A STUDY OF FIFTH-GRADE TEACHERS' GRADE-LEVEL MEETINGS:
THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHERS' GROUP WORK

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DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
OF FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK
2007
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Rita Brause, and my readers Arlene Moliterno and Toby Tetenbaum for their time and guidance throughout this process. Their thoughtful questions and supportive comments moved me forward and enabled me to reach this place. I also would like to acknowledge my parents, who instilled in me the importance of questioning and understanding issues and ideas from various perspectives. Without their guidance I would not be the inquisitive natural learner I am today. Additionally, I wish to acknowledge my mentor and friend, Denise Levine, my first principal who models everyday the joy and wonder of teaching and learning and from whom I have learned so much. Further, I must acknowledge my in-laws, Harold and Pamela Kurstedt for their support and comforting insights into the dissertation and research process. Finally, I need to thank my friends Whitney Bremer and Cathy Cavanaugh for reading and editing, listening to my frustrations, and celebrating in my “ahas,” each time I had one. Without their support I just do not know what I would have done.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the teachers who made this work possible and who opened up their professional and personal lives. I also dedicate this dissertation to my husband, David, to my children, Jacob and Dylan, and to Rowena, for their support, patience, and love throughout this journey.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Unlike traditional professional development activities, peer collaboration has been heralded by teachers, researchers, and policymakers as essential to teachers' continuous learning. (USDOE, 1999)

Although the United States Department of Education maintains that teachers, researchers, and policymakers identify an essential relationship between peer collaboration, teacher growth, and student achievement, the grade-level meeting, a prevalent form of peer collaboration, remains largely unexplored. Grade-level meetings, also known as team meetings or planning meetings, are becoming more popular in American schools. A recent survey conducted by the U. S. Department of Education (1999) found that 62% of teacher respondents had a common planning period with team teachers, while 81% reported having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers. In the USDOE survey the type of common planning being reported was unclear, as was the definition of team teaching. The relevance of whether the planning was mandated or developed organically from teachers' needs or wants was not established, nor was the team makeup, which could range from all teachers on a grade, teachers in a department, volunteers, or a curricula team. Regardless of these survey limitations, 40% of the teachers surveyed who had a common planning period responded that it improved their classroom teaching "a lot,"
while 33% reported that it improved classroom teaching moderately. A distinct
definition of classroom teaching or how the common planning improved classroom
teaching also was unclear, since finite descriptions were not provided within the
survey.

The joint work of teachers might be increasing in part because professional
associations posit that teachers’ collaborative work increases student achievement
(American Federation of Teachers, 2004; National Board for Professional Teaching
Standards, 2004; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003;
National Education Association, 2004; National Staff Development Council, 2004).
In addition, there is growing evidence that professional development embedded in
teachers’ everyday work that utilizes the experience and knowledge of teachers in the
building. This in turn, addresses the importance of context which can lead to
increases in student achievement (Education Week Research Center, 2004; Guskey,
1995; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993; Putnam & Borko, 2000;
Richardson, 2003, Wood, 2007). Other researchers assert that in the current high-
stakes testing atmosphere of accountability and blame, teachers find comfort and
strength when working with colleagues (D. Hargreaves, 1994). The joint work of
teachers may also be increasing due to the changing needs of society as reflected in
the business sector’s preference for employees who can work with colleagues and
think collaboratively (A. Hargreaves, 2003; Sarason, 1990; Senge et al., 2000;
Tetenbaum, 1998).

Within this context, in which the collaborative work of teachers is being
championed, it becomes critical to examine what is happening in the settings
established to promote collaboration. For example, what do teachers actually do in these collaborative settings and how do they view these collaborative experiences as influencing their work and, in turn, influencing student achievement? These questions, which are of utmost consequence as we seek to create more effective educational settings, were the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

In a time of increased accountability due to No Child Left Behind legislation (United States Department of Education, 2001) and high-stakes testing, intensified attention has been placed on schools to increase student achievement. There is extensive documentation of enhanced student achievement when teachers critically talk about instruction, curriculum, and planning, and where teacher collaboration supports learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Fullan, 2005b; Leonard & Leonard, 2001a, 2001b; Little, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sarason, 1990; Schmoker, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Senge et al., 2000; Stein & D'Amico, 2002). Influenced by this affirmation, schools have incorporated various structures to promote teacher collaboration, including site-based management, shared decision-making, and team teaching.

Another configuration aimed at promoting teacher collaboration is the grade-level meeting, herein referred to as (GLM), which was the focus of this study.

Although collaboration is theorized to be a remedy for the ills of education, there is some disagreement as to how collaboration is defined and what “counts” as collaboration. Johnson (1990) documents that definitions of collaboration range from friendly staff relations that consist of the mere sharing of ideas, to interdependency
and co-teaching. Many believe that to define collaboration as friendly collegial relations and the mere sharing of ideas is a misconception, since these types of interactions and behaviors are more representative of congeniality (Achinstein, 2002; Schrage, 1989; Senge, 1990; Welch, 1998). Some challenge this definition and contend that collaboration entails the questioning and critical examination of shared ideas, as well as pointed attention to any conflict or differences that may occur in the joint work. Furthermore, being too friendly or congenial with colleagues may in fact hinder collaboration; teachers work hard not to offend colleagues and suppress conflict and diversity of ideas (Achinstein, 2002; Senge et al., 2000).


Despite these different perspectives, a complex and cohesive definition of collaboration can be formulated: one that attends to the purpose, the process, and the outcomes of joint work. Collaboration begins with a purpose: a need or desire to create something (Schrage, 1989). The process is voluntary, if not by structure, (when groups are organized or mandated to work together), then by commitment to the purpose (Achinstein, 2002; Friend & Cook, 2000; A. Hargreaves, 2003; Senge,
The process involves sharing ideas from diverse perspectives and trusting other collaborators so that beliefs and assumptions can be questioned and examined (Achinstein, 2002; Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996; Senge et al., 2000). The outcomes from a collaborative process may generate considerations, possibilities, and products that would not have been thought of, seen, or produced without the joint work (Schrage, 1989; Senge, 1990).

Although the prevalence of grade-level meetings in the elementary school is rising (USDOE, 1999), little is known either about what actually occurs within the meetings or the influence of these meetings on teachers' work. The assumption, albeit largely unexamined, is that this work is beneficial to teachers' growth, student achievement, and ultimately school effectiveness (Hall, 1996; Leonard & Leonard, 2001a, 2001b; Little, 1990; Maeroff, 1993; Pounder, 1998; Riley, 2001; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003).

Most of the research on teachers' collaborative work has examined middle school interdisciplinary teacher groups (Cromwell, 2004; Crow & Pounder, 2000; Maeroff, 1993; K. Martin, 1995; N. Martin, 2000; Pounder, 1998), high school departments (Horn, 2002; Little, 2002a, 2003; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998), and teacher study groups (Crockett, 2002; Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafka, 2003; McCotter, 2001; Sweeney, 2003; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998), with little attention paid to elementary grade-level groups. The modest amount of research that has been done on elementary grade-level groups has employed survey and interview methodologies (Britton, 2004; Hall, 1996; Shields, 1997). Therefore, the examination
of what the teachers’ collaborative work looks and sounds like in elementary grade-level meetings is scant (Riley, 2001; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003).

Since teachers and researchers ascribe different meanings to collaboration, it is difficult to gain an understanding of the collaboration that occurs within teachers’ work from interview and survey data, which as stated earlier, are the predominant research methodologies employed to study teachers’ work (Leonard & Leonard, 2001a; Little, 2003). To address this issue, the present study investigated one group of fifth-grade teachers’ grade-level meetings from a qualitative, ethnographic perspective. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the teacher participants and a variety of data sources were analyzed in an attempt to generate a more robust inquiry and accurate understanding of such activities.

The intention of this study was to understand educational settings through an investigation of the work of a group of fifth-grade teachers at their grade-level meetings in a Grade 3-5 school. The more we know about these activities, the more likely it is that we will be able to contribute to school reform efforts that promote the collaborative work of teachers. The questions used to guide this study were:

1. What are the characteristics (content, purpose, structure) of grade-level meetings for a group of fifth-grade teachers in a Grade 3–5 school?

2. What are the perceived outcomes for teachers from the grade-level meetings?

3. What are teachers’ perceptions of the grade-level meetings?

4. In what ways do the grade-level meetings influence teachers’ sense of community?
Theoretical Rationale

The following bodies of knowledge which inform current understanding and thinking about teachers’ work served as theoretical grounding for this study: school structure; cultures of teachers’ work; professional development; and grade-level meetings. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the various bodies of knowledge used to support this study, from broad: the school culture, to specific: professional development. The knowledge basis of school structure, teacher culture, and professional development potentially have influence on grade-level meetings’ content, structure, purpose, and outcomes.

Figure 1

*Influencing Knowledge Bases on Grade-Level Meetings*
School Structures

School structure has been noted as a factor that contributes to the empowerment of teachers and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Elmore & Associates, 1990; Fullan, 2005a; A. Hargreaves, 2003; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1989; Rowan, 1990, 1995; Sarason, 1990; Smith & Rowley, 2005; Sweetland, 2001). There are two major types of school structures. One type of structure is referred to as bureaucratic, hierarchical (Brause, 1992; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001), tall (Palardy, 1992), or mechanistic (Rowan, 1995). The second type of structure is referred to as democratic (Brause, 1992), organic (Rowan, 1990; 1995) or flat (Palardy, 1992) structure. There are, of course, variations and combinations of the two, but in the main, school organization is discussed in this dichotomized way. What is important to consider is that school’s organization is founded upon a belief about teaching, learning, and, more specifically about schooling. The different assumptions underlying the different school structures are discussed below.

Tall/Mechanistic/Bureaucratic Structures

Most schools are steeped with tall, hierarchical (Brause, 1992; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Palardy, 1992; Sweetland, 2001) or mechanistic structures (Rowan, 1995; Rowan, Raudenbush, & Kang, 1991). Tall structures have a long chain of command with teachers on the bottom. Because of the hierarchical structure, those on the bottom (e.g., teachers) have little opportunity to influence decisions outside of their immediate environment (e.g., the classroom). The basic assumptions of tall institutional structures are that the people on the top are most capable and powerful and the people on the bottom (teachers) are not. Therefore, the people on the top of
the hierarchy make the decisions and the people on the bottom are often required to
carry out that which was decided by people higher up in the structure. Moreover, it is
sometimes believed that the people on the bottom of the hierarchy are unreliable and
need to be closely supervised (Palardy, 1992). Tall structures rely “on elaborate
controls to constrain teachers’ decisions and activities” (Rowan, 1995, p. 16).

In theory, tall or mechanistic structures are derived from the belief that
teaching can be routinized. The underlying assumption is that if the input (what is
taught) is controlled through direct instruction and standardized textbooks, the output
(student achievement) can be controlled as well (Rowan, 1995). Tall mechanistic
structures are intended to “standardize and routinize the . . . work of teachers”
(Rowan, 1995, p. 17). Further, a bureaucratic structure “which is intended to
expedite the process of schooling” (Brause, 1992, p. 117) creates a workplace in
which teachers’ expertise and experiences are not utilized, decisions are made to
perpetuate tradition, and “the concern for excellence is displaced by the demand for
immediate action and efficiency” (p. 117). Brause (1992) contends that a
bureaucratic structure is “counterproductive in establishing effective learning
settings” (p. 125). Since there is evidence to support that the bureaucratic,
hierarchical approach limits people’s commitment, decreases motivation, and is
incompatible with teacher autonomy, some educators believe that an alternative
structure should be utilized (Brause, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1988; Darling-
Hammond & Wise, 1985; Elmore & Associates, 1990; Fullan, 2005a; A. Hargreaves,
2003; Rowan, 1995; Rowan et al., 1991).
Flat/Democratic/Organic Structure

In contrast to the bureaucratic school structure, the flat, organic, or democratic school structure is an alternative that operates from different beliefs about teaching, learning, and schooling. The organic structure views teachers as active "decision makers working in complex classroom environments" (Rowan, 1995, p. 15). This belief builds from an understanding that teaching is nonroutine, and individual teacher judgment and expertise are needed for student success (Berlin, 1986; Shulman, 1987). In a democratic structure, teachers have more power through collegial interactions, sharing advice, sharing expertise, and sharing leadership with the school principal (Elmore & Associates, 1990; Lieberman, 1988). Flat structures give teachers the authority to make decisions because they rest on the belief that teachers are knowledgeable and capable (Palardy, 1992; Rowan, 1995). Further, through collegial support, teachers' knowledge and expertise is networked throughout the school so that teachers approach the uncertainties and complexities of teaching with confidence and success (Palardy, 1992; Rowan, 1995). Whereas bureaucratic or tall school structures are believed to limit teacher commitment and motivation, the democratic structure relies on just that: teachers' commitment and teachers' motivation are at the center of schools with flat structures (Rosenholtz, 1987; Rowan, 1995; Rowan et al., 1991).

There are many configurations of democratic school structures (e.g., site-based management, school-site councils, community schools, shared-leadership, etc.). However, they stem from common underlying assumptions about teaching: first, that teaching is variable; second, that teaching requires judgment and creativity; and third,
that teachers' expertise and knowledge must be shared and utilized. A flat school structure fosters teachers' decision making, work with colleagues through "networks and participative structures" (Bacharach & Mundell, 1995, p. 2) and professional cultures that support and motivate teachers (Bacharach & Mundell, 1995). These factors are all believed to support student achievement. However, it is important to consider that some teachers may not want to participate in a democratic organizational structure. Teachers' may prefer the clarity of objectives often associated with mechanistic structures. Further, teachers' beliefs about teaching may be more in line with that of a mechanistic structure and, therefore, some teachers may prefer it (Rowan, 1990; Rowan et al., 1991; Smylie, 1995).

Hoy and Sweetland (2001) discuss an enabling school structure that has aspects of both bureaucratic and flat structures, describing schools that have a hierarchy and a set of rules and regulations but also are flexible, cooperative, and collaborative. In a different article, discussing the same study, Sweetland (2001) writes that enabling school structures promote teachers' professional autonomy, sense of control of their work, and authentic collegial interactions.

Since the bureaucratic and democratic school structures stem from different beliefs about teaching, school structure may influence the cultures of teachers' work, as well as the opportunities teachers have to engage in collaborative activities or decision making. The following section addresses the cultures of individualism and collaboration as it relates to teachers' work.
Cultures of Teachers’ Work: Individualism and Collaboration

The culture of teachers’ work is characterized as both individualistic and isolating (Barth, 1990; Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975). Lortie’s seminal study found that schools are “organized around teacher separation rather than teacher interdependence” (p. 14). Lortie interviewed 94 teachers from high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools from five towns in the Boston area and found that, “the cellular form of school organization, and the attendant time and space ecology, puts interactions between teachers at the margin of their daily work. Individualism characterizes their socialization” (Lortie, 1975, p. 192). Goodlad’s (1984) study, almost 10 years later, characterized teachers’ work similarly. “The classroom cells in which teachers spend much of their time appear . . . to be symbolic and predictive of their relative isolation from one another and from sources of ideas beyond their own background of experience” (p. 186). Goodlad found that most teachers taught alone in classrooms, with little awareness of what and how colleagues were teaching, of their educational beliefs, or of their competence. Goodlad also found that, although teachers “appeared, in general, to function quite autonomously . . . their autonomy seemed to be exercised in a context more of isolation than of rich professional dialogue about a plethora of challenging educational alternatives” (p. 185). Brause (1992) suggests that “teachers become isolated in the guise of professionalism” (p. 113) since teachers often report that they respect their colleagues by not interfering in what and how they teach. In Goodlad’s (1984) study, some veteran teachers reported that, in all their years of teaching, they had never once seen how another teacher teaches.
However, more recent studies have found that, although the organization of teachers' work has remained somewhat stagnant, their interactions with colleagues are increasing (Crockett, 2002; Johnson, 1990; Little et al., 2003; McCotter, 2001; Richardson, 2003; Sweeney, 2003; USDOE, 1999; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998). Although organizational barriers to collaboration may exist, such as insufficient time for sustained interaction, reluctance of other staff members, or lack of support from school administrators, many teachers seek out collaboration (Johnson, 1990). Further, many reformers and prominent educators argue that a more collaborative culture of teachers' work will remedy the ills of education (Alvarado, 2005; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Fullan, 2005; Sarason, 1990; Schmoker, 2004a, 2004b, 2005). This belief is particularly noteworthy since there is evidence to support that when teachers feel isolated, they are more apt to question their decisions, lack self efficacy, feel a sense of anxiety and uncertainty (Lortie, 1975) and burn out more readily than those teachers who work collaboratively with their peers (Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996; Johnson, 1990). The GLM is an activity that has the potential to limit teachers' feelings of isolation.

Individualism

Barth (1990) notes that most schools are like sandboxes, where teachers parallel play with one another, engaging for fleeting moments to offer some help or advice but rarely participating and influencing each others' work. Brause (1992) mirrors these ideas, reporting that teachers "rarely engage in extended dialogue" (p. 116) and rarely discuss "understandings about how to be particularly effective in promoting student's learning" (p. 116). Within individualistic cultures, Barth (1990)
describes adversarial and competitive relationships in which teachers withhold materials and ideas about discipline and curriculum. Data in such settings are used to blame or embarrass, so teachers tend to keep their knowledge to themselves for fear of being ridiculed (Barth, 1990; A. Hargreaves, 2003). Barth (1990) argues that, "professional isolation stifles professional growth" (p. 18) and further argues that within a culture of individualism, the sharing of craft knowledge is seen as pretentious and often "taboo" (p. 17). However, A. Hargreaves (1993) cautions that, "when we speak of individualism, we are speaking not of a singular thing but of a complex social and cultural phenomenon with many meanings—not all of them necessarily negative" (p. 62).

The most positive characterization of teachings' individualistic culture is that of the independent artisan (Huberman, 1993). Huberman (1993) argues that the reason teachers work in a culture of individualism is because teaching is idiosyncratic and personal. After all, the majority of teachers’ work occurs inside a classroom, with no other adults present. The independent artisan works daily and constantly on his or her craft in the confines of the classroom. Huberman further argues that improvement and growth occur only within the act of practicing and fine tuning teaching. He emphasizes the importance of teachers’ "tinkering" and argues that the complexity of classroom work warrants individual attention.

A. Hargreaves (1993, 1994, 2003) identifies five different types of individualism: strategic, constrained, corrosive, permissive, and elective. He attributes individualism to various factors, including the nature of teaching, organizational factors, and personal preference. Based on a study he conducted with
Wignall in 1989, A. Hargreaves (1993, 1994) describes some teachers’ work as strategic individualism. This type of individualism is a conscious decision on the part of the teachers, based upon the large amount of work to be done. In the interview data, teachers reported trying to do their jobs as best they can, spending the little nonstudent contact time planning for, preparing for, and grading classroom work, resulting in strategic individualism.

