired results, the next probe may be the one that meets teachers at their level of readiness.

My leadership practices changed because of the PAR project. I experienced a double edge of discomfort being the outsider entering a new school and initiating a PAR with teachers who I did not know and who did not know me; however, I took up the inclusive, innovative, and reflective pedagogies modelled by my dissertation supervisors to smooth a pathway for myself and the PAR project. The PAR project provided opportunities to look closely at the people and practices in my school. The evidence from the cycles of PAR directed the research process and simultaneously supported decisions I made as a school leader. PAR has added to my understanding of what leadership actions are important and led me to a deeper awareness of how I can continue to develop following the study.

### **Conclusion**

When I began this leadership journey, I held a narrow vision of leadership and learning. As I moved through the PAR project, adjusted to the challenges of a new context, and persevered through the unpredictable changes brought on by the COVID pandemic, my vision of leadership and learning widened and deepened: “Sometimes change is directly visible, but sometimes it is apparent only to peripheral vision, altering the meaning of the foreground” (Bateson, 1994, p. 6). Change in schools takes time and any movement forward requires a school leader to earn the trust of the teachers; a change effort in itself I have learned. I have learned to go slow to go fast, and I have learned that my change process may not be congruent with everyone else’s vision of improvement: “In all learning, one is changed, becoming someone slightly—or profoundly—different” (Bateson, 1994, p. 79). After nearly two years in the school, I feel I am a different leader, going slow, listening, and learning—skills that are essential to my leadership practice. As

I move forward, I continue go slow and listen to the teachers and ask for their feedback. Further, I allow myself to be vulnerable in an effort to gain trust, reflect on sightings and evidence, and confidently know that teachers' readiness has surfaced. Through a facilitative approach to leadership and the PAR project, I see teachers embracing the opportunity to improve their instructional practices and improve the conditions in which students receive equitable access to and increased rigor in learning.

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## APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**  
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board**  
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building- Mail Stop 682  
600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284  
[rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/](http://rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/)

### Notification of Amendment Approval

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: [Michael Palmer](#)  
CC: [Matthew Militello](#)  
Date: 12/2/2020  
Re: [Ame1 UMCIRB 19-001605](#)  
[UMCIRB 19-001605](#)  
Co-constructing Observational Feedback

Your Amendment has been reviewed and approved using expedited review on 12/2/2020. It was the determination of the UMCIRB Chairperson (or designee) that this revision does not impact the overall risk/benefit ratio of the study and is appropriate for the population and procedures proposed.

Please note that any further changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a Final Report application to the UMCIRB prior to the Expected End Date provided in the IRB application. If the study is not completed by this date, an Amendment will need to be submitted to extend the Expected End Date. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Description:  
The study end date is being extended until June 2021.

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

## APPENDIX B: SITE APPROVAL LETTER



June 11, 2019

To Whom it may concern,

This letter is to verify that Michael Palmer has permission to conduct doctoral research on "How a co-generated feedback process can drive teachers toward instructional improvement" with East Carolina University at Stratford Hall.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Croy', written over a horizontal line.

Dean Croy, Head of School  
Per Stratford Hall

## APPENDIX C: CITI CERTIFICATE



Completion Date 24-May-2019

Expiration Date 23-May-2022

Record ID 29881160

This is to certify that:

**Michael Palmer**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Human Research**

(Curriculum Group)

**Group 2.Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel**

(Course Learner Group)

**1 - Basic Course**

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**East Carolina University**



Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w51d82793-aa08-41e0-9897-dd4e3c93ad34-29881160](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w51d82793-aa08-41e0-9897-dd4e3c93ad34-29881160)

## APPENDIX D: ADULT CONSENT FORM

*East Carolina  
University*



### **Informed Consent to Participate in Research Information to Consider Before Taking Part in Research That Has No More Than Minimal Risk**

#### **Title of Research Study: CO-CONSTRUCTING FEEDBACK**

Principal Investigator: MICHAEL PALMER under the guidance of Dr. Matthew Militello  
Dr. Militello: Institution, Department or Division: College of Education  
Address: 220 Ragsdale, ECU, Greenville, NC 27858  
Telephone #: (919) 518.4008

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#### **Why am I being invited to take part in this research?**

The purpose of this participatory action research project is to improve approaches to providing feedback to teachers that will drive them toward transforming their instructional practices. You are being invited because you are a Junior School teacher.

#### **Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?**

There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study.

#### **What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?**

You can choose not to participate.

#### **Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?**

The research will be conducted at Stratford Hall Junior School in Vancouver.

The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study will not exceed 60 minutes.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in one or more interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups will be asked to record reflections in writing. These written artifacts will be collected by the principal researcher. Interview, and focus group questions will focus on the observations of teaching and learning and the data collected from the observations for the purpose of providing feedback.

#### **What might I experience if I take part in the research?**

We do not know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We do not know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

#### **Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

**Will it cost me to take part in this research?**

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

**Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?**

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

**How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?**

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from interviews, and focus groups will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

**What if I decide I do not want to continue in this research?**

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator Michael Palmer, Principal, Stratford Hall Junior School, Vancouver. [Michael.Palmer@stratfordhall.ca](mailto:Michael.Palmer@stratfordhall.ca).

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2941 (days, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the ORIC at 252-744-1971.

**I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?**

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

---

**Participant’s Name (PRINT)                      Signature                      Date**

**Person Obtaining Informed Consent:** I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

---

**Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)    Signature**

**Date**



## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Interview Protocol

#### Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview and will limit the time to one hour.

My name is Michael Palmer. I will serve as the moderator for the interview. I am conducting research as a graduate student at East Carolina University. The interview is part of a study to determine how a principal can support teachers to develop their instructional practices through feedback, so they learn and grow as educators.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be digitally recorded in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation.
- All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the focus group and interview data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured and informal format. Several questions will be asked about both the individual knowledge and skills gained and the organization practices used. It is our hope that everyone will contribute to the conversation.
- The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

#### Interview Questions

**TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:**

**“This is Michael Palmer, interviewing (*Participant Code*) on (*Date*) for the Co-constructing Feedback Study.**

Interview:

To begin the conversation, please introduce yourself and describe your role at the school and your initial reactions to participating in the focus group in the Co-constructing Feedback Study.

Question #1. What made you agree to be a part of this process?

Question #2. How do you feel about participating in the focus group?

Question #3. What have you learned about your teaching practices?

Question #4. What changes will you make to your teaching practices as a result of the conversations in the focus group?

Question #5. What changes would you like to see your teacher colleagues make about their teaching practices?