Constrained individualism occurs in a context of organizational and situational traditions having to do with time and space to meet with colleagues (A. Hargreaves, 1993, 1994). Corrosive individualism occurs when teachers retreat into their own classrooms and withdraw from any external influence, including potential innovations or learning opportunities, when in either competitive or blame-oriented environments (A. Hargreaves, 2003). Another type, permissive individualism (A. Hargreaves, 2003), describes the culture of teaching as teaching alone “away from scrutiny, in insulated classes” (p. 163) but with the possibility to work with colleagues. The last, elective individualism (A. Hargreaves, 1993, 1994), occurs when teachers simply prefer to work alone, even when opportunities for collaboration are available. Huberman (1993) suggests that some teachers enter teaching because of its culture of individualism and autonomy.

Despite the varying types of individualism, none seems supported as the best cultures for teachers’ work if continuous growth, learning, and improvement are the goals (Barth, 1990; Brause, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Fullan, 2001, 2005b; Goodlad, 1984; A. Hargreaves, 2003; Little, 1987; Lortie, 1975; Sarason, 1990; Sizer, 1984). Although teachers defend their isolation as exercising their professional
autonomy, their isolation from colleagues stifles their professional growth; therefore, “students are deprived of teachers who are becoming increasingly proficient as professionals” (Brause, 1992, p. 117). Little (2002b) asserts that, even if teachers are seen as independent artisans who sporadically work with colleagues, share materials, and ask for help to expand and improve their own classroom practice, “instances of deep and sustained collaboration” (p. 45) that benefit individual teachers and the school are unlikely. There is growing evidence to support the position that instances of deep and sustained collaboration are imperative for continuous teacher development and school improvement. (Barth 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 2001, 2005b; A. Hargreaves, 2003; Sarason, 1990; Sizer, 1984; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). This evidence may be why collaborative activities such as GLMs are increasing.

**Collaboration**

Some researchers posit collaboration among teachers is supported and heralded as essential to improve education, particularly with respect to teacher learning, teachers’ job satisfaction, and student achievement (Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996; Erb & Doda, 1989; Leonard & Leonard, 2001a, 2001b; Little, 1987). Rosenholtz’s (1989) seminal study found that teachers who work in collaborative school cultures are more satisfied with their work, and their students’ performance is higher, than in schools where teachers are isolated. Rosenholtz’s (1989) data sources consisted of 1,213 complete teacher questionnaires (a 70% return rate per school), 78 interviews, and school demographic information within eight Tennessee school districts.
There is increased support for creating school cultures that promote teachers’ joint work (American Federation of Teachers, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Education Week Research Center, 2004; Guskey, 1995; A. Hargreaves, 2003; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2004; National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future, 2003; National Education Association, 2004; National Staff Development Council, 2004; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Richardson, 2003; Sarason, 1990; Senge, et al., 2000). Despite this support, in the main, schools are still organized around isolation (Little, 1987). Nevertheless, researchers have found pockets of teacher collaboration within schools characterized as individualistic (Grodsky & Gamoran, 2003; Little, 1987). Sometimes groups developed organically from teachers’ interest (Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996; McCotter, 2001); other times, they were initiated by academic literacy or math coaches (Sweeney, 2003). Principals and or district personnel may also initiate teacher groups.

Numerous studies have found that teacher collaboration supports teacher learning through goal setting, teacher evaluation, involvement in decision-making, and ongoing discussions about curricula (Crockett, 2002; Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Little, 2002a, 2002b; McCotter, 2001; Richardson, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1989; Thomas, Wineburg, Grossman, Myhre, & Woolworth, 1998). Further, they have found that joint work offered support of personal needs, instructional needs, and organizational needs (Johnson, 1990; Little, 1987; Rosenholtz, 1989). Teacher collaboration also provided places for teachers to critically reflect upon their experiences and consider new perspectives on curricula, practice, and students (McCotter, 2001, p.702; see also
Crockett, 2002; Horn, 2002; Johnson, 1990; Little, 1987; Little et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 1998; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998). But, despite these positive aspects of collaboration, potential difficulties and limitations have been identified.

Many researchers and theorists challenge the pursuit of collaboration as a remedy for isolation, particularly when the collaboration is superficial or imposed (Achinstein, 2002; A. Hargreaves, 1993, 2003; Huberman, 1993; Leonard & Leonard, 2001a; Little, 1990), as might be the case if the teachers’ joint work is mandated by the district or principal. A. Hargreaves argues that mandated collaboration can become contrived collegiality, with faculty going through the motions of working together, and has the potential for groupthink (Fullan & A. Hargreaves, 1996; Little, 1990). Huberman (1993) maintains that collaborating with colleagues does not necessarily translate into improved instruction, since teaching is idiosyncratic and very personal. Others contend that if the collaboration is not focused on teaching and learning, or does not contain an aspect of accountability, it may have no influence on teachers’ classroom practice. These critics maintain that collaboration may in fact be detrimental to teachers’ work, because the time spent with colleagues is time away from planning for individual classrooms, grading papers, or working on that which a teacher personally wants to address (A. Hargreaves, 1993; Huberman, 1993; Supovitz, 2002; Supovitz & Christman, 2005). Additionally, teachers may simply validate what they are already doing without stretching their thinking or changing their practice (A. Hargreaves, 2003, Stevens & Kahn, 2006; Wood, 2007). Further, in the name of collegiality, ideas and assumptions may not be questioned and, therefore, discussions may remain on the surface (Crockett, 2002; Supovitz, 2002; Wood,
It is for this reason that Achinstein (2002) cautions against a rose-tinted view of collaboration. She notes that conflict and tension, inherent in joint work, are often under-examined in or omitted from the literature of teachers' collaborative experiences, and need to be brought to the forefront if we are to fully understand and reap the benefits of collaboration. The present study examined teachers' work within grade-level meetings. A close examination of grade-level meetings provided insights into the nuances, complexities, and the outcomes of such an activity.

Professional Development

Professional development in educational settings traditionally has consisted of discrete activities often occurring outside of teachers' everyday work. Typical professional development has involved one-day workshops where teachers choose from a menu of options offered by outside consultants or "experts." This smorgasbord of professional development usually lacks focus, coherence, and consistency (Goodlad, 1984; Thomas et al., 1998). As Little notes (1989), "the market-driven and menu-oriented character of much [traditional] staff development [has left] the field vulnerable to content that [is] intellectually shallow, gimmicky, or simply wrong" (p.178).

The traditional model of professional development, sometimes referred to as the training model (Little, 1993) or the deficit model (Huberman & Guskey, 1995), employs "experts" who impart techniques and strategies for inclusion in teachers' repertoires. The traditional model seems to be based upon the assumption that teachers are in need of "updating" (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 4), and often consist of one-shot workshops with advice, tips, and "bite-sized pieces . . . of transferable
packaged knowledge" (Lieberman, 1995, p. 591). Additionally, district offices or administrators often select the focus, form, and time of the professional development and require teachers to participate.

As Fullan (1995) suggests, "professional development has been miscast. By being treated as a discrete entity outside the regular job, its effectiveness has been severely limited" (p. 264), and has produced disappointing results (Russo, 2004; Sparks, 2003; Thorton, Peltier, & Perrault, 2004). Others assert that the success of traditional professional development has been slight because teachers feel that professional development is not "situated" in their day-to-day work; the content does not account for teachers' existing knowledge; the context of teachers' schools are not taken into account; and how adults learn is not considered (Education Week Research Center, 2004; Joyner, 2000; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993, Putnam & Borko, 2000; Richardson, 2003). Wood (2007) states that a professional development agenda is needed that, "doesn't simply equip teachers with techniques, but widens their professional responsibility and hones their professional judgment" (p. 8).

A National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] survey found that a very low percentage (10–15%) of teachers believed follow-up from professional development workshops was sufficient. The survey data also showed that a low percentage (10–27%) of teachers felt that professional development in the form of one-shot workshops improved their teaching (NCES, 2001). In some ways, traditional professional development has bolstered the individualistic culture of teaching by offering opportunities that are outside of teachers' classrooms, thus keeping teachers safe from scrutiny. In her study of the professional lives of
experienced teachers, Dorian (1997) found that teachers' professional development was individually sought out and implemented. Teachers, in the main, have taken it upon themselves to grow as professionals by attending conferences, participating in study groups, or enrolling in university courses (Dorian, 1997; Goodlad, 1984). While these efforts support individual teachers' growth, there are few mechanisms in place for teachers to share their new learning and experiences with colleagues, so as to further benefit the school culture, colleagues, and other teachers' instruction (Bird & Little, 1986; Little, 1993; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

Some suggest a new vision of professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Joyner, 2000; Lieberman, 1995; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). This view provides alternate perspectives to professional development and teacher learning that are situated inside classrooms and schools. It is argued that a job-embedded focus of professional development addresses individual needs of teachers and the context in which they work, while viewing teachers as central in their own development (Guskey, 1995; Richardson, 2003). Proponents of this approach highlight the need for collaborative learning contexts, teacher research and inquiry, engagement in practical tasks of instruction and assessment, exploration of relevant subject matter, and consistent feedback and follow-up activities (Education Week Research Center, 2004), as well as ongoing critical reflection about practice (Darling-Hammond & McLauglin, 1995). The concepts of the "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983) and "teacher as researcher" (Brause & Mayher, 1991) are two examples that support this professional development stance.
The grade-level meeting is another example of an arrangement specifically designed to promote teachers’ joint work. The present study focused on grade-level meetings in order to understand more fully how such an activity might influence teachers’ work.

Grade-Level Meetings

With the rising support for flat school structures, collaborative teaching cultures, and job embedded professional development, school activities, like the GLM, have also increased. However, little research has examined the GLM. Studies that have investigated elementary grade-level meetings have used survey and interview methodologies for data collection. The few that have used observation (Riley, 1999, 2001; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003) as a method of data collection observed formal grade-level meetings and focused their analysis on the roles and interactions within the meeting such as the type of leadership that occurred, who asked questions, who was resistant, or who made the decisions. Little attention has been placed on examining the content of the meetings: what is discussed and what gets done. Further, many of the studies refer to the grade-level groups as grade-level teams and examine the groups’ ability to work as a team. Table 1 summarizes the key aspects of different studies on elementary grade-level groups.

This study broadens that perspective by observing the grade-level meetings of a group of fifth-grade teachers and focusing on the substance of the meetings to better understand the influence these meetings have on teachers’ work.
Table 1

*Studies of Elementary Grade-Level Meetings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Purpose of Study or Research Questions*</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britton, C. (2004)</td>
<td>Describe factors of team collaboration and determine the relationship between the over all presence of collaborative factors and teacher perception of the level of student achievement.</td>
<td>Surveys Group interviews</td>
<td>10 elementary school grade-level teams within 5 low-socioeconomic schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, S. C. (1996)</td>
<td>Identify and describe teacher teams by determining the degree to which the teams exhibited “teamness”, identify what team members did to promote high student achievement, and determine strategies used by principals to promote “teamness” in teacher teams.</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Teacher teams and the principals from four low-socioeconomic, high-achieving elementary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley, J. (1999)</td>
<td>What is the level of participation during team meetings by teachers in an elementary school grade-level team? (p. 4) What types of interactions take place between teachers during such grade-level team planning meetings? (p. 4)</td>
<td>Case study: Observed meetings collected and coded quantitative data on levels and types of participation</td>
<td>8 fifth grade teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley, J. (2001)</td>
<td>What practices are more or less effective in collaborative planning? (p. 4) How do changes in leadership and personnel and differences in teaching philosophy and style affect collaborative planning? (p. 4)</td>
<td>Case study: Observed meetings collected and coded quantitative data on levels and types of participation</td>
<td>14 elementary school teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shields, J. (1997)</td>
<td>Identify the advantages and disadvantages of team teaching and elements of successful teams.</td>
<td>Open-ended interviews</td>
<td>8 upper elementary teachers and the principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiu, S. &amp; Chrispeels, J. (2003)</td>
<td>How were habitual routines established and evolved in the grade-level Team A and Team B? (p. 3) In what ways did habitual routines support and constrain team effectiveness and learning? (p. 3) In what ways were the teams similar and different in creating conditions for team learning? (p. 3)</td>
<td>Ethnographic: Observed weekly meetings, video-taped, took field notes, and reviewed written documents</td>
<td>10 female elementary teachers: 4 on Team A 6 on Team B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Purpose of study is included when research questions are absent.*
Purpose, Structure, and Content

The overarching purpose of grade-level meetings is to whittle away at the individualistic culture of teaching, establish routines within teachers’ daily program to work with colleagues and, of course, to increase student achievement. However, the actualization of GLMs, their specific purpose, structure, and content are context-specific, varying from school to school, as well as within schools (Crow & Pounder, 2000; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2004). It appears that grade-level meetings are a formal or institutionalized practice, endorsed by the school. Only one study explicitly stated the impetus for the grade-level meetings: In Shiu and Chrispeels’s study (2003) the GLMs were a piece of a larger district reform process that engaged teachers in aligning their curriculum to the state’s standards. As part of the district reform initiative mentioned above, grade-level teams were charged with creating and implementing multidisciplinary units that were aligned with state standards (Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003). One of the teams in their study also reflected upon and improved the developed units during and after implementation (Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003).

Other purposes of grade-level meetings included discussing and critiquing formative assessments to drive instruction (Fox, 2004). In Crow and Pounder’s study (2000), teachers viewed grade-level meetings as a way to lessen their isolation. Other researchers reported that the grade-level meetings’ main purpose was to plan and implement student interventions (Crow & Pounder). Hall (1996) found that the grade-level meetings in some low-socioeconomic high-achieving elementary schools in California were “freeflowing” with an established purpose to create consistency within a grade level.
The artifacts produced as a result of grade-level meetings vary as well. Some produce few written documents, while others produce formal agendas, minutes, and unit plans (Crow & Pounder, 2000; Fox 2004; Riley, 2003; Shiu & Chrispeels). Britton (2004) interviewed several grade-level teams and surveyed most of their team members. Her findings document teachers’ beliefs that having time to discuss instructional strategies improves student achievement. Britton also found that those groups that were more “intentional about documenting their collaborative work through written products” (p. 117), such as minutes and agendas, perceived their work as having more influence on student achievement.

Within the various configurations of grade-level meetings, most consist of weekly discussions among same-grade classroom teachers regarding various work-related issues. Some GLMs occur during school hours, while others occur after school. Their scheduled duration ranges from 30 minutes to 90 minutes (Britton, 2004; Crow & Pounder, 2000; Fox 2004; Hall, 1996; Riley, 2001, 2003; Shields, 1997; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003).

The structure of the interactions at grade-level meetings also varies. Some grade-level groups have a designated leader, while others have shared leadership (Riley 2001; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003). In Shiu and Chrispeels’s (2003) study, the leader, or “chair” (p. 6), was chosen by the school principal. In Riley’s (2001) study, teachers within the groups chose the leader, or “captain” (p. 9).

Research on grade-level meetings in elementary schools suggests that the leadership of the group has great influence on the group’s productivity, members’ feelings towards their group work, and the artifacts produced (Britton, 2004; Riley,
2001; Shields, 1997; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003). Riley's (2001) study found that the type of leader was of great consequence: an experienced teacher with a “dynamic personality” led a successful grade-level team. Riley states that one leader’s ability to use her sense of humor to move tense conversations along, as well as help members feel comfortable and at ease, contributed to the group’s success. Another grade-level team studied in Riley’s (2001) research did not have a dynamic leader. The members’ philosophical and personality differences emerged and impeded the group’s work, with four teachers eventually forming a different group, particularly to discuss math. Riley’s (2001) study did not follow this group’s development or meetings. However, the study reported that, the following year the principal stepped in and brought the grade-level team back together, while the math meetings continued with additional teachers attending.

Other studies report that the personality traits of the leader, as well as the other team members, are instrumental in teachers’ perceptions of the groups’ success. When group leaders or members were domineering, other members became passive (Riley, 2001; Shields, 1997; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003). In contrast, when group leadership was shared and members were treated with respect, by listening to and welcoming divergent ideas, participants tended to be more active resulting in more positive perceptions of the groups’ work (Riley, 2001; Shields, 1997).

Shiu and Chrispeels (2003) examined the habitual routines of two grade-level groups and the team learning that occurred within the same elementary school. They found that different leadership styles led to different habitual routines, which in turn led to different levels of team learning and differences in the planned instructional
units. Although both groups (Team A and Team B) focused on similar work (e.g., developing instructional units around a topic or theme, developing rubrics, searching for resources, setting the agenda for next week), the analysis of dialogue and actual instructional units produced were quite different. Team A consisted of four teachers who operated the meetings with shared leadership, which resulted in members’ more active participation and increased opportunities for learning. Team A’s shared leadership culture allowed participants to discuss issues comprehensively, resulting in instructional units that engaged students in activities and assessments that required high cognitive demands. The discussions also provided members with opportunities to talk through instructional and conceptual questions or confusions, thus affording the teachers with a fuller understanding of the created units.

Team B, on the other hand, developed a “leader dominant culture” (p. 7). This group was comprised of six teachers. In contrast to Team A’s collaborative development of the units, Team B’s units were planned by the group leader and presented to the other team members. The members of Team B became passive. There was little questioning or discussion of the units before implementation, and no evidence of review or revision of the units during or after implementation. This was in stark contrast to Team A’s habitual routines, which included reviewing and revising the planned units. The reviewing and revision of the planned units often resulted in better quality units, as measured by the rubric Shiu and Chrispeels (2003) used to evaluate the “cognitive demands, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria” (p. 11).
Participant Perceptions: Benefits and Limitations

While it is widely theorized that the collaborative work of teachers is positive, research shows that the joint work of teachers is rather complex, with potential benefits and limitations. The reported benefits of collaborative work are plentiful. Teachers reported the various benefits of collaborative work, including teachers’ beliefs that their instruction is more effective and that they have increased personal and professional support from colleagues (Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996; Erb & Doda, 1989). Teachers also reported feeling validated and empowered because of the peer collaboration (Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996; Erb & Doda, 1989). Further, teachers reported that the increased sharing of instructional ideas, information, and experiences contributed to their heightened insight into curricula and teaching. The exposure to and sharing of different perspectives also contributed to the creation of curricula that was better integrated with state standards (Britton, 2004; Shields, 1997; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2004). Moreover, as a result of grade-level meetings, teachers reported having increased respect for colleagues, leadership opportunities, and opportunities for learning (Britton, 2004; Erb & Doda, 1989; Shields, 1997; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2004).

Nevertheless, collaborative grade-level work is not without its limitations. Teachers experienced a loss of autonomy because there was a need to compromise, as well as a loss of control over scheduling, continuing projects, and spontaneity (Shields, 1997). This occurred because teachers shared students, so the need to keep to the schedule was important. Further, teachers from Shields’s (1997) study commented on how the differing philosophies and personalities of members created
tension among colleagues, as was the case with one grade-level group in Riley’s (2001) study. The differing personalities and philosophies impeded teachers’ ability to focus on their collaborative work. Other teachers reported feelings of frustration when one teacher dominated the group, and told other teachers what to do. Although both new and experienced teachers resented this dynamic, they allowed it to continue (Shields, 1997; Shui & Chrispeels, 2004), essentially putting in “face time” by attending the meetings but not contributing or benefiting from them.

Although these studies focused primarily on elementary school grade-level groups, the research conducted with middle school interdisciplinary teams documented similar benefits and limitations. In Crow and Pounder’s (2000) study of three middle school interdisciplinary teams, teachers reported that they were more knowledgeable of students’ academic performance and personal lives because of their collaborative work with other teachers. The teachers also reported being more proactive when students were having difficulty because, as a group, teachers could design cohesive intervention strategies (Crow & Pounder, 2003). Additionally, teachers reported the grade-level meetings increased their knowledge of curricula beyond their own area of expertise (Erb & Doda, 1989). Moreover, teachers reported an increased sense of autonomy, and increased support from staff members and school administrators (Crow & Pounder, 2000; Cromwell, 2004; Erb & Doda, 1989; Pounder, 1998), all of which contributed to a positive work environment.

Barott and Raybould (1998) comment on the difficulties of “asking people [teachers] to share information, [share] decision making . . . co-labor” (p. 29). They assert that when interdependency increases so does the opportunity for conflict, since
people's intentions, values, beliefs, goals, and personality styles differ. These differences, when utilized to generate more dialogue, discussion, and ideas, can positively influence a group's work. However, if not discussed openly and honestly, these differences can also hinder communication and collaboration. Much of the literature on effective collaboration discusses the importance of trust and honest communication, while welcoming different perspectives and points of view (Senge, 1990). Barott and Raybould note:

In essence, we are asking them [teachers] to change the patterns of their relationships so that they are more interdependent. This is in stark contrast to many schools' current relationship patterns, which tend to have an organizational bias in favor of professional isolation, autonomy or discretion. (p. 29)

A. Hargreaves (1994) expands upon this observation. He contends that teacher cultures have great influence on teachers' work and student performance. Therefore, this study examined the contents, structure, and outcomes of grade-level meetings to build on current understanding about how school structure and teachers' work culture influence GLMs and how such an activity influences teachers' work.

**Synthesis**

The preceding sections provide a framework for understanding the influence grade-level meetings have on teachers' work. Figure 2 is a dynamic representation of the different bodies of knowledge used to support this study. The three main bodies of knowledge are represented in the middle of Figure 2 as continuums. At the ends of each continuum, inside the nested ovals, are the different representations of the body of knowledge. For example, bureaucratic and democratic represent opposite ends of the continuum for school structure. Individualistic and collaborative represent
opposite ends of the continuum for teachers' work cultures, and traditional and new vision represent opposite ends of the continuum for professional development.

Figure 2

*Potential Influencing Factors on Grade-Level Meetings*

Figure 2 also can be read vertically. This view shows possible relationships among the different dimensions of school structure, teachers' work cultures, and professional development. For example, a bureaucratic school structure most likely promotes an individualistic teachers' work culture and the professional development would most likely be traditional, whereby experts come in and impart knowledge onto teachers. In contrast, a democratic school structure most likely promotes a collaborative work culture with professional development that is job embedded and context specific, whereby teachers are involved in decision making and their own
professional development. Grade-level meetings could exist at either end of the spectrums. However their form, content, and purpose would vary within different contexts. This model represents the theoretical. The reality of school is not so predictable. However, the model may be useful by providing a framework in which to understand potential aspects of school life that influence grade-level meetings.

Educational Significance

In light of the current educational climate of high stakes testing and accountability, many believe that teachers’ collaborative work has the potential to improve education. Therefore, as the collaborative work of teachers continues to increase through job-embedded professional development, such as grade-level meetings and more democratic school structures, the need to understand the complexities and nuances of the educational settings that promote teachers’ joint work is critical. This study entered and observed a group of fifth-grade teachers’ grade-level meetings to (a) contribute to our understanding of the nuances and complexities of teachers’ joint work, (b) inform reform efforts aimed at promoting educational settings that support teacher collaboration, (c) provide descriptions and analyses of teachers’ grade-level meetings to provide a framework for improving these designed arrangements in an effort to make them as advantageous as possible.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews literature related to the study of grade-level meetings. The study was informed and influenced by theory and research on educational reform, with specific attention paid to professional learning communities, adult learning in professional contexts, and collaborative groups as sites for professional development.

Educational Reform

The call for educational reform has existed for at least a century, with many constituencies, including politicians and the private sector, vying for a voice in the educational arena. As a result, discussions of educational reform begin from different perspectives and focus on different aspects of this complex issue. For example, some reforms focus on the purpose of schools or the goals of schools, while others focus on how learning is defined.

Additionally, educational reform is discussed from many vantage points. Some common terms used to categorize reforms include curriculum restructuring, instructional reform, and standards-based reform. Kennedy (2005) organized her discussion of educational reform into three major ideals: “more rigorous and important content, more intellectual engagement, and universal access to knowledge”
These categories provided a frame from which to discuss educational reform as it related to her study. Kennedy’s (2005) goal was to understand three major issues: what teachers were actually doing to see if reformers’ perceptions were accurate; how teachers accounted for what they were doing to gain the teachers’ perceptions of their practice; and where teachers got the ideas that motivated their practices to understand what influence, if any, reform efforts had on teachers’ decisions.

In her essay on educational reform and professional development, Little (1993) organized reform into five streams which included, “reforms in subject matter teaching” (p.130), “reforms centered on problems of equity among a diverse student population” (p.130), “reforms in the nature, extent, and uses of student assessment” (p. 131), “reforms in the social organization of schooling” (p. 131), and “reforms in the professionalism of teaching” (p. 132).

Examining educational reform from the vantage point of the organization of teachers’ work, specifically those reforms that institutionally support or promote the collaborative work of teachers seems most fitting. However, in order to provide a context for the discussion on education reform that promotes teachers’ collaborative work, a discussion about the evolution and reformation of the American school follows.

Origins of Reform

The history of education in America is replete with instances in which politicians and the private sector have been the driving force of change. With the advent of the common school, education in the United States began to change, with its primary goal shifting “to commence or extend the processes of cultivation and
socialization" (Beyer & Liston, 1996, p. 2). The educational system as it had been organized (to educate the few) was no longer meeting the needs of the “rapidly industrializing, and increasingly urban, American society” (Beyer & Liston, 1996, p. 4). In tandem with the Industrial Revolution there were many scientific advances and increasing support for science, specifically support for its claims of predictability, certainty, and objectivity. Frederick Winslow Taylor’s (1911/1967) scientific management model of productivity and efficiency became the model for business and, in turn became, the way schools did business (Beyer & Liston, 1996). This assembly-line organization for schooling has remained despite our changing society, despite our growing insights into learning and development, and despite the complex changing marketplace (Nehring, 2007; Senge et al., 2000).

Many of the characteristics of industrial age beliefs stem from Newton and other seventeenth-century scientists. Newton believed that the world was made up of discrete components that when put together could make something. Thus, an understanding of the component parts would lead to a prediction of how those parts would work together. This machine-age thinking first influenced how businesses were organized, and then to meet the needs of business, how schools were organized and how teaching and learning were defined (Nehring, 2007; Senge et al., 2000). Schools were organized into what is often referred to as an egg-crate environment (Richardson, 2003) in which teachers teach a specific group of students, for a set amount of time, within the confines of a single classroom. In this model, teachers have little, if any, interaction with fellow teachers. In addition, the nature of education became the teaching of a finite amount of isolated and fragmented skills.
Under this model, the teacher, not seen as the expert, was the transmitter or importer of these skills and students were receptacles. Therefore the need to interact with colleagues was not considered important. This type of teaching and learning has been referred to as the banking model (Friere, 1997).

Since the inception of the banking model and machine-age thinking, many initiatives have attempted to reform education by changing our views about learning, as well as the role of teachers in that process. Constructivist theories of learning promote a view that students are active in the learning process and, therefore, should be engaged in meaningful activities within the school setting. The University of Chicago’s laboratory school, directed by Dewey, was based on the belief that it is through experience and interaction that learning takes place (Dewey, 1956). Other reform movements have focused on the organization of teachers’ work. Most notable are the team-teaching movement (Joyce, 2004; Sowers, 1968; Sterns, 1977), the small schools movement (Center for Collaborative Education, 2003; Cotton, 1996; Raywid, 1995), and the Coalition of Essential Schools (Coalition of Essential Schools, 2002).

More recently, a push to create professional learning communities (PLCs) within schools has been gaining popularity. Not surprisingly, the theory of professional learning communities stems from the private sector. The PLC theory advances the idea that, when all adults in a school are engaged in learning, and teachers’ work is reorganized to be more collaborative, school improvement and student learning are enhanced. The following section reviews the literature on professional learning communities.
Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities challenge the individualistic culture of teaching by focusing on improving instructional practice and increasing student achievement through the collaborative work of teachers. Improving instructional practice and increasing student achievement are accomplished by creating environments in which, as part of their everyday work, teachers collectively engage in dialogue, reflection, and learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Fullan, 2005b; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schmoker, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; Stein & D’Amico, 2002). The grade-level meeting is one such structure established to provide teachers with the opportunity to engage in dialogue, reflection, and learning.

The theory of professional learning communities focuses on transforming the school culture from one of teaching to one of learning (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005); from one of isolation to one of collaboration (Barth, 1990, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1998; A. Hargreaves, 1994, 2003; Lieberman, 1995; Pappano, 2007; Wood, 2007); from one of one-shot high-stakes test results to ongoing assessment and reflection (Schmoker, 2004a, 2004b, 2005). Additionally, the PLC theory “emphasizes three key components: collaborative work and discussion among the school’s professionals; a strong and consistent focus on teaching and learning within that collaborative work; and gathering assessment and other data to inquire into and evaluate progress and problems over time” (A. Hargreaves, 2003, p. 128). A professional learning community includes a focus on improving teaching and learning by utilizing evidence and data to inform and to support instructional and
administrative decisions (A. Hargreaves, 2003). A. Hargreaves contrasts the data use in PLCs with the data use in competitive or corrosive teaching cultures. In a PLC data are used to inform, support, generate and provide the foundation for learning. As discussed in Chapter 1, in competitive or individualistic cultures, data are used to blame or embarrass. Teachers in a professional learning community work with colleagues on “teams” and “give up a degree of personal autonomy in exchange for collective authority to answer the most critical questions of teaching and learning” (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, p. 5).

Advocates for professional learning communities caution that although the concept may be powerful, change is difficult and time consuming (Collins, 2001; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Fullan 2001; A. Hargreaves, 2003; Joyce, 2004; Little, 1990, 2003; Supovitz & Christman, 2005; Wood, 2007). As DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005) note,

it will take more than adopting new mission statements, launching strategic plans or flying a banner proclaiming “we are a learning community” to develop the capacity of educators. . . . It will require a staff to find common ground and to exert a focused, coherent, consistent effort over time. . . . The PLC concept represents more than just a series of practices—it rests upon a set of beliefs, assumptions, and expectations regarding school. (p. 11)

Joyce (2004) warns of the importance for PLC advocates to study themselves and critically evaluate their work. He asserts that the demise of many other initiatives that focused on teachers’ collaboration and reflectivity lacked an in-depth internal study. He argues that all improvement reform efforts must be studied intensely in order to continually enhance the process and, accordingly the results.
Schmoker (2004b) further warns that clarity of meaning is imperative because the concept of the PLC is at a critical juncture. On one hand, many champion its benefits; yet, the movement has the potential to lose clarity, and therefore lose focus (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2005a). Fullan (2005a) cautions that the term “learning community” (p. 10) may “travel well, but the underlying conceptualization and thinking do not” (p. 10). He comments that many schools and districts tout that they are professional learning communities without fully understanding the core concepts and practices of PLCs. Fullan further asserts that, for the concept of PLCs to have large-scale effects, educators must develop collective and shared knowledge about learning communities’ concepts and practices. According to Lieberman (1995), transforming schools into learning organizations, in which people work together to solve problems collectively, is more than a question of inserting a new curriculum or a new program. It also involves thinking through how the content and processes of learning can be redefined in ways that engage students and teachers in the active pursuit of learning goals. (p. 2)

Supovitz and Christman (2005) mirror these sentiments when discussing their studies in Cincinnati and Philadelphia, respectively. Each study documented that creating communities of teachers did not, in and of itself, bolster student achievement. What did increase student achievement was when the teacher communities were focused on instructional practice, or when the PLCs were “focused on improving the instructional core of schooling” (p. 649). Although the specific reform initiatives were different in Cincinnati and Philadelphia, both districts had similar goals, including that “teachers would benefit from the collective knowledge of their peers, form deeper . . . relationships with students and parents . . . [and] that the new structures could flourish within the existing school and district organizations”
Both districts found that their reform initiatives improved school climates, with teachers and students feeling safer. However, many of the students' learning gains were attributed to other district initiatives, such as Philadelphia's literacy initiative or Cincinnati's Education Trust's Standards in Practice program.

Gains were also attributed to how specific groups of teachers chose to work together, with few groups engaging in "structured, sustained, and supported discussions" (Supovitz & Chrisman, 2005, p. 650) about instruction. Most of the teacher groups did not discuss instructional issues. In the Philadelphia schools, most conversations were centered around isolated events, such as field trips or assemblies. In the Cincinnati schools, teachers spoke mostly of administrative issues, not academic or instructional issues.

Another study that examined a district-wide initiative to implement learning communities was conducted in a city in the mid-Atlantic states. Wood (2007) studied the early stages of the initiative and found that participants did not see a "connection between their collaborative work and student learning" (p. 700). In this initiative, the benefits of learning communities were constrained because of other outside forces such as high-stakes testing. Furthermore, Wood found that groups spent more time building community than talking critically about improving practice and student achievement, which mirrors some of Supovitz and Christman (2005) findings. She also discovered that many of the "initiatives' practices and principles ran counter to entrenched norms of district culture" (p. 700). This existing tension caused Wood to assert that the initiative "walked a tightrope between redefining the work of teaching or using a new structure to do business a usual" (p. 721), since the possibility that the
initiative could change the culture in the long run was tenuous. Despite these difficulties, Wood concluded that the initiative had many more positives than negatives, including that some teachers were beginning to review and assess student work and critique their practice. The district culture seemed to be changing as teachers were learning to pose and investigate questions, collect data, and take the initiative to improve student achievement.

In summary, although the reforms in all three districts had some positive effects, the goal that the teachers’ work together would provide teachers with opportunities to improve their practice and generate the theorized learning communities discussed above was not necessarily met. Hence, although the theory of professional learning communities is touted in many arenas as the reform that will improve the ills of public education, in reality, there are many obstacles and nuances that complicate the realization of this ideal.

Embedded in many of the recent educational reform initiatives, particularly those that support professional learning communities, is the belief that teachers must be engaged in learning for school improvement and enhanced student achievement to occur. Some claim that education reform on the school level, as well as on a large scale, has and will continue to fail because generative learning is not taking place. The reforms tend to offer strategies and solutions based upon already existing mental models. Thus, although an initiative might be successful at the outset, sustainable improvement ultimately will not occur because the mental models have not changed, for individuals or for the system, (Fullan, 2001; A. Hargraeves, 2003; Sarason, 1990; Senge et al., 2000). Due to its perceived importance in the context of educational
reform, adult learning in professional settings is examined in the following section.

**Adult Learning in Professional Settings**

In a time of standards and accountability, the pressure on teachers to “get the scores up” and raise student achievement has been mounting. Theorists, researchers, and expert educators continue to assert that, in order to create and sustain student learning, teachers must be involved in learning themselves (Alvarado, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Little, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sarason, 1990; Senge et al., 2000). The grade-level meeting is an increasingly prevalent activity that has the potential to promote teacher learning. Therefore, to inform the current study on grade-level team meetings, theories of adult learning within professional contexts will be explored.

**The Learning Process**

Learning can be understood as a never-ending process, *learning-how-to-learn*, as well as an end product, *knowledge* (Brause, 1992, p. 9). Constructivist theories posit that learning occurs when individuals and their environment (context) interact, each affecting the other throughout the learning process, and that individuals construct their own understanding, meaning, and knowledge. Dewey discussed the idea that information gains meaning by “joint activity” (1916, p. 17). Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning was a social act and high-order thinking begins as a social activity. Marsick and Watkins (1990) posited that, “learning is continually influencing and influenced by the way in which people construct meaning. Social networks play a role in this process” (p. 38). Lave and Wenger (1991) asserted that learning is situated in particular contexts and occurs as a function of activity and
culture. All of these theories recognize the importance of the interaction among the individual and the environment. Although the emphasis within various theories may differ between the role of experience, the construction of reality, and whether meaning making is primarily individual or social, all assert that the cognitive process of meaning making and learning occurs within an individual, as well as within a socially interactive exchange (Brause, 1992; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Learning occurs when individuals challenge underlying assumptions in order to reframe problem situations (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Dewey (1938) discusses a model of learning embedded in experience, reflection, and action. When ambiguity occurs in an individual’s understanding, a dilemma develops and the status quo of understanding is disrupted. This state is referred to as disequilibrium (Dewey, 1938; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Through reflection, individuals may choose to hold onto their underlying assumptions and understandings and regard the ambiguous situation as an anomaly. However, individuals may also alter their assumptions and learn on a deeper level. Smylie (1995) explains, “once equilibrium is challenged and upset, an individual will seek information to resolve the dilemma that is posed” (p. 95). In the search for meaning and balance, an individual might seek information or “experiment” (as Dewey may have put it) from the environment, from another individual, or from the social climate, situation, tools, or artifacts.

A lifetime of experiences leads adults to develop strong mental models and ways of interacting with their environment. Mental models are constructed and developed over time within contextual and social boundaries. The models are actualized through interactions within the present context and social environment.
Knowles's (1984) andragogy model of adult learning posits that adult learners draw from their varied experiences and that this experiential knowledge base supports and facilitates learning. In contrast, some argue that, because of adults' depth and breadth of experiences, their underlying assumptions or "theories-in-use" (Argyris, 1976; 1994; Argyris & Schön, 1978), are tacit and may hinder them from seeing situations and problems from a variety of perspectives. Thus, this process might actually inhibit learning (Knowles, 1984). As Mezirow (1990) explains,

Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action. What we perceive and fail to perceive and what we think and fail to think are powerfully influenced by habits of expectation that constitute our frame of reference, that is, a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences. It is not possible to understand the nature of adult learning or education without taking into account the cardinal role played by these habits in making meaning. (p. 1)

Theorists have defined different levels of learning that stem from the idea that adults' mental models or their frames of reference are integral to the learning process. These theorists view learning as a process, in which behavior is altered based on feedback. When people disregard the feedback and continue to act in the same way, no learning takes place. Habits are an example of a situation in which no learning occurs.

Simple learning, also known as single-loop (Argyris & Schön, 1978) learning, occurs when individuals pay attention to feedback and change their actions. Single-loop learning is a term used by systems thinkers who believe systems are made up of feedback loops. A single-loop would denote that a person is acting on his or her already existing mental models, without any form of reflection or questioning of why
he or she has those particular habits of expectation (Mezirow, 1990). Examples of single-loop learning are trial and error, rote learning, and learning a routine skill, such as how to fill in the attendance and lunch forms at a new school.

Argyris (1976, 1994) and Argyris and Schön (1978) use a thermostat analogy to describe single-loop learning. When the temperature reaches a certain degree, the thermostat will go on or shut off. The thermostat is reacting to feedback, either turning on or turning off based on a set program. The set program is illustrative of single-loop learning, or simple learning, because the thermostat is not questioning or reflecting on the set program temperature. The thermostat is not questioning whether the temperature is the best temperature, or if the way it is turning itself on and off is the most efficient. However, if the thermostat were to question or reflect upon its set program (its mental models) another type of learning might occur, which Argyris and Schön termed double-loop learning (1978). Obviously, a thermostat cannot pose questions. Nevertheless, Argyris and Schön use this analogy to explicate the differences between single-loop and double-loop learning.

Double-loop or generative learning uses feedback not only to alter actions, but also to question and possibly change existing mental models. Argyris (1994) remarks that, “double-loop learning asks questions not only about objective facts but also about the reasons and motives behind those facts” (p. 79). The example of learning the skill of filling out the attendance and lunch forms as single-loop learning can become a task where double-loop learning occurs. If, for example, a person questions the purpose, value, and underlying messages of the activity, and then changes his or her actions, or even the procedures within the school, double-loop learning might
occur. This type of learning can lead to innovation and learning-how-to-learn; as people question their mental models, they begin to view situations from different perspectives, thus affording themselves more choices or ways in which to act.

**Contexts for Learning: Formal, Informal, and Incidental Learning**

Adult learning can occur in various contexts, ranging from formal structured experiences to informal and incidental experiences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). It is important to recognize these different settings for learning in order to fully appreciate the multifaceted, multidimensional learning process.

Marsick and Watkins (1990) discuss three different settings in which learning opportunities arise within professional contexts: formal, informal, and incidental. Formal learning, a traditional form of professional development, is usually institutionally sponsored, highly structured, and intentional (Smylie, 1995). Informal learning, although initiated by the individual and usually loosely structured, is also intentional. In contrast, incidental learning occurs as a by-product of some other activity (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Incidental learning is not planned, but occurs as an individual engages in doing or participating in an activity. As opposed to formal and informal learning, incidental learning happens serendipitously. Of course, incidental learning may occur through participation in formal and informal settings, but that “learning” would not be directly related to the intended purpose of the formal and/or informal experience. GLMs that are embedded in teachers’ daily schedule are most closely aligned with a formal learning structure, because they are institutionally sponsored and intentional.
Marsick and Watkins (1990) discuss three capacities in which informal and incidental learning are more likely to occur: proactivity (which relates to a person’s willingness and readiness to learn); critical reflectivity (which relates to a person’s willingness and readiness to uncover and examine mental models); and creativity (which relates to a person’s willingness and ability to see a situation from multiple perspectives). Marsick and Watkins argue that learning “takes place through an ongoing, dialectical process of action and reflection” (p. 9).

Central to Marsick and Watson’s (1990) theory on informal and incidental learning is the notion that learning occurs from and through experience. Similar to Dewey’s notion of learning through experience, Marsick and Watkins define learning from experience as

the way in which people make sense of situations they encounter in their daily lives. . . . We are concerned with how we [people] extract . . . lessons [meaning] so that each experience adds to our knowledge instead of simply being a repetition of the same mistakes. (p. 15)

They discuss the importance of context and how the context of the workplace may have significant influence on what and how people learn. This research informed the present study’s examination of teachers’ perceptions of grade-level meetings within the school environment. Another essential element of the learning process is reflection, which is the focus of the next section.

Reflection

Reflection is an integral part of the learning process. The following section discusses reflection from three vantage points: reflection as part of the learning process, reflection as part of teaching, and reflection as part of social practice.
As Part of the Learning Process

Reflection is at the heart of the learning process—that which drives it. As West-Burnham and O’Sullivan (1998) state, “reflection is the process of giving meaning to, and so understanding experience.” Dewey defines reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (1933, p. 9). In Democracy and Education (1916), Dewey defines the “reflective experience” as follows:

The general features of a reflective experience . . . are (i) perplexity, confusion . . . (ii) conjectural anticipation—a tentative interpretation . . . (iii) a careful survey (examination, inspection, exploration, analysis) . . . (iv) a consequent elaboration of the tentative hypothesis to make it more precise and more consistent . . . (v) taking one stand upon the projected hypothesis as a plan of action which is applied to the existing state of affairs: doing something overtly. (p. 176)

The purpose of reflection, in Dewey’s view, was to make sense of the world. Others have viewed the purpose of reflection as a means of empowerment and emancipation (Freire, 1998; Mezirow, 1990, 1991). Still others have viewed reflection as a means to improve practice (Argyris & Schön 1978; Schön, 1983). People can engage in reflection as to “how and why . . . [they] have perceived, thought, felt, or acted” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 6), which is different from engaging in reflection about how best to act. The former would entail double-loop learning, while the latter would entail single-loop learning. Mezirow (1990), and Marsick and Watkins (1990) write about reflection that challenges the validity of presuppositions in prior learning (mental models) and ways of viewing a problem or the world. Mezirow (1990) and Marsick and Watkins (1990) argue that this type of reflection,
critical reflection, elicits a transformation of perspective that transcends the cognitive, affective, and conative domains. Critical reflection examines the reasons behind a person's actions, as well as the consequences of those actions, possibly addressing ethical and moral dimensions.

As Part of Teaching

Although reflective approaches to teaching have increased greatly in the last two decades (Smyth, 1992), the ideas behind reflective practice date back to Dewey. Smyth asserts that the recent trends stem from reform efforts that attempt to empower teachers, by engaging them in reflective practices that utilize their expertise and knowledge. Although the rhetoric of reflective practitioner has gained popularity, some question its value, particularly when the reflection is superficial, focusing on the technical aspects of teaching and curriculum delivery (Fendler, 2003). Zeichner similarly warns against the wholesale support of reflection for reflection's sake, and notes that teaching is not automatically better if teachers are more "deliberate and intentional about their actions" (1993, p. 7). However, according to some researchers, reflection that stems from a critical lens has potential to support and promote teacher growth and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Fendler, 2003; Zeichner, 1993).

Van Manen (1977) discusses three levels of reflectivity: technical reflectivity, practical action, and critical reflection. There is value in each level of reflectivity. However, Van Manen, as well as Fendler and Zeichner, contend that critical reflections which have moral and ethical content are imperative for development and growth. Technical reflectivity focuses on the means rather than on the ends of
instruction or education. Liston and Zeichner (1991) write, "In technical reflection the concern is with the efficiency and effectiveness of the means used to attain ends that themselves remain unexamined" (p. 167). The focus of technical reflexivity is on competence that is demonstrated by standardized, measurable outcomes.

Practical reflectivity, the second level Van Manen articulates, includes the notion that "every educational choice is based on a value commitment to some interpretive framework" (1977, p. 226). Level two reflection shows teaching and learning as processes that involve communication and common understanding (Van Manen, 1977). Educational choices are based on some belief framework. Reflection involves perception, not just description. “Category two is a reflection of an event relying on personal experience and/or observation with regard for a system or theory and is often viewed as problematic, but commonly with a personal bias” (Pultorak, 1993, p. 290).

Critical reflection is the third level of reflectivity articulated by Van Manen (1977). He asserts that this is the highest level of reflection. This level of reflectivity addresses moral and ethical issues of teaching and learning, and suggests that teaching should be characterized by its support of justice and equity. The content of reflection includes the worth of knowledge and the social circumstances of students. “Category three is specifically viewed as reflection of an event with open-mindedness including moral and/or ethical considerations” (Pultorak, 1993, p. 290).

Most studies on reflective teaching have been conducted with student teachers. Pultorak’s (1993) examined student teachers’ reflective thoughts using four procedures for reflection: daily journals, weekly journals, visitation journals, and
reflective interviews. She investigated the types of reflection the different activities produced. Pultorak used Van Manen’s (1977) levels of reflectivity to analyze the different levels of reflection found within the different procedures. Pultorak discovered evidence of Van Manen’s three categories of reflection in all four procedures. However, the degree to which different reflective levels occurred varied between procedures. She found most of the daily journal reflections fell into category one, technical rationality; visitation journal reflections tended to fall within category one, technical rationality and category two, practical application; and the reflective interview reflections fell into all three reflective levels.


Schön (1987) describes reflection-in-action as the “artistry that good teachers [use] in their everyday work” (p. 1). It is also “often tacit and spontaneous” (p. 4) and involves the “capacity to respond to surprise through improvisation on the spot” (p. 5). Schön (1995) makes the comparison of reflection-in-action to what jazz musicians do when they improvise within a musical framework. Reflection-in-action requires a “reframing” or a different way of seeing or hearing the situation (Russell & Munby, 1991). Reflection-on-action, on the other hand, happens after the action in a more “ordered, deliberate, and systematic” (p. 165) way that is within our control, and entails “careful consideration of familiar data” (Russell & Munby, p.165). Russell and Munby explain the interplay between these types of reflection.
Reflection-in-action is not systematic and when an individual reflects-in-action, the data are seen in a novel way. They propose that it is only "through reflection on reflection-in-action, . . . [that] we think systematically about the freshly framed data" (p. 165). Reflection-on-action or reflection on reflection-in-action are the types of reflection that might be evidenced in grade-level meetings.

Teacher as researcher is possibly the most systematic and authentic example of reflective practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). The deliberate process of self-assessment, question generation, data collection and analysis are impossible to do well without a reflective stance. Brause and Mayher (1991) share one teacher’s journey as a teacher-researcher and the benefits she and her students experienced. As a teacher-researcher, this teacher learned about her students’ learning styles and how to better address their needs. She learned to approach teaching more from a teacher-as-inquirer and teacher-as-learner stance than from her previous stance of "teacher-as-controller." Additionally, she gained knowledge in the writing process and the effects of engaging students in such a task. By observing her students closely, keeping reflective journals, which both she and her students kept, and constantly reflecting on her actions and on what she observed, she was able to feel powerful, and successful. She commented that due to these experiences, "a spirit of inquiry affects . . . my teaching" (Brause & Mayher, 1991, p. 39).

As part of this teacher’s growth as a teacher-researcher and teacher, she shared her knowledge with colleagues in her school and district. Brause and Mayher (1991) assert that "while individuals can and do grow on their own, they grow best in
a supportive and collegial environment” (p. 41). The idea that inquiry, reflection, and, ultimately, learning are social acts is discussed in the next section.

As Part of Social Practice

Whereas Dewey, Schön, and Mezirow focus their discussion of reflection from the perspective of the individual, albeit interacting with his/her environment, others approach reflection and learning from a situated discourse communities perspective (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, & Lopez-Torres, 2003). This latter perspective emphasize[s] the shared nature of reflection through three concepts: situated activity, reflection as a social endeavor, and reflection as a distributed process with distributed content (i.e., the situation, the group, and the artifacts utilized in reflection that permeate this discourse). (p. 250)

Crockett (2002) notes that most of the research and literature on teachers’ reflection-in-action or reflection-on-action has focused on the individual, rather than on communities of teachers in school settings.

Reflection from a social vantage point connotes that interaction with others is a critical medium of reflection. Different kinds and types of reflection are embedded in the group’s culture. Hoffman-Kipp et al. (2003) discuss the situated discourse communities of teachers and argue that reflection does not entirely occur within an individual. Instead, it is distributed among and through the sign systems and artifacts that are part of the discourse. In the case of the current study on GLMs, the agendas, lesson plans, and curriculum guides produced for or by the members are examples of the sign systems and artifacts that might influence what and how the groups discuss and reflect on their teaching.
However, Hoffman-Kipp et al. (2003) posit that examining learning through the situated discourse lens does not account for the historical and cultural aspects of learning. Further, they promote the study of adult learning (namely, teacher learning) through the lens of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT). “A key premise to CHAT is the social origin of learning. It emerges first in a social plane (in relations between people) and is subsequently appropriated as a psychological category” (Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003, p. 251). Thus, reflection is framed “as both a meta-cognitive mechanism and a social practice . . . debunk[ing] the image of the reflective practitioner as an isolated apolitical professional” (Hoffman-Kipp et al., p. 253).

The grade-level meeting might be a place for teachers to personally and collectively reflect on their practice: what and how they teach. If reflection is an integral part of the learning process then it is important to examine settings, such as the grade-level meetings, that afford teachers with opportunities to reflect on their teaching. The examination of the characteristics of grade-level meetings has the potential to contribute to our understanding of teacher growth and learning in these educational settings. The belief that reflection and learning have social components may be influencing the increasing popularity of teachers working together in collaborative groups as a form of professional development. This topic is the focus of the next section.

Collaborative Groups as Sites for Professional Development

The grade-level meeting is often considered a form of collaborative professional development. Therefore, research and theory on the different types of collaborative groups as sites for professional development are examined. In addition
to the grade-level meeting, examples of collaborative groups include teacher study groups (Crockett, 2002), inquiry groups (Richardson, 2003), curriculum groups (Thomas et al., 1998), and book groups (Crockett, 2002). Sometimes groups develop organically from teachers’ interests (McCotter, 2001); other times academic coaches initiate them (Sweeney, 2003); or they are mandated. Different types of groups provide teachers with opportunities to talk about various aspects of teaching and learning. For example, some groups learn specific subject matter together (Crockett, 2002), while others examine and inquire into students’ thinking and learning (Fox, 2004; Little et al., 2003). Some teacher groups scrutinize and research teaching practices and plan curriculum (McCotter, 2001; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998), while others meet to read, discuss, and be part of an intellectual community (McCotter, 2001; Thomas et al., 1998).

The advantage of these teacher groups is that they typically provide teachers with opportunities to collaborate and discuss important issues with colleagues. Additionally, if implemented with flexibility, collaborative groups can be an impetus for development, learning, and change by “provid[ing] ample opportunities for teacher input and discussion” (Sweeny, 2003, p. 21). In her study, McCotter (2001) found that participation in the teacher study group created a “safe place for the teachers to critically reflect on their experiences and look at new ways to consider their practice” (p. 702). Many studies which examined teacher collaborative groups have had similar findings (see Crockett, 2002; Horn, 2002; Little et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 1998; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998). However, despite the positive outcomes, some studies note potential difficulties and limitations, as well.
A primary limitation of teacher groups is time. Groups need time to get to know each other and build trust (Crockett, 2002). Teachers need to find enough time in their busy day to engage in meaningful and in-depth conversations. Another possible limitation is that working solely within teachers’ own school’s context might be limiting, since “the pull of the existing classroom [and school] environment and culture [are] simply too strong” (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 16). However, some groups have a variety of constituencies represented, for example, teachers or administrators from different high school departments, university faculty, or teachers from other schools, which may counter this limitation. Another potential limitation is that teachers may simply validate what they are already doing without stretching their thinking or changing their practice (A. Hargraeves, 2003; Wood, 2007). In the name of collegiality, ideas and assumptions are not questioned and therefore discussions remain on the surface. Other studies have found that collegiality can limit the learning potential of teachers engaged in joint work (Crockett, 2002; Supovitz, 2002).

As discussed, a fair amount of research has been conducted on these different types of teacher groups. Some studies focus on the discourse that occurs within these organized settings and others focus on the organization and structures of the groups. However, all of the studies attempt to understand how these settings support teacher learning and growth. Table 2 presents highlights from three different studies that examined teacher collaborative groups. An in-depth examination of the three studies follows Table 2.
Table 2

*Highlights from Studies on Collaborative Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sponsor of Collaborative Group</th>
<th>Type of Group</th>
<th>Reason for Meeting</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crockett (2002)</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>Study group</td>
<td>Personal desire</td>
<td>4-6 grade teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little (2003)</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Department meeting</td>
<td>Institutionally established Part of school day</td>
<td>High school math and English teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Study</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Grade-level meeting</td>
<td>Institutionally established Part of school day</td>
<td>3-5 grade teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The studies represented in Table 2 characterize the breadth of research conducted on collaborative groups. Crockett’s study represents a collaborative group that was teacher initiated. Little’s study examines high school department meetings, and Adger et al.’s (2004) study examines a group of teachers and administrators who participated in a professional development course that was institutionally suggested and supported. The course fulfilled a new state requirement for preschool teachers and participants received college credit for the course.

Crockett’s (2002) study examined the contents and interactions of a teacher inquiry group. She “concentrated on the problems, or, dilemmas that emerged in their [the group’s] interactions . . . [and] attended to how they [the members of the group] constructed and negotiated their understandings, as they acted on symbols like lessons, curricula, student work, and other teachers’ meanings” (p. 612). Four
different activities (solving open-ended problems, critiquing videotaped teaching vignettes, lesson planning, and looking at student work) were discussed in the article, highlighting the amount of teacher inquiry that ensued. Of the four activities, Crockett found that only in the examination of student work did disagreement and conflict emerge, thus creating “dilemmas” for the teachers. As the teachers tried to articulate their understandings, they also tried to incorporate others’ understandings, and “as a result, the teachers’ conceptions about what constitutes understanding in the context of the problem were enriched” (p. 622). Notably, the examination of student work occurred later in the groups’ work together. It may be that the group developed trust and an accompanying comfort level, whereby disagreements were allowed to emerge. Although the other activities did not promote teacher inquiry, by teachers’ own accounts, teachers’ understandings of mathematics increased and their pedagogy changed as a result.

Little (2003) studied the learning opportunities and dynamics of professional practice that occurred during teacher-led groups that considered themselves collaborative. Specifically, she was trying to understand two questions: (a) “What facets of classroom practice are made visible in out-of-classroom talk and with what degree of transparency and (b) how does interaction open up or close down teachers’ opportunity to learn?” (p. 920–921).

Through in-depth analysis of audio and video transcripts from an English department meeting, an algebra group’s “check-in” routine, and a weekly meeting of an academic literacy group, she surmised that, while the teachers’ talk consisted of “decontextualized representations of the classroom” (p. 936), it was simultaneously
contextualized within the group’s work together. For example, as the group made sense of "one another’s stories, speculations, explanations, comments, jokes, complaints, and observations," (p. 936) the sense-making process became the substance of the group’s work, thus contextualizing the out-of-classroom talk. Based on all the different data sources, Little postulated three interpretations about accounts of classroom practice within these collaborative groups:

1. They “are generally opaque by comparison to lived or observed classroom practice.” (p. 936)

2. They “are partial, selective, and situationally relevant in time and space.” (p. 937)

3. They “are time-compressed, fleeting moments commonly interspersed in dense trajectory of dialogue.” (p. 937)

She found that the availability of different resources for teacher learning affected how the different groups interacted, as well as what the different groups accomplished. The resources included the content of the meetings, how the content was discussed, as well as the practices of the groups (Little, 2003). For example, the literacy group spent most of their time coordinating activities and discussing the pacing of the units, while the algebra group’s discussions focused on “ways of thinking about and responding to students’ learning difficulties in mathematics” (p. 939). The varied resources for learning, the differences in what was discussed, and how it was discussed, influenced the type and depth of out-of-classroom talk that occurred.

Adger, Hoyle, and Dickinson’s (2004) study focused on locating learning through discourse analyses of the conversations and sessions conducted through one
model of professional development, the Literacy Environment Enrichment Program (LEEP). The program was developed by the Education Development Center (EDC) and was delivered to Head Start programs in New England. The study examined the effectiveness of one LEEP course in influencing early childhood teachers’ literacy. Eleven staff members from four preschool programs (7 teachers and 4 supervisors) participated in the professional development course. The researchers stated that participants’ motivation to attend the course included that undergraduate and master’s level college credit was offered and that the course was paid for by a research grant. Additionally, the course met a new state requirement for preschool teachers. Data were collected at two full-day Saturday sessions and eight 3-hour late afternoon sessions. All meetings were videotaped for a total of 29 hours. Data were analyzed in two ways: first, quantitative coding was used to indicate the amount of time devoted to professional conversation and planning, lecture, video watching, and whole group discussion. Second, recursive qualitative analysis by a team of sociolinguists was conducted. The analysis discussed in the article concentrated on the lecture discussions. The framework was linked to Goffman’s description of authorship.

Adger et al. (2004) found that the collaborative discussion created joint authorship and supported teachers’ knowledge construction. They maintain that collaborative discussions within professional development courses are not the only forums in which knowledge construction can happen. However, since the collaborative discussions provided opportunities for joint authorship, teachers’ understandings may be deeper and multifaceted. This occurs because the knowledge construction was done collaboratively, with varying perspectives and opinions being
discussed. Further, Adger et al. believe that providing teachers with opportunities to participate in collaborative discussions within professional development courses has the chance to carry over into teachers’ work in their own schools, particularly since participants attended the course as school teams.

These three studies analyzed different types of collaborative groups. However, the groups’ goals were the same: to promote teacher growth. Whether the group developed from teacher interest, as part of a high school department team, or as part of a college course that met a new state requirement, the experiences seemed to provide teachers with opportunities to grow as professionals. The current study adds to the knowledge base by examining yet another type of collaborative group: the institutionally established elementary grade-level meeting and its influence on teachers’ work.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' interactions within the context of grade-level meetings, I employed ethnographic case study methods. Fetterman (1998) depicts ethnography as "the art and science of describing a group or culture... [by studying] the routine, daily lives of people" (p. 473). The ethnographer enters the field with an open mind to ascertain the "social processes and the meanings which participants (educators) attribute to the social setting (in a school)" (Burgess, 1985, p. 8). An ethnography as described by Brause (1991b) "is a written description of a group's implicit or tacit rules and traditions which are followed by members of that specific community and bond the members of that group together" (p. 183). Case studies intensively examine an individual, a group, an activity, or a process in order to better understand how it functions or operates (Berg, 2001; Cresswell, 2003). Through the collection and analysis of multiple data sources, case study research is one approach used to generate hypothesis about complex activities (Brause, 1991a). The present study went inside grade-level meetings to gain an understanding of this complex activity.

The current study on grade-level meetings was influenced by preliminary research I conducted on school culture. From my preliminary research, I gained valuable experience in observing naturally occurring situations, interviewing, and
understanding the recursive nature of data collection and analysis in a hypothesis-generating study. Additionally, I learned, first hand, how difficult it is to document nuances of conversations without the aid of an audiotape. Therefore audiotapes were used throughout the current study. The research questions and methods for data collection and analysis are highlighted in Table 3. Figure 3 displays the research design in a visual representation.

Table 3

Research Questions and Data Collection Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources (Level 1)</th>
<th>Data Sources (Level 2)</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the characteristics (content, purpose, structure) of grade-level meetings for a group of fifth-grade teachers in a Grade 3-5 school?</td>
<td>Audiotaped interviews</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audiotaped GLMs</td>
<td>Interview transcriptions</td>
<td>Theme generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written documents</td>
<td>GLM transcriptions</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g., minutes, school’s daily bulletin, district documents)</td>
<td>Summary content logs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the outcomes for teachers from the grade-level meetings?</td>
<td>Audiotaped interviews</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audiotaped GLMs</td>
<td>Interview transcriptions</td>
<td>Theme generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written documents</td>
<td>GLM transcriptions</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g., minutes, school’s daily bulletin, district documents)</td>
<td>Summary content logs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Casual Conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are teachers’ perceptions of the grade-level meetings?</td>
<td>Audiotaped interviews</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audiotaped GLMs</td>
<td>Interview transcriptions</td>
<td>Theme generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written documents</td>
<td>GLM transcriptions</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g., minutes, school’s daily bulletin, district documents)</td>
<td>Summary content logs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Casual Conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In what ways do the grade-level meetings influence teachers’ sense of community?</td>
<td>Audiotaped interviews</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audiotaped GLMs</td>
<td>Interview transcriptions</td>
<td>Theme generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written documents</td>
<td>GLM transcriptions</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g., minutes, school’s daily bulletin, district documents)</td>
<td>Summary content logs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Casual Conversations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Setting

The setting for this study was an intermediate school (Grades 3-5) in a suburban school district located in the northeast. The district had a total of three primary schools (k-2), three intermediate schools (3-5), one multiage magnet school (k-2), one middle school (6-8), and one high school. The district also operated a preschool program for children with special needs. Additionally, the school district operated a community school for adult learning. The elementary school buildings housed before- and after-school care for attending students. The students represented
diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. As per the state’s department of education 2003-2004 School Report Card, this district spent $15,639 per pupil, about $4,000 more per pupil than the state average.

The particular intermediate school where this research took place had 268 students: 48% White, 40% Hispanic, 10% African American, and 2% other. The class size averaged about 18 students. I selected this school for my research because the school represented the increasing diversity found in our schools today. Additionally, it was considered a successful school (as measured by state achievement tests), and it was a school, at least in rhetoric, that supported teachers’ joint work. On the top of the school’s daily bulletin were the words “generate and support collaborative relationships” (School Bulletin, 2005/2006). The school schedule worked on a six-day cycle (A day–F day). The six-day cycle was instituted to address a variety of issues, including a state mandate to offer physical education twice a week, increased district emphasis on science instruction so students would have science twice a week, as well as the need to accommodate instrumental music within the school day, instead of having a before-school instrumental program.

There were 15 regular classroom teachers (five on each grade level), three special education teachers, one ESL teacher, and six basic skills and resource room teachers, in the building. Only one of the 15 classroom teachers was a novice teacher. Two of the 15 classroom teachers were new to the school but had many years of experience in other districts. The school had additional faculty who taught science, physical education, health, world languages, library, and computers. There were four
male faculty members: two classroom teachers, the science teacher, and the principal. The remaining faculty members were women. A majority of the teachers had at least seven years of experience and had been at the school for most or all of their careers.

*Site Selection*

The school site was selected due to several converging factors. First, I met the principal of the school at a conference. I sought permission to conduct this research at his school because his attendance at the conference was a potential indicator that there was collaborative work occurring at his school. After the conference, I visited the school on several occasions to see if there were, in fact, opportunities to study teachers' joint work. One area that captured my interest was the organized grade-level meetings. Within the six-day cycle, one day was designated for teachers on each grade-level to have a common preparation period to meet with fellow grade-level teachers. On the day designated as grade-level meeting day, teachers had an additional preparation period, so as not to infringe on their individual planning time. Also of interest was that, in the staff room, the minutes from the grade-level meetings were posted for others to read.

The principal arranged for me to attend a staff meeting where I provided the teachers with information about my study. Since the school consisted of Grades 3–5, there was the potential for me to study three different grade-level groups. However, only one full grade-level group signed the consent form and agreed to have the meetings audiotaped. Since it is very difficult to catch everything that is said in the meetings when taking only field-notes, I thought it was imperative that an entire
grade-level faculty agree to have the meetings audiotaped in order to be part of the study. Therefore, the study focused on the fifth-grade grade-level group because they were the only group whose members had all agreed to have the meetings audiotaped.

Participants

The participants were 5 fifth-grade classroom teachers and one basic skills teacher who worked with the fifth grade. Pseudonyms were given to protect the teachers’ privacy. Names were chosen by the researcher and the participants. As such, the 5 classroom teachers will be referred to as Carrie, Delia, Lisa, Marianne, and Ellen. The basic skills teacher will be called Betty. Table 4 describes the participants’ total years of teaching experience, and their years teaching at the study school.

Table 4

Summary of Participants’ Teaching Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years at Study School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>First year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>First year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A more in-depth discussion about the teachers’ stances towards the grade-level meetings and their participation styles is discussed in Chapter IV.

Data Collection

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the GLMs of the group of fifth-grade teachers, the data collection methods included interviews, observations, and the examination of written documents. In order to address reliability, triangulation of data occurred. “Triangulation consists of collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods,” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 93). Interviews, observations, and written document analysis provided various perspectives on this group of fifth-grade teachers’ grade-level meetings. Other strategies used to validate the findings included member checking, rich description, clarifying researcher bias, presenting negative or discrepant information, as well as spending prolonged time in the field (Cresswell, 2003; Maxwell, 1996). Grade-level meetings and interviews were audiotaped. I used a small MP3 player to record the grade-level meetings and interviews and then downloaded the recordings to my computer. All data were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. Data collection consisted of two levels of data sources that are explained in the following sections.

Level 1 Data Sources

Level 1 data sources were primary data sources which were the closest to the actual event. Level 1 data sources included the audiotaped interviews, the audiotaped meetings, the written documents, and casual conversations.
Audiotaped Interviews

Seidman (1991) notes that the “primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people . . . who make up the organization or carry out the process” (p. 4). He further states that a researcher can look at an organization or phenomenon through a variety of sources, including documents, histories, questionnaires and surveys, and observations. However, if the researcher’s goal “is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, . . . [then interviewing is a necessary] avenue of inquiry” (p. 4). Many researchers assert that it is through story that people make sense of themselves and their world. Interviewing is a way for researchers to tap into people’s stories, allowing them to articulate the meanings they make of their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Berg (2001) discusses how qualitative interviews allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives. Therefore, I conducted interviews to understand the teachers’ stories and perspectives regarding the grade-level meetings.

Many studies that examined teachers’ experiences have employed interviewing techniques. Rosenholtz (1989) used interviews with two types of open-ended questions. The first type helped to “expand and clarify [the] quantitative findings” (p.10) from the questionnaire, and the second type “more fully elaborated on teachers’ definitions of reality” (p. 10). Dorian (1997) used qualitative interviews to understand experienced and accomplished teachers’ perceptions of their professional lives. Stein and D’Amico (2002) used interviews along with classroom
observations to understand staff developers' and teachers' understandings of
experiences with a district-wide literacy initiative. Horn (2002) used interviews in
combination with audio- and videotaped interactions with mathematics teachers to
examine their professional development in the context of high school reform.

One limitation of interviewing as a data collection tool is "that people say and
do different things in different situations. Since interview is a kind of situation,"one
must not assume that what a person says in the interview is what that person believes
or says in other situations" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 82). In addition, interviews
are "deprived of context" (p. 82), so using interviews as the sole data source possibly
limits the perspectives from which a situation or phenomenon can be understood.
Because of these limitations, researchers (Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 1991; Taylor &
Bogdan, 1984) advocate in-depth interviewing so the researcher has a better chance
of constructing the context, and shared meanings have a better chance of being
achieved. Others suggest using various data sources and data collection methods to
address this limitation. This study compensated for these limitations by employing
various data collection methods, including observations and the examination of
written documents as a way to provide contextuality to supplement the interview data.

For the present study, interview questions were designed to allow teachers
opportunities to discuss their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs about the grade-
level meetings (see Appendix A). The interview questions were used as a guide. I did
not use them as a check off. Instead, I followed the lead of the interviewee to
determine areas to address more in-depth. I conducted two interviews with each
classroom teacher: an initial interview focused on the grade-level meeting, and a
second interview focused on the teachers' perceptions of their work culture. I also interviewed Arthur, the principal, to better understand his perspective and ascertain the context in which the grade-level meetings occurred. Interview data were cited with the interviewee's first initial and a little "i" followed by a number 1 or 2. For example, when I cited something Carrie said in the first interview, the citation would be "Cil." Table 5 details the interview duration with each participant and the total interview time. In total, I conducted almost five hours of interviews. A total of 175 pages of interview transcriptions was documented.

Table 5

Teachers' Interview Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher's Name</th>
<th>Interview 1 (Hr:Min:Sec)</th>
<th>Interview 2 (Hr:Min:Sec)</th>
<th>Total Time (Hr:Min:Sec)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>32:10</td>
<td>44:26</td>
<td>1:16:36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delia</td>
<td>23:17</td>
<td>15:23</td>
<td>38:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>23:37</td>
<td>29:04</td>
<td>52:41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne</td>
<td>26:51</td>
<td>33:23</td>
<td>1:00:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>25:06</td>
<td>21:43</td>
<td>46:49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>19:49</td>
<td>None Conducted</td>
<td>19:49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL TIME:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4:54:48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Betty was not interviewed because she told the researcher "she was afraid of what she might say about individual people." This exchange occurred during a casual conversation between Betty and the researcher.
Audiotaped Grade-Level Meetings

The information obtained from interview data is a representation of people's stated understandings and perceptions, and can provide rich stories and descriptions of teachers' work. However, as Taylor and Bogdan (1984) note "no other method can provide the detailed understanding that comes from directly observing people and listening to what they have to say at the scene" (p. 79). Therefore, observational data provided concrete examples of when, where, and how different stories, perceptions, and behaviors discussed in the interviews materialized in everyday interactions.

Maxwell (1996) states,

observation often enables you to draw inferences about someone's meaning and perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data. This is particularly true for getting at tacit understandings and theory-in-use, as well as aspects of participants' perspective that they are reluctant to state directly in interviews. (p. 76)

I attended this group of teachers' grade-level meetings for nine months. In total, I attended 22 grade-level meetings, of which I audiotaped 20, once the MP3 player was not working and the other time I forgot to turn it on.

Written Documents

Written documents such as meeting minutes, schedules, curriculum frameworks, the school's daily bulletin, and teacher lesson plans were examined and analyzed to document and develop the findings and hypotheses. The examination of written documents provided insights into the school and district context in which the grade-level meetings occurred. Additionally, the examination of the written documents confirmed or contradicted hunches based on other data sources.
Casual Conversations

Casual conversations occurred throughout data collection. The casual conversations provided additional layers of understanding and insight. Further, the casual conversations aided the researcher in getting to know the teachers on a personal level.

Level 2 Data Sources

Level 2 data sources represented data that were once removed from the actual event. The Level 2 data sources enabled me to examine the data by asking questions or summarizing aspects of the data. Level 2 data sources included field notes, transcriptions, and summary content logs.

Field Notes

Field notes were taken during the interviews and grade-level meetings, as well as after casual conversations. Soon after I left the research site, I typed the field notes in a Word document and included any information I could recall from my observations that may not have been in the field notes.

The field notes documented that which could not be captured on the audiotapes. For example, field notes documented where people were sitting, if people came in late and other nonverbal information. Further, I wrote down any key ideas or questions I had based on that which I observed. All field note files were saved by the grade-level meeting number and key words. For example, the third grade-level meeting I observed would be labeled “GLM3”, followed by the main topics of discussion (e.g., GLM3.SSArtifacts.Topics of Inquiry.Clocks.ReportCards). This
provided me easy access to specific data, as all files were saved in a way that explicated the key contents of the data.

Additionally, any questions or comments that I had about the notes or reactions to specific statements were added to the field notes using the track changes function in Microsoft Word, so as to keep the original field notes and additional comments separate and discrete (see Figure 4 for sample field notes).

Figure 4

Sample Field Notes with Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C — talking with the school psychologist off to the side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L — Are we meeting now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B — Agenda is....?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L — good you have the agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L — need SS lessons today for Thursday meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L — Ideas, lesson, products, anything — for Thursday’s meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D — writing Delia gave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L — topics scale down projects if don’t get parent volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B — assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L — Scrapbook idea — web — books make it factual. Research based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M — careful of Google research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D — gotten a few calls in the past from parents not too thrilled with teaching the holocaust. I would be really careful with that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[RK1] M — Country in a Box idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C — came in at 10:30.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L — told C about her project idea[RK2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C — shared scrapbooks from what some of her kids did last year[RK3].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C — who started Europe — Workbook?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E — discussed where she was in Europe — maps, landforms and rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D — Taking the spiral approach — kids will revisit latitude and longitude and 5 themes of geography throughout the studies of different countries[RK4]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B — Math conferences. How were you going to do that with new teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M — Yeah — report cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science modules discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E and C brief discussion of student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L placed little post it notes onto people’s books to remind them about social studies stuff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFTER MEETING — IN THE HALL RESEARCHER WISHED LISA A GOOD MEETING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa said the SS meeting isn’t such a big deal, but she just wants them to give her stuff.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[RK1] Stance seems to be one of fear????
[RK2] Interesting that L would repeat all the information.
[RK3] Very story based not as research based as L wanted.
[RK4] Said this in a somewhat sarcastic way — L commented quietly that that is the way to do it.
The sample field notes and other samples of my data collection and data analysis notes generated throughout the process are referred to as figures. Since they represent my thinking in progress, formatting and consistency usually found in tables does not apply. Consequently, they are included as figures.

Transcription of Interviews

The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed for recurring themes and patterns within and across participants to gain an understanding of teachers’ perceptions of the content, purpose, structure, usefulness, and general effect of the grade-level meetings. I highlighted different sections and used Post-It to mark off specific statements that supported or contradicted different hunches, findings, and assumptions.

Transcription of Grade-Level Meetings

In-depth analysis of conversations is a fine-grained method to understand a phenomenon. Little (2002a) comments that most of the research on teacher community relies on surveys, interviews, and field observations. She asserts that a “more fine-grained analysis of naturally occurring interaction” (p. 919) is needed as we continue to examine and try to understand how teachers’ work together may “afford opportunities for teacher learning and innovation” (p. 919). The grade-level meeting audiotapes were transcribed using an adapted version of the transcript conventions used by Little (2002a) which were adapted from Ochs’ (1979) transcription conventions (see Appendix B). For analysis purposes, transcripts were divided into episodes as a way to segment the data into more manageable pieces.
Each episode was then annotated to provide content information about the interactions that occurred within the episode. The episodes were used to organize the data for more specific analysis and to aid the reader in understanding the content and context of the grade-level meetings when presenting the findings in Chapter V-IX. Additionally, for analysis purposes, turns at talk were numbered sequentially. Turns at talk that exceeded one line were numbered and lettered. For example, the first line of a turn at talk might be numbered 25. If the turn at talk exceeded one line, each additional line would be numbered 25a, 25b, 25c respectively:

187    L: Umhum..well, I'm going to tell you what she told me and then
187a   I’ll tell you what I talked to Arthur about. The first thing is that
187b   she said to teach text structure, focus on teaching the kids that
187c   the blue is the most important, it’s the bigger one than the red.
187d   I like the subtitles

Summary Content Logs

The time it took to transcribe the interview and grade-level meeting data was tremendous and, as Stubbs (1983) points out, the transcription is merely the preliminary step in coding and analyzing the data. In her study on locating learning in teachers’ communities of practice, Little (2002a) dealt with a large amount of data from audio- and videotapes of teacher interactions by creating summary content logs. These logs provided initial ideas and themes of relevant issues found in the data and were used to find smaller segments of interactions for fine-grained analysis. A similar approach was employed in this study for the interviews, and grade-level meetings. An example of a summary content log from a grade-level meeting can be found in Figure 5.
### Sample Summary Content Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussing E’s Observation</td>
<td>Do we have an Agenda?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling Word discussion (inappropriateness)</td>
<td>E what should we talk about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding who will take minutes</td>
<td>Holocaust videos – from Librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E – Miracle at Midnight goes along with Number the Stars</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holocaust videos – from Librarian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria’s idea about a Wax Museum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C – interrupted (what’s this boomerang box) – M - Not traveling now</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still go on it – but if it’s not moving I say we don’t do it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose taking agenda items? M – I am – C – did you put Holocaust video</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L – Holocaust thing at the Museum C – expensive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L- is for 6 -8 but if you class is mature.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria’s idea about a Wax Museum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back to wax museum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L – I think that would be cool – African Americans in History.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D – each kid is a person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C – kids or parents walk around.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E – classroom have a different theme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica and Bill (D friends where Monica and Bill)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change for Halloween</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers will dress up as the decades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D – Losing Hair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you been doing? How about taking prenatal vitamins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back to Halloween</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing costumes again</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L – Tips for Extended Day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B – work on picture prompts – I have some will give you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of kids in it. Why are they?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS – Are we moving to Russia and Europe (Minute 16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(This discussion lasted 20 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check where everyone is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Different books for Europe (Robinhood, Family Under the Bridge, Angel on the Square…) and Russia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L said she might buy some books for her lower kids over the weekend.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

"Data analysis is a dynamic and creative process. Throughout analysis, researchers attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what they have studied, and continually refine their interpretations" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 130). During the data collection process, data were examined for themes and contradictions. New questions were posed and pursued to follow up on hunches, concepts, or insights that emerged from the data.

In order to provide rich descriptions and gain insight into grade-level meetings, large amounts of data were collected. Maxwell (1996) discusses three analytic options for dealing with the large amounts of data: "memos, categorizing strategies (such as coding and thematic analysis), and contextualizing strategies (such as narrative analysis, individual case studies, and ethnographic microanalysis)" (p. 78). Maxwell notes that a combination of all three should be employed. Therefore, all three analytic options were used in this study.

A discussion of the content analysis, discourse analysis, and a synthesis of the analysis process follows. Throughout the content analysis memos and categorizing were used to better understand the large amounts of data, while the discourse analysis was used as a contextualizing strategy. The analysis process section illustrates the reiterative nature of the analysis, incorporating the memos, categorizing, and contextualizing strategies used within the content and discourse analysis.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was done for the interview transcriptions, the grade-level meeting transcriptions, and the written documents. I examined the data for recurring
themes that emerged from within and among the different data sources and wrote memos to document my thinking. Theme generation was recursive and is discussed in detail in the analysis process section.

Discourse Analysis

Since ethnographic methodologies were employed in this study, discourse analysis was used because it is a supporting “conceptual approach for analyzing discourse data (oral or written) from an emic (insider’s) perspective and for examining how discourse shapes both what is available to be learned and what is, in fact, learned” (Gee & Green, 1998, p. 126).

An important aspect of discourse analysis is understanding who and what are implicit in the text. Gee (2005) defines who as the “socially situated identity, the kind of person one is seeking to be” (p. 22). He defines what as the “socially situated activity that the utterance [or text] helps to constitute” (p. 22). Using discourse analysis provided a framework for analyzing discourse, and helped to uncover the complexity of the interactions (text) and the layers of meaning, many of which are often taken for granted. Kucer (2001) notes that “the meaning and language that are built and used will always be framed by the social identity (e.g. ethnic, cultural, gender) of the individual and the social context in which the language is being used” (2001, p. 5). Gee mirrors this view by stating that “language-in-use” is representative of our cultural, social, and personal identities. Discourse analysis was used to analyze the interview data, the written documents, as well as the observational data. The insights gleaned from discourse analysis helped me to understand the complexities of
grade-level meetings, contextualize hunches, and thus generate findings and hypotheses.

Many studies have used aspects of discourse analysis. Crockett (2002) examined upper elementary mathematics teachers’ discourse to see which activities would “generate dilemmas regarding teachers’ beliefs and practices about mathematics teaching and learning in and through the activities that constitute their daily work—planning lessons, teaching lessons, and assessing students’ work” (p. 611). Data analysis consisted of analyzing the “talk” that occurred from the teachers’ face-to-face interactions. As teachers discussed their work around four activities, an open-ended problem, a video-teaching vignette, lesson planning sessions, and examination of student work, the researcher attended to the dilemmas that emerged from the interactions. The researcher also used discourse analysis to examine how understandings were negotiated and constructed.

Adger, Hoyle, and Dickinson (2004) examined teachers’ learning using discourse analysis of conversations conducted during the Literacy Environment Enrichment Program (LEEP), one model of professional development. The researchers were trying to ascertain whether this professional development model was effective in influencing early childhood teachers’ literacy practices. The focus of their analysis was on the interactions themselves, and data were analyzed via audio- and videotaped transcriptions. These researchers drew on the work of Gumperz and Goffman to base their discourse analysis.

McCotter (2001) examined the discourse of a group of ten k-12 teachers and teacher educators who came together to explore issues of social justice in their
classrooms. She used the Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan's (1995) Four Step Listening Guide as a defining structure to guide her discourse analysis. After all the teacher educators' discussions were transcribed, McCotter's first reading focused on the “plot” of the conversations. The second reading looked at each group member individually to see how each participated. The third and fourth readings focused on how participants addressed the issues of “social justice and equity and how they described their professional actions” (p. 687). These studies exemplify the value for including discourse analysis as a tool in understanding grade-level meetings.

The Analysis Process

Data analysis was truly a recursive and iterative process: one that took patience and stamina. Since the analysis process was more circular and dynamic, as opposed to linear, it is difficult to describe the process here in perfect sequence. Some beginning ideas that were put aside were returned to in the end, while other ideas were not formulated until the very end. The following discussion explicates this recursive and iterative process.

Since this was ethnographic research the initial stage of analysis began during data collection. Each time I went into the field I was in some ways analyzing the data, since it was through my observations that my initial hunches developed. Based on previous data collection experience, when a hunch was in the back of my mind or jotted down on a piece of note paper, my focus for observing that day may have been more toward my hunch. While I could focus my observations that day on any number of specific hunches, the audiotape was there to ensure that I was able to have documentation of the meeting in its entirety. Subsequently, a more deliberate and
fine-grained analysis occurred during the transcription process. The transcription process included listening to the audiotapes multiple times, reading and rereading the transcripts, revising episode titles and breaks, and creating annotated episodes. This recursive process entailed generating themes based on the data and then reexamining the data to support or contradict the generated themes.

Each interview was transcribed and summary content logs were written to help uncover teachers’ stances toward the grade-level meetings and toward their work in general. Concurrently, audiotaped grade-level meetings were transcribed to obtain the substance and flow of the meetings, and then each grade-level meeting was reviewed again to create summary accounts of the meetings. Summary accounts were written for 6 of the first 10 meetings. Initial categories emerged including, meeting logistics, personal, procedural (district, school, grade), curriculum (district, school, grade), individual students, testing, and miscellaneous. Using those categories, I listened to the audiotaped meetings again and calculated the time spent within each category. After doing this for the first eight meetings, patterns began to emerge, most notably that teachers spent the majority of their time talking about grade-level issues, both procedural and curriculum related. While this categorization and initial analysis provided an entry point into understanding the data, I recognized that this was only a surface-level understanding. Therefore, I began to look again at the summary accounts and generated lists of content trying to group the different topics into larger categories. Some of these initial categories were safety, administrative life of teachers, discussions based on outside influences, coming to common understandings, reasons for different curricula choices, and jointly creating a teaching culture in
which to work. I reread the summary accounts and listened to the audiotapes again to find excerpts that represented the aforementioned categories (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

*Categorized Excerpts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Transcript Page Numbers</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>GLM 3</td>
<td>pages 3-8                                                      Holocaust Scrapbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM6A</td>
<td>pages 3-5                                                        going out for movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM5</td>
<td>pages 24-26                                                   Circumcision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM 9</td>
<td>pages 8-14                                                     Circumcision (19:13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM 18</td>
<td>pages 9-12                                                    Circumcision (5:28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions based on Outside Influences – Bulletin, District, Parents?, tradition?</td>
<td>GLM4</td>
<td>pages 7-11, 12                              SS meeting (text too difficult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pages 12                                                        Next year in Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pages 12                                                       Was differentiation now strategies (teaching reading all day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM5</td>
<td>pages 4                                                        Cookie Cutter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM6a</td>
<td>page 5                                                         Reality check for Backwards Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM9</td>
<td>pages 15-34                                                   LA kids self-assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM11</td>
<td>pages 1-5                                                       Context Clues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM18</td>
<td>pages 18                                                      Next year in Middle School - use of textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pages 18                                                    Math next year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM14</td>
<td>page 1                                                        Sally ordering books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Sense of – Coming to common understandings- Coming to Consensus?</td>
<td>GLM1</td>
<td>Backwards Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM5</td>
<td>pages 2-4                                                      Making sense of meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pages 4-9                                                       SURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM13</td>
<td>pages 7-15                                                     A-Z Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM15</td>
<td>pages 24-35                                                   Backward Design/Project based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale/Reasons for doing what we are doing</td>
<td>GLM3</td>
<td>page 12                                             Scrapbook kids love doing it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM4</td>
<td>page 11                                                        Part of SS kids love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM5</td>
<td>pages 3-9                                      kids liking it (Students as learners? Students as individuals? Affective vs. Cognitive?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GLM13</td>
<td>pages 4-15                                        the way we have done it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once excerpts from the different meetings were categorized, I noticed that some meeting excerpts represented multiple categories. That prompted me to begin more in-depth analyses of those excerpts. Similar to Little’s (2002a) data analysis, I found relevant content and themes in the data and used those to find smaller segments
of interactions for fine-grained analysis. I began discourse analysis on a select group of excerpts that I felt best explicated the different themes and categories that emerged. I reread the transcripts and listened again to the tapes as I examined the text for layered meanings and embedded assumptions. A piece of one of the excerpts examined is shown in Figure 7. These are my notes that represent my thinking-in-progress. As I became more familiar with and gained richer understandings of the data I revised the episode breaks. Therefore, the episode breaks in Figure 7 are a bit different from those found in the transcripts represented in the latter part of this dissertation.

Through the discourse analysis that included multiple grade-level meeting excerpts, a revised set of potential themes emerged. The revised set of themes used descriptors that characterized spectrums or continuums of ideas. One revised theme was teacher autonomy and teacher isolation. The theme descriptors of teacher autonomy and teacher isolation possibly characterize a spectrum of teachers' work culture. Another theme generated at this time was status quo and innovation. These descriptors might possibly characterize a school-change continuum. Additional themes generated during this iteration included understanding terminology and just doing, role of new teachers and role of veteran teachers, superficial discussion and deep discussions, face-time and investment, idea generation and collaboration, and teacher as administrator, teacher as student advocate, and teacher as curriculum presenter.
Figure 7

Sample Transcript Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preliminary Episode Split</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Comment/Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10: Be Careful</td>
<td>D: I'm going to tell you something and not to discourage you from/</td>
<td>It is safe to give your opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L: No, I want/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D: //because I think it's great idea but [3 sec pause]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M: You're going to have to be really careful with pictures if you google that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L: I know.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: Wait there's more</td>
<td>D: That's the first thing and the second thing is that I already had a call from a parent saying that last year in Library, Mrs. Murphy did a unit on the study of the Holocaust/</td>
<td>Parents have influence on teachers' choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L: mmhm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D: //And her child had nightmares.</td>
<td>Stories get passed around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E: Yeah, I heard about that. Thought that people were going to come and get her out of her house.</td>
<td>Sharing past experiences adds validity to your claim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D: Soooo</td>
<td>Don't want to upset the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E: Yeah.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12: I talked to parents</td>
<td>L: I talked to the parents that I was concerned about/</td>
<td>Be upfront with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D: Oh, you did? Okay.</td>
<td>Need to be careful not to provide students with potentially disturbing material or experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L: But um. But I still do have to be careful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D: Yeah. Because, you know, it's//I think umm/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13: Suggestions</td>
<td>E: I've got a great packet.</td>
<td>Suggestions to improve ideas are wanted, excepted, and often go unexamined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L: That's a good idea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E: I've done a great packet for you too in that/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L: Okay.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M: Okay?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D: But/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E: //That's very kid-like.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

After the transcript analysis, I returned to the interview transcripts to see if the themes represented in the grade-level meetings were supported or contradicted in the teachers' interviews. As this process continued, some themes were discarded, some were collapsed together, and some new ones emerged. For example, one organizing structure included what the grade-level meetings looked like (aspects of the meeting
structure and the nature of discussions); and why the meetings were the way they were. A second organizing structure focused on larger ideas including teaching is individualistic, teachers avoid conflict, and teachers' participation styles reflect their stances toward the grade-level meetings. In an attempt to simplify the organization and understanding of the data, a third organizing structure was developed that included teaching matters, social matters, and meeting matters. Still unsatisfied with the organizing structures and generated themes, I developed another organizing structure focused on teachers’ participation in the grade-level meetings and conflict-avoidance in and out of the grade-level meetings.

After many category generations and organizations the analysis had gone back and forth from very specific categories to broad themes. Throughout the process I wrote pages and pages of analysis. Each piece was fine on its own, but the analysis was disjointed. A structure or common thread was absent, and therefore the analysis did not hold together. The individual iterations were not representative of the totality of data. I tried to think of overarching “ahas” instead of discrete categories. I kept asking, “What is the data telling me? What does this all mean?” At one point in the process, I thought the data supported the idea of rituals and the ritualistic nature of teaching. Another time I thought it was all about conflict. Each time, I thought I had it, and each time, after weeks of writing and reading, I realized I did not have it, because the data simply was not there to support these assertions.

During a meeting with my advisor, she asked about my findings. When I was unable to answer, we worked together to generate one finding. She suggested I write a chapter on that finding, which I did. However, more than a chapter emerged. A
structure and organization materialized that took into account the totality of data. This organization is explained in Chapter V. From there, I wrote three additional findings. Once the findings were written, hypotheses were generated. After nine months in the field, and almost 13 months of analysis, I believe I have uncovered many of the complexities of grade-level meetings and of teachers’ work together.

Potential Limitations

As with most ethnographic research, the purposes are to understand, from an emic perspective, naturally occurring phenomena, and to generate hypotheses that will contribute to our understanding of the studied phenomenon. The generalizability of this ethnographic study is potentially limited, since the study examined only one grade-level group. However, the benefits of this study and ethnographies in general, are that they provide rich descriptions and develop hypotheses concerning complex phenomena which contribute to theory building and rich understandings.

Another potential limitation includes researcher bias. Researcher bias might influence the choices made in data reduction, and also in the generating of findings and hypotheses. One way to address researcher bias is to make the researchers’ perspectives public. As such, the next paragraph discusses my bias regarding the topic of study.

I have been privileged to work with professionals who embraced collaboration and teacher learning as integral parts of their jobs and the schools’ cultures. Despite the rhetoric I found myself in, I realized that an environment where teachers learn and collaborate as part of their daily interactions was not the norm. As such, I knew my research would somehow study this phenomenon. I believe that collaboration and
learning communities can make a difference in our schools. However, I approached this study with an open mind, since my intent was to better understand the complexities of collaboration and teachers’ work, for although I lived it, I never fully understood it. This research has helped me understand the monumental complexity and nuances of what seemed to me to be so natural.

Since the nature of ethnography requires the collection of huge amounts of data, researcher bias might also influence the data reduction choices the researcher makes during analysis. To address this potential limitation, I used many forms of data analysis, and returned to the data many times to ensure that any assertions were supported by the multiple data sources. In addition, my dissertation committee reviewed the data and assertions, further reducing researcher bias. Lastly, throughout data analysis I spoke informally with the participants in the study about some hunches I had and some themes I found in the data.

Another potential limitation with this ethnographic study was that I was an outsider. Since I was an outsider, teachers might have been uneasy when I was present, so data might have been skewed. To address this limitation, I entered into the community, gained the members’ trust and became in one way or another part of the community. I did this by engaging in conversations with individual teachers prior to and after the meetings, at which time I would ask the teachers follow-up questions about ideas or projects they had discussed previously. For example, at one meeting Lisa mentioned she needed artifacts from teachers for the Social Studies curriculum meeting. The next week, I asked her how the meeting went. Ellen left early one meeting to prepare for an observation, so the next week before the meeting, I asked
her how the observation went. This was my way of connecting with the teachers on a personal level that hopefully showed my interest in them as individuals and not just as research participants. Additionally, since snacks were a large part of the meetings, I did at times bring snacks because I wanted teachers to know I cared and appreciated their welcoming me into their group.

I also remained in the field for an extended period of time, which made it more difficult for participants to “act” in a way incongruous to their normal behavior. An additional limitation of being an outsider was that I did not know, first hand, the histories and relationships within the community. Therefore, I needed to be more diligent during interviews and other aspects of data collection to be secure in my understandings of the data. As the researcher, I rarely participated in the meetings because I wanted to influence them as little as possible. Sometimes I commented during discussions because a teacher asked me a specific question or because I felt I could alleviate some confusion. This participation occurred infrequently, as I tried my best to influence their discussions as little as possible.

While potential limitations exist, the richness of data, and depth of description and analysis will help to contribute to our understandings of grade-level meetings and the complexities of teachers’ group work. In the current environment of accountability and blame, these new understandings can only help to equip our profession as it faces the challenges that lay ahead.

The dissertation is organized so the reader can get to know the participants in Chapter IV and understand the context and belief factors that framed the grade-level meetings in Chapter V. The four findings are presented in Chapters VI, VII, VIII,
and IX. Chapter X presents the generated hypotheses and implications for future research and educational settings.
CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The participants in this study consisted of 5 classroom teachers and 1 basic skills teacher. The teachers’ teaching experience ranged from one year to more than 25 years. While this study’s focus was on the grade-level meeting, it is impossible to fully understand the grade-level meetings without understanding the individual teacher’s stances toward the grade-level meetings, as well as their participation styles. As such, this chapter includes individual profiles of the 6 participants to provide the reader with a frame of reference for the findings and hypotheses discussions. Table 6 briefly highlights the teachers’ stated thoughts about the grade-level meetings and their observed participation style. A narrative discussion of individual teachers’ stated thoughts about the grade-level meetings and their observed participation styles in the grade-level meetings follows.

Carrie

Carrie worked at the school the longest of the classroom teachers. The research year was her 10th year teaching, all of which were at this school. In the meetings she took the lead and often dominated the grade-level meeting conversations. She talked quickly, was very animated, and reported that she avoided confrontations. In one meeting when Betty challenged Lisa as Lisa reported what the
Table 6

*Participants’ Stated Thoughts about Grade-Level Meetings and Their Observed Participation Styles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Stated Thoughts about Grade-level Meeting</th>
<th>Observed Participation Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Carrie  | Sees the benefits of working with peers.  
        | Feels like group would do it anyway.    
        | Good to have a set time to sit down but 
        | should be on a need to meet basis.      
        | Under the impression that the meeting   
        | agenda is generated by the principal.   |
| Delia   | Beneficial for newer teachers. Sees     
        | benefit of talking with colleagues but  
        | does her own thing in the classroom.    
        | Shouldn’t talk about field trip stuff just put it in a memo. Should meet every other “A” day, or half as often. | If asked, will offer advice and share what she has done in the class. Shares personal anecdotes and stories of past teaching experiences. |
| Lisa    | Beneficial learning from colleagues.    
        | Gets great ideas from them. Thinks the meetings could be a bit more structured and tries to think of things to bring up at the meetings. | Often initiates discussions and brings topics to the table. Avoids confrontations. |
| Marianne| Very helpful for learning about procedures and school traditions. Also for getting to know the materials. Next year she thinks it will be more helpful for her with regards to curriculum, when she is not so overwhelmed. | Brings project ideas to the table and also insight into the state tests. Asks mostly procedural questions as opposed to curricula questions. Listens attentively and takes notes. |
| Ellen   | Very beneficial. Great to get ideas from colleagues. Sometimes overwhelming. Glad agenda is not mandated and comes from teachers’ questions and concerns. | Asks questions about individual student needs and also about understanding some terminology and the curriculum. |
| Betty   | Not beneficial for her but can see how it can be for newer classroom teachers. | Moves the meeting along. Is a bit cynical. Offers suggestions. |

head of the Social Studies curriculum said about the text book, Carrie tried to relieve the tension by saying, “Yeah, well we’re just playing devil’s advocate” (GLM4)

Another time, when Carrie challenged Ellen during a discussion about lesson plans,
towards the end of the discussion Carrie said, “I’m not questioning it to be mean. I’m actually just questioning it for my own (GLM4).” So while Carrie was outspoken and “would say her piece,” (Ci1) she also tried to avoid confrontation.

Carrie thought it was important for everyone to get along. She tried to perpetuate that feeling of camaraderie and openness with new teachers who joined the grade-level group. Additionally, she felt it was important to share ideas with colleagues. At the grade-level meetings, when other teachers had questions about curriculum or procedures, Carrie shared what she did in her classroom and gave the other teachers carte blanche with using the materials and information. “I’m the one who’s here the longest, I’ll share anything. If you want something, you can have it. I have books.” (Ci1). Marianne corroborated this idea in an interview, “Plus Carrie knows a lot about//like, beside the curriculum, like what books go with what, and she’s always willing to share all her information, just so helpful” (Mi1).

Carrie articulated in an interview that she did not appreciate that the grade-level meetings were mandated, particularly since the fifth grade teachers got along and talked frequently.

Like I went to Ellen yesterday before conference and said, “Hey, do you want to have a half hour today or some time today to talk about conferences tonight?” You and//Marianne’s been a teacher so I went to her, she’s, fine yeah, I do. Because you know what? Either way we would go with each other. I’ll go to Delia and say “I’ve got a letter//how do you think I//should I word it this way, what do you think? How should I word this to a parent?” So we’ll do it anyway. Some people won’t, and I think that, it’s what you make of it. (Ci1)

Carrie frequently informed teachers what was done in the past including information about trips, school and grade functions, and district history. She played the role of storyteller and historian, providing teachers with information about the
school, district, and, in some cases, other colleagues and school families. The storyteller in an organization is in a powerful position since he or she preserves, from his or her own perceptions, what is valued in an organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Carrie had a powerful role in the grade-level meetings. She had the most experience of the fifth-grade classroom teachers at the school. Sharing was something she did frequently and freely, and her overall friendly demeanor influenced the grade-level meetings greatly. In some ways, her knowledge was an invaluable resource for the teachers; in other ways, her zest for sharing sometimes stifled idea generation. (This is discussed in more detail in Chapter VII). Furthermore, her resentment that the grade-level meetings were mandated and that teachers were held accountable for the discussions might have contributed to her sometimes quick responses of “just do it this way.” The topics she initiated were mainly about procedural aspects of trips, curriculum implementation, or school rituals. Carrie rarely came to the group with questions or concerns about the curriculum or students.

Delia

This was Delia’s sixth year teaching, all of which were at the research school. Like Carrie, Delia had some mixed feelings about the grade-level meetings. She thought in some instances they were helpful, but in other instances they were a waste of time. She stated, “Sometimes they’re helpful, I think especially in the beginning of the year. I feel like sometimes I could be doing something more productive. Absolutely.” (Di1). Delia’s stance was evidenced in some of the grade-level meetings when she brought student papers to correct or basketball rosters to complete
(she was the girls’ varsity basketball coach for the district). When asked to elaborate on when the grade-level meetings were helpful or not, Delia responded,

I don’t know that I really//I think they’re more helpful for the newer people than for Carrie or I, but I mean I’m certainly willing to give my time to help the newer people out because I would have appreciated something like that when I was new. (Di1)

Additionally, Delia did not think the fifth-grade teachers needed to meet every “A” day. As such, she, like Carrie, used the Meeting Plan/Agenda as a source of humor. During a meeting when Delia was taking minutes, Lisa asked the group to give her social studies ideas, artifacts, or lessons for the district social studies meeting. In line 37, Delia used a humorous, almost mocking tone, when she wrote that she already gave Lisa some artifacts on the Meeting Plan/Agenda minutes.

32 [5 sec pause while D writes on minutes]
33 L: And then you can write people agreed to give them to her.
34 ((Collective LGH))
35 D: I’m writing Delia gave.
36 ((Collective LGH))
37 B: She did it already.

Additionally, in lines 43 and 45, Delia referred to the Meeting Plan/Agenda after Lisa said she wanted to talk about topics. When Delia referred to the Meeting/Plan Agenda this time, it was in a somewhat sarcastic way. She asked Lisa if topics is a different point and if the group was “only discussing three points.” Line 45 about discussing three points evidences Delia’s belief that the grade-level meetings were not extremely beneficial to her, and she just wanted to cover the meeting and get it done, by discussing the predetermined amount of topics as outlined on the Meeting Plan/Agenda.

41 [5 sec. pause]
42 L: Topics.
Delia rarely brought topics or questions to the table during the grade-level meetings. However, whenever asked, she answered colleagues’ questions and helped them with project ideas, lesson ideas, and parent teacher conferences. She did so by calling on her past experiences. She offered suggestions but rarely if ever stated “do it this way.” When Delia did initiate topics she voiced frustrations about curriculum materials and students not understanding the material.

Although Delia reported that the meetings were a chance to “learn from each other” (Di1) it was apparent from how she participated that she expected the newer teachers would be learning. She did not expect to learn from the grade-level meetings, aside from some organizational inter-grade scheduling.

Lisa

This was Lisa’s second year teaching and she said she liked to get ideas from her colleagues. She reported that they were “all expert teachers” and that she “can learn so much from them,” including the new “girls” because “they are really expert teachers, too” (Li1). She also stated that, “they’re very good resources and if I help them it’s more like this is what we do when there’s a fire drill//policy stuff” (Li1).

Lisa was a serious person. She wanted to get as much out of the grade-level meetings as possible. It was evident that she did not mind that the meetings were mandated because she tried hard to take advantage of the time with her colleagues. She also preferred to keep the discussions positive. When conversations, particularly about students, became unproductive in her mind, she disengaged from the
conversation or tried to redirect the conversation. In the excerpt below Delia, Carrie, Ellen, and Betty were engaged in a discussion about how they taught something over and over and the kids “still don’t get it” (GLM3). Since Lisa did not like these types of conversations she refocused the group on the time and excused herself from the meeting to go to the bathroom.

522  B: They did that in third grade?
523  C: And they just don’t get it.
524  L: Is it time?
525  E: Yeah.
526  L: I really have to go.
527  C: Put down there. Lisa left earlier isn’t it?
528  L: Lisa needed to go.
529  L: I went for the large coffee this morning, so.

Lisa had difficulty saying, “No.” This was evidenced by her participation on two of the district curriculum committees. Lisa avoided conflict and wanted to get along. Lisa was a rule follower and wanted to avoid confrontations. She was nervous when Carrie jokingly wrote about the broken clocks on the Meeting Plan/Agenda minutes, somewhat mocking the accountability aspect of the grade-level meetings. Carrie alleviated her concern by signing the text she had written about the clocks.

401  C: What’s wrong with the clocks, anyone?
402  L: Some thing must be really wrong.
403  C: The clocks. [C writing the clocks on the minutes]
404  ((Collective LGH))
405  B: I have a math question.
406  C: What the hell is wrong with the clock? [writing on the minutes]
407  L: Don’t put that on there.
408  M: and when is it getting fixed?
409  C: And when will they be fixed. [writing that on the minutes]
410  D: Because the clock in the office/
411  C: CC - there your go. [C signed the comment on the minutes to alleviate Lisa’s concerns]
Since Lisa was a rule follower and believed her colleagues had so much to offer, she thought the meetings were beneficial and, for the most part, enjoyed them. However, she did feel pressured for time during the meetings because there were many other things she felt she needed to do, a possible reason why she initiated topics and tried to make the most out of the meetings. Although Lisa believed she could learn so much from her colleagues, she felt her ability to contribute was minimal. It is interesting that Lisa perceived her contribution as such, since her initiation of topics and questions were integral to the meetings and provided the group with many opportunities to engage in discussions about curriculum and teaching. It might be important to note that she was the youngest of the group members, which might have played a role in the development of her stance.

Marianne

Marianne taught for 9 years, filling in as a seventh-grade humanities maternity-leave replacement, and then as a fourth-grade teacher. This was her first year teaching at this school. Marianne thought the purpose of the grade-level meetings was to get the five classroom teachers together. When asked how she felt about the grade-level meetings at this school, Marianne replied,

First of all, I feel like//I guess because I’m a new teacher, I have so many things that I don’t know about, and I wouldn’t find out about them, I guess, because I don’t go to lunch, because I’d rather do my work here. I tutor everyday after school//... So they were really helpful to me. (Mi1)

Marianne also mentioned that the grade-level meetings helped familiarize her with the materials available in the school, specifically what books to use with the different social studies themes the grade studies. Marianne stated that next year she
thought the grade-level meetings would be even more helpful and she would be able to contribute more, because right now she was overwhelmed with learning the curriculum (Mi1).

Marianne said that she did not feel like she had much to offer the group since she was new to the school and was focusing her energy on learning the curriculum. On multiple occasions Marianne offered suggestions to the group about projects she did in her previous school. Furthermore, since Marianne previously taught fourth grade (the grade that has been tested by the state for many years), she was the most familiar with the state tests, which all fifth-grade students were taking for the first time the year of this research project. During the grade-level meetings Marianne provided the teachers with her insights about test format and test preparation.

When asked about her various contributions, Marianne shrugged them off as, “I have a couple of projects, but that’s it” (Mi1). As she continued to talk more about this, she said,

I also don’t want to seem like I know more than because I probably have the most experience, but I don’t want to, ya know? I’m new on board. . . . I don’t want to be the one that says, “Oh, I know a great way to do that.” . . . Ya know? I can do that with Ellen, because she asks me all the time, and I can say here, this is a much easier way to do it. . . . They tell me what to do right now, and that’s fine with me. . . . You play to your audience. (Mi1)

It seemed that Marianne felt she had to be careful about how much she contributed. She must have felt that in order to “play to her audience,” she should sit back and let them tell her what to do. Marianne spoke the least of the classroom teachers, which supported her stance of not wanting to seem like a know-it-all.
Ellen

Ellen taught for five years in another school. She taught fifth- and sixth-grade science and seventh-grade math prior to the year of this study. This was her first year in the research school, as well as her first year teaching reading, writing, and social studies. Ellen reported that she thought the grade-level meetings contributed to her getting to know her colleagues and feeling more comfortable working with them (Ei1). She stated that the grade-level group talked outside of the grade-level meetings, and that if the minutes of the meetings were not posted in the staff room, she was uncertain whether the group would meet as often or for the entire period. Like Carrie and Delia, she had mixed feelings about having to meet every “A” day. While she believed there were benefits at times, she also felt nervous about getting all the other things done that needed to be completed.

Ellen often turned to the group for advice and suggestions for working with individual students. Additionally, she asked questions about curriculum purpose and professional concepts, such as differentiation and backwards planning. Ellen believed it was important for her to understand different professional concepts (e.g., differentiation and backward planning) and felt comfortable coming to the grade-level meeting with questions. She also felt comfortable enough to challenge or continue to question when an answer did not fully make sense to her. She believed she could learn a lot from her colleagues, but also confronted some taken-for-granted assumptions by asking questions about her teaching, specifically related to professional concepts.
Betty

Betty, the basic skills teacher attended the fifth-grade grade-level meetings. She worked with students who needed supplemental support in Delia and Ellen’s classes during language arts. Betty had a disengaged stance toward the GLMs evidenced by her statement that “she sat in on” the grade-level meetings, thus implying the meetings were not for her. Betty was the most experienced and oldest of the teachers. Betty worked in the district most of her 25+ year career.

Betty offered suggestions in the meetings and alluded to lessons she had done with Delia and Ellen in their classrooms that other teachers might benefit from. She often moved the meeting along, saying “What’s next?” and “Ladies, let’s continue.” At times, Betty was quite cynical. In the following excerpt Lisa told the group about what the head of social studies for the district said when Lisa mentioned the text book was too difficult since it was at a 7.2 reading level. Betty’s comments are highlighted in bold.

Episode 1: In the real world.

173  L: I need to bring something up . . . about the social studies meeting. I brought up the fact that the reading//the text, the Social Studies text is a 7.2 [reading level]. She [the head of the social studies curriculum] told me that///<br>174  B: She being?<br>175  L: Sarah Mead [NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED]//<br>176  C: the head of the Social Studies curriculum.<br>177  L: //which I told her that//She told me that she understands but in the real world///<br>178  C: No!<br>179  L: //you’re going to be given texts that you don’t understand///<br>180  B: Excuse me, in the real world, New York Times is written on a
fourth grade
level I believe, so.

181 C: Yeah
182 R: Oh, I thought it was at least 5th, but -
183 B: fifth grade well, Yeah, well it's not seventh.
184 C: Yeah, no.
185 D: ((LGH))
186 C: But then why would they give us a program that kids can’t read?

Episode 2: Let me tell you what she said.

187 L: Umhum, well, I’m going to tell you what she told me and then I’ll tell you what I talked to Arthur about. The first thing is that she said to teach text structure, focus on teaching the kids that the blue is the most important, it’s the bigger one than the red. I like the subtitles//

Episode 3: I’m the messenger

188 B: They do that in the real world? They do that in the real world, they color code things that you have to read? Yeah, okay.
189 L: Well, I’m just the messenger//
190 C: Yeah, well were just playing devil’s advocate//
191 B: And you’ll be shot.

Episode 4: Come to the next meeting

192 L: Well, you can come to the next meeting, please. I’d love it. Um But so she said this//

In the next excerpt Lisa asked the group if they knew about any differentiation workshops because it was part of her Professional Improvement Plan (PIP). Yearly, each teacher wrote a Professional Improvement Plan documenting specific teaching goals. At the end of the year, teachers document what they have done throughout the year to address their PIP (see Appendix C). Betty’s comment, that the district’s focus on differentiation will be out the window and something new will come in, is a stance indicative of many teachers with her length of tenure because they have
witnessed several educational trends. This stance potentially undermines Lisa’s desire to learn more about differentiation and take her PIP seriously. However, in line 305, Lisa defends her desire to learn more.

301  L: If anyone comes across the differentiation workshop, let me know.
302  C: For which subject?
303  D: Just keep working here.
303  C: Eventually, you’ll just have to differentiate on your own.
304  B: Eventually, this will be out the window and something new will come in.
305  L: Yeah, I know but I’m try//it’s my PIP and I’m working on it and I think that would be just something good to add that I did for my PIP, so.

Betty once told the interviewer that she attended the meetings to fill her extra prep “cause g-d forbid she had some time unaccounted for.” She does not feel like the meetings benefit her but she does see the benefit for the classroom teachers, especially the newer ones. Although she agreed to have the meetings audiotaped, she did not agree to be interviewed because “she was afraid of what she might say about individual people.”

Synthesis

In the main, these teachers enjoyed each others’ company and articulated that they believed there was value in sharing ideas with colleagues. Individually and collectively, they were open to sharing ideas and supporting each others’ decisions. They got along, “there were no riffs” (Ei1) and they “were all open minded” (Li1). Despite teachers’ belief that sharing with colleagues was beneficial, tension seemed to exist because the meetings and the Meeting Plan/Agenda were mandated. Both Delia and Carrie talked about filling in the Meeting Plan/Agenda during the meeting, and both used it as a source of humor. Further, Carrie’s expansive willingness to
share may have stifled conversations and idea generation. Betty’s cynical comments also might have quieted some of the teachers from showing support for district initiatives and curricular decisions.

Another tension existed with regard to investing what they considered a big chunk of their time in the meetings. Notably, each teacher had a separate preparation period on the day the grade-level meetings took place. Furthermore, Delia, Carrie, and Lisa stated that the grade-level meetings were in some ways redundant, because the fifth-grade teachers talked so much outside the grade-level meetings, all feeling on some level, that it was not necessary to have the grade-level meeting every “A” day. The next chapter introduces the findings and discusses the context and belief factors that framed the grade-level meeting environment.
CHAPTER V
CONTEXT AND BELIEF FACTORS

In light of the current educational climate of high-stakes testing and accountability, many believe that teachers' collaborative work has the potential to improve education. Therefore, as the collaborative work of teachers continues to increase through job-embedded professional development, such as grade-level meetings, the need to understand the complexities and nuances of the educational settings that promote teachers' joint work is critical. The intention of this study was to understand one educational setting that is designed to promote teacher collaboration through an investigation of the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings of a group of fifth-grade teachers. The study revealed four findings:

1. In the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings, unwritten rules were evident and left unexplored.

2. The institutionally mandated grade-level meetings' professional discussions were superficial.

3. The informal and casual tone of the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings provided an opportunity for teachers to get to know their grade-level colleagues.

4. As represented in the institutionally mandated grade-level meeting, teachers avoided conflict. This conflict-avoidance stance was realized
in the grade-level teachers’ curriculum choices and interactions with the principal.

The unwritten rules in Finding 1 and the behaviors embedded within Findings 2, 3, and 4 were manifestations of the interaction among various factors, of which there are two types: context and belief. The context and belief factors framed the environment in which the grade-level meetings occurred. Within that framed environment, unwritten rules and specific behaviors surfaced, which are central to each finding. The context factors, belief factors, unwritten rules, behaviors and their interactions are represented in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Interactions of Context and Belief Factors, Unwritten Rules, and Behaviors

- **Context Factors**
  - Mandated meetings
  - Time constraints
  - Vague purpose

- **Belief Factors**
  - It’s best if we get along
  - Teaching is individualistic

- **Unwritten Rules**

  Finding 1: Participate to be noticed, not to be involved
  - If no one is watching do what you want
  - It’s always something, but it too will pass
  - Don’t rock the boat

- **Behaviors**

  Finding 2: Conflict-avoidance
  - The “helpful” leader

  Finding 3: Sharing personal stories
  - Breaking Bread Together

  Finding 4: Watering down the curriculum
  - Filtering the minutes
The context and belief factors framed the environment in which the grade-level meetings occurred. Therefore, in order to provide a dynamic and complex understanding of the findings, the context and belief factors will be addressed first. Consequently, this chapter will discuss the three context factors and two belief factors that contributed to the unwritten rules and teachers’ grade-level meeting behaviors. These factors were instrumental in defining the study’s findings. Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 discuss the four above-mentioned findings, respectively.

The context and belief factors influenced the content and tenor of the grade-level meetings. The context factors were institutionally based and determined while the belief factors were more individually determined. Literature and research related to small-group work in industries and schools were used to explicate the complexity of the grade-level meetings as they relate to the current study.

Context Factors

The mandated meeting, time constraints, and vague purpose provided the context in which teachers engaged in the grade-level meetings. Since this group of fifth-grade teachers spoke frequently outside the grade-level meeting, they articulated that they were frustrated that they were required to meet every “A” day. Although the teachers had a separate preparation period on the days they had grade-level meetings, teachers were often distracted at the meetings. They were preoccupied and worried about completing more time-sensitive tasks such as grading papers. What was important for today and tomorrow trumped a more long-term focus. The teachers were so focused on the day-to-day that they “could not see the forest for the trees.” Additionally, although they appreciated that they could theoretically talk about issues
that were important to them, for the most part, they also voiced frustration over the lack of goals and continuity from one meeting to the next.

Research and literature on teachers' joint work discusses the pitfalls of mandating teachers to complete tasks (Barth, 2001; A. Hargreaves, 2003). Investment and commitment wavers when teachers engage in tasks that have been mandated, particularly tasks group members may not be convinced are worthwhile, as was the case with the grade-level meetings. Moreover, literature on small-group effectiveness discusses the need to provide ample time for topics to be addressed fully during a time when participants are able to focus on the group work (Dee & Henkin, 2001). Lastly, the small group literature also discusses the need for clear and distinct purposes (Cragan & Wright, 1991; Dee & Henkin). These issues will be discussed throughout the chapter. The next section addresses one of the context factors: mandated meetings.

*Mandated Meetings*

Arthur, the principal, instituted the grade-level meetings five years prior to when the research study took place. Since the grade-level meetings occurred during teachers' preparation period, Arthur organized the teachers' schedules so that, on the day of the grade-level meeting, teachers had an additional preparation period. Arthur instituted the grade-level meetings so teachers could “share practice” (Ail) and build “leadership capacity” (Ail). However, two years prior to the study, Arthur noticed that the grade-level meetings were not as structured or productive as he would have liked, “it [the GLMs] became complaining meetings. . . . it just wasn’t productive, it [the things they discussed] could have been//um, settled outside of that valuable time
that we set aside for curriculum discussion and professional development” (Ai1).

Arthur did three things to address this concern: sat in on the meetings, provided teachers with articles to read to anchor and focus their grade-level meeting discussions, and created a Meeting Plan for teachers to fill out. The title of the document is Meeting Plan, but the teacher participants in the study referred to it as “the Agenda.” Therefore, it will be referred to as the Meeting Plan/Agenda henceforth. The Meeting Plan/Agenda influenced the grade-level meetings and will be discussed in more depth below.

The Meeting Plan/Agenda was developed by the principal and a small group of teachers from the Leadership Committee. The Meeting Plan/Agenda was developed, as stated previously, because the grade-level meetings, as perceived by the principal, were unstructured and had become “complaining meetings.”

And it became complaining meetings, “Well, what did you talk about? Because I’m not sure what you exactly accomplished.” So then we started to look at that so then you could see if it’s got curriculum focus and the other issues; and those other issues have become smaller and the curriculum issues have grown larger. So, that format has helped. (Ai1)

It seemed that Arthur’s unspoken focus for the grade-level meetings was curriculum, as evidenced by his explanation of why the meetings were now more productive “and those other issues have become smaller and the curriculum issues have grown larger.” Additionally, a curriculum focus was evidenced in the structure of the Meeting Plan/Agenda where more than half the page is allocated for curriculum discussions (see Figure 9).
Although Arthur’s articulated purpose was for teachers to “share practice,” it seemed “sharing” was supposed to be focused on curriculum. Delia articulated this stance, “And he’s big on curriculum; he always wants us to discuss the curriculum. The curriculum and the assessments, those are things that he just loves” (Di1).
While the Meeting Plan/Agenda provided focus, as Arthur intended, it was also intended it to be a communication tool since he expected teachers to take minutes of the meeting within the Meeting Plan/Agenda. In the grade-level meetings, one teacher took notes on the Meeting Plan/Agenda (or within the structure of the document) which became the meeting minutes. The meeting minutes (completed Meeting Plan/Agenda) were placed in the staff room for others to read (see Figure 2 for sample Meeting Plans/Agendas).

Arthur stated, somewhat defensively it seemed, that the Meeting Plan/Agenda was not intended to be an administrative tool.

And we weren’t looking to making this a paper trail. Definitely not... This was more to do with being a communication tool, than a, I don’t know what, administrative. It’s definitely not admin/it’s definitely not administrative tool. So, it’s not a check to know that these people are meeting. That’s absolutely not that. That’s still at/all the staff members know what was in discussion, because you might look at it and go//“Oh, that relates to me,
or//Oh, I need to make sure that I’ve got, maybe enough Africa unit books for the teachers.” Things of that nature. (Ai1)

Nevertheless, the teacher participants in the study only looked at the minutes of other grade-level meetings when they happened to be standing in front of them in the staff room. If the teachers did read the minutes of other grade-levels, they only read the one that was on top. The teachers said they would like to read the minutes of other grade-level meetings but did not have the time. Carrie remarked that if there was something important she needed to know about another grade-level meeting, her friends from that grade would tell her (Ci1).

Despite Arthur’s assertion that the purpose of placing the minutes in the staff room was a communication tool, the teachers in the study viewed the completion and posting of the Meeting Plan/Agenda as an accountability tool. Marianne stated the reason she thought the teachers took minutes (filled in the Meeting Plan/Agenda) at grade-level meetings and placed them in the staff room was to “just to make sure we are doing it” (Mi1). Ellen had a similar view.

We have to be responsible for the time that we’re meeting, and we actually have to write down what it is that we’re talking about, and who was at the meeting. . . . If the minutes were not accounted for, I don’t know, we may just meet for 10 minutes. (Ei1)

Although Arthur asserted that the process of completing the Meeting Plan/Agenda and placing it in the staff room was not intended to be administrative or a “checking up on,” it seemed that the teachers perceived it to be. This sequence of events seems self-evident, particularly since none of the teachers in the study looked at the minutes of other grades’ meetings.
Interestingly, the accountability aspect of the Meeting Plan/Agenda was about participation and not quality. Arthur, other teachers, and the fifth-grade teachers never reflected on the minutes, nor questioned what was discussed or documented. So while the literature on effective small groups emphasizes the need for accountability, it would seem that the type and purposefulness of the accountability is important. Although the Meeting Plan/Agenda moved the grade-level groups away from complaining meetings, as perceived by Arthur, it did not move the group toward sustained and deep conversations. Additionally, the fifth-grade teachers reported that it did hold them accountable for meeting and for what they discussed. However, the document fell short because it failed to move teachers to engage more thoughtfully in the meetings and reflect on previous discussions.

Ellen reported that, without the Meeting Plan/Agenda accountability, she believed the teachers might not meet as regularly or for the full time. Ellen stated, “I think that it forces us to sit down together as a group. So if we didn’t have that, even if we had common planning time, I don’t know how often all five of us will be sitting down together” (Ei1). However, Ellen also stated,

I'm just/.../and I feel like if we don’t have an agenda that’s going to last for 40 minutes, then why do we need to sit there for 40 minutes... Let's just talk for 10, and then use the rest of the time to do.../whatever we need to get done. (Ei1)

Lisa, Delia, and Marianne voiced similar views in their interviews. However, the teachers seemed to see value in getting all the fifth-grade-level teachers together and recognized they might not get together if they were not held accountable for meeting.

Furthermore, Carrie stated, “I think they’re [the grade-level meetings] valuable, ya know for what’s//what it’s worth, I think they’re valuable. I think that it
gets us together, forces us to talk about things” (Ci1). Nevertheless, the teachers still did not appreciate having to meet every “A” day. Carrie divulged in an interview that she did not appreciate that the grade-level meetings were mandated, particularly since the fifth grade teachers got along and talked frequently. Carrie suggested that the meetings should be on, “a need to meet basis. If he [Arthur] had something we need to discuss, and get an answer and the result to, that’s fine….Great. If there’s nothing, just don’t waste my time” (Ci1). The use of the word “he” instead of “we” is indicative of Carrie’s stance. The idea that Carrie thinks the meetings are a waste of time if teachers are not working on something to give to Arthur was representative of the fact that the meetings were mandated, and did not stem organically from the teachers.

While the teachers were certainly capable of using the grade-level meeting time in a way that suited their needs, they chose not to. They also chose not to speak with Arthur about changing the meetings. Instead, they met every “A” day, completed the Agenda, and got little out of the grade-level discussions. While the other teachers did not believe as strongly as Carrie that the grade-level meetings were a waste of time, Carrie was the informal leader of the group, so her stance influenced the group’s work greatly. This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter VII, where Finding 2 is discussed.

The tension between recognizing the benefits of getting all grade-level classroom teachers together and having the grade-level meetings mandated created an atmosphere in which teachers attended the grade-level meetings half-heartedly. While they felt it was important to work with their colleagues, the “mandate” took
away their sense of ownership. Contributing to this tension was the limited time devoted to the grade-level meetings as well as when the meetings occurred, which is the focus of the next section.

*Time Constraints*

There are two aspects of the time constraint context factor. The first aspect has to do with the 45-minute time frame. It is difficult to engage in sustained and deep discussions when your time is limited, especially when members are expected to switch in and out of different roles, as was the case for the teachers in this study. The second aspect is that the meetings were held in the middle of teachers’ instructional day. The meetings occurred from 10:15 to 10:55 on “A” days. The school schedule was on a six-day (A-F) cycle. The meetings were held during one of the two teacher preparation periods. Teachers often rushed to go to the bathroom, call parents, or grade papers before, during, and after the meetings. These responsibilities distracted teachers’ attention away from the grade-level meetings. Therefore, even if teachers were physically at the grade-level meetings, mentally they may have been thinking of all the other things they needed to accomplish. Lisa stated, “Last year I had a prep right after and it made it so I could really give my all but now I don’t, so that might be a part of it [why it is difficult to switch gears and focus]” (Li1). In the meetings, each classroom teacher at least once corrected papers or completed other tasks. Betty, the resource room teacher, did not. Lisa mentioned that it was difficult to collect her thoughts and found moving from one thing to another a challenge.

Because I feel like I have stuff to do but it just forces me to do it another time and get it/everything gets done but sometimes I really need to do, you know, X-Y-Z. Last year I had a prep right after and it made it so I could really give
my all but now I don’t, so that might be a part of it. Even just like using the bathroom, we get to eat during the meeting but going to the bathroom, and collecting my thoughts; I feel it's from one thing to another. (L11)

Ellen voiced a similar frustration,

Well, because that’s a lot of time//where you just have so much to do, and sitting in those meetings for 55//for 45 minutes or whatever it is, it's just, I mean, I’m nervous that I'm not going to get everything done, or that if you have a pile of papers that you want to grade, or go over something it [the grade-level meeting] just is taking [time away from that]. (Ei1)

It is difficult to engage in deep and sustained discussions when your mind is thinking of other things. So while the teachers had the opportunity to meet once every six days, the timing of the meetings was not perceived by the teachers to have been ideal. Since the meetings occurred during the school day, teachers’ minds were focused on other responsibilities like grading papers, calling parents, or setting up for their next lessons. Therefore, discussions remained superficial and a large aspect of the grade-level meeting was social. Stevens and Kahne (2006) found that teachers in their study felt similar tensions between daily responsibilities of teaching and participating in activities geared towards professional learning and improving practice. The next section discusses the vague purpose and its contribution to the context in which the grade-level meetings occurred.

**Vague purpose**

Literature on small-group work identifies the importance of clear and distinct purposes (Cragan & Wright, 1991). Often when purposes are unclear, circuitous conversations occur or little gets accomplished because goals are nonexistent (Amason, Thompson, Hochwarthe, & Harrison, 1995). Additionally, group members at times can feel frustrated and therefore disengage from the group or work. This
section discusses the vague purpose of the grade-level meetings and how this context factor contributed to the grade-level meetings.

The intended purpose articulated by the principal who instituted the grade-level meetings five years ago was to provide teachers time to “share practice” as well as to “develop leadership capacity” (Ai1). Arthur reported that as a teacher, he always found it beneficial to collaborate with his colleagues (Ai1).

The teachers in the study reported that they thought Arthur instituted grade-level meetings to enhance communication amongst grade-level teachers, to make sure grade-level teachers were all on the same page, and also to share ideas (Ci1; Di1; Ei1; Li1; Mi1). More specifically, the teachers reported the meetings’ purposes were to discuss the new Social Studies curriculum and Language Arts Framework, to help the newer teachers with school and grade procedures and policies, as well as to get to know colleagues.

I think it [the grade-level meetings] made it [our relationship] strong//made them stronger. . . . Even though we’re supposed to stay on topic and talk about things, I think that there’s just, like, a large part of the social aspect of it so we all know a little bit more about each other, so we feel a little bit closer to each other. . . . //yeah. (Ei1).

While the meetings were mandatory and the Meeting Plan/Agenda provided a structure to the meetings, Arthur reported that he wanted teachers to set the agendas since they knew what was important to them (Ai1). In fact, the concept of an Agenda is a misnomer. There was no prearranged explicit statement of meeting topics. Since topics emerged during the meeting as teachers thought of them, conversations occurred spontaneously with no planning or information gathering and
therefore remained on the surface. In an interview, Lisa reported her frustrations that the topics were decided upon as the meeting evolved,

And I have something and I'm like trying to think what can I bring up so that this is a good meeting but//so, I don't know. I feel, like, a little more planning in//we could do better just because my time is so limited that I want to spend that time, learning from them because they have a lot to offer, that's all. (Li1)

With such a broad nonspecific purpose, teachers had the liberty to define “share practice” as they saw fit, within the structure provided by the Meeting Plan/Agenda. Furthermore, the vague purpose was instrumental in creating a context in which each meeting could be its own entity, with no carry-over or reflection from one meeting to the next. Since the teachers were not working toward a goal (e.g., creating a unified assessment plan or a writing continuum for fifth grade writers), the topics that were discussed were predominantly those that had a sense of immediacy and urgency (e.g., to prepare for parent/teacher conferences, or bring artifacts and ideas to a district curriculum meeting). The teachers were meeting to share ideas, not to create something new or work through problems. Furthermore, the concept of teachers setting their own agendas might be problematic in light of Carrie’s feeling that the grade-level meetings were for Arthur’s benefit.

Therefore, if Arthur did not explicitly ask teachers to produce something, for example, a list of the themes they would cover for the year and the books to go along with the themes (Ci1), teachers filled the meeting time with whatever came to mind at the moment. Lisa probably said it best, “the grade-level meeting is just like//everyone just kind of talks” (Li1).
Context Factor Synthesis

Many researchers and theorists challenge the pursuit of collaboration as a remedy for isolation, particularly when the collaboration is superficial or imposed (Achinstein, 2002; A. Hargreaves, 1993, 2003; Huberman, 1993; Leonard & Leonard, 2001a; Little, 1990). A. Hargreaves argues that mandated collaboration can become contrived collegiality, with faculty going through the motions of working together, and has the potential for groupthink (Fullan & A. Hargreaves, 1996; Little, 1990). Moreover, there is growing evidence to support the view that providing the structure for teachers to talk will not, in and of itself, promote collaboration or teacher learning (Little, 1982; Pappano, 2007; Stevens & Kahne, 2006; Supovitz, 2002; Supovitz & Christman, 2005; Wood, 2007), which seemed to be the case with this group of fifth-grade teachers.

The mandated meetings, time constraints, and vague purpose were the context factors that framed the grade-level meetings. The belief factors also framed the environment in which the grade-level meetings occurred and are discussed below.

Belief Factors

While many researchers and theorists promote teacher collaboration as a remedy for the ills of education, scheduling and organizing teachers’ days to include joint work might not garner the expected results because teachers’ underlying beliefs about teaching have not been explored, examined, or changed. Therefore, teachers may simply validate what they are already doing without stretching their thinking or changing their practice (A. Hargreaves, 2003; Wood 2007). This section discusses the
two belief factors that greatly influenced the grade-level meetings: teaching is individualistic and it’s best if we get along.

*Teaching is Individualistic*

When group members are interdependent, it is more likely that the members will be more invested in the group’s work, since they are affected by the outcomes of the group work (Dee & Henkin, 2001), than when group members are independent. The analysis of the grade-level meetings and teacher interviews showed that this group of teachers seemed to believe that teaching was inherently individualistic. In the grade-level meetings and interviews, comments and discussions about the individualistic nature of teaching were present. The teachers often shared information with their colleagues and ended the discussion with “it’s just the way I do it.” For example, when teachers were discussing parent/teacher conferences, questions arose about giving students’ grades to parents, as well as giving parents report cards during the first marking period. Carrie and Delia, two veteran classroom teachers to the school, each gave grades, but one used the report card and one made her own. The teachers decided that each person could choose what she wanted to do, thus illustrating that these teachers viewed teaching from an individualistic lens.

In another instance, Ellen voiced concern about what the teachers were supposed to do in a previous staff meeting. At the staff meeting, and as noted on the Daily Bulletin’s “To Do List” (see Figure 11), teachers were supposed to come up with examples of, or evidence for, how they were using and meeting the objectives outlined in the Language Arts framework (see Appendix D).
Lesson Plans are due from Homeroom teachers.

- Highlight in Grade Level Meeting Minutes LAL dialogue:
  - How do we do a good think a loud and discuss characteristics of one...
  - What common terminology is needed in a district glossary of terms?
  - What other questions do we have about reading instruction?

Reading Curriculum Implementation

During common planning time, grade level notes should reflect discussions about the evidence we are accepting that shows students are making progress toward achievement in the Strands and Cumulative Progress Indicators (CPIs) contained in the LAL Framework.

FYI:

- **S Test**
  - Results will be distributed from Central Office this week to all of our grade 4 teachers who teach math and/or language arts (including PAR, ESL, Special Ed., and Extended Day and Homework Club teachers).
  - These results should allow us the chance to identify focus skills for differentiation for mini group instruction and support
  - The parent copies and parent letter will go out within 2 weeks.

- **Code of Conduct Reward:** Hat/Pajama day- Referrals for January:

- **Professional Development Opportunities:**
  - Early this week you should receive copies of the Professional Development brochure. There are many wonderful professional opportunities for our non-tenured teachers to consider for professional growth, but we certainly are not limiting registration to only non-tenured teachers. We are hoping that teaching assistants and veteran teachers will also take advantage of the course offerings, but our goal was to meet the requests made by the survey results from the non-tenured teachers. Teachers and teaching assistants will earn professional hours and will be given certificates at the end of the sessions; they will not be paid for their attendance, only the presenters will receive pay according to the district contract. We expect to run a course with a minimum of 8 participants and a maximum of 20 with non-tenured teachers being the priority at this time.
  - We are hoping to run a full week in the summer for new hires and the fall session will include more opportunities for the high school and for life-long learning opportunities for veteran teachers.

- **Public Relations:**
  - Here are the key elements of the interim grades 5-7 program for 2005-2006:

  **Schedule:** The tests will be administered during the period April 4 - April 13, 2006, with regular testing scheduled for April 4 (LAL Day 1), April 5 (LAL Day 2), and April 6 (mathematics), and make-up testing the following week. For districts that have a school break during the week of April 10, make-ups may be given the week of April 17, and no later than April 21. Grades 5-7 test booklets and answer folders will arrive in districts in late March, several days prior to the first testing date, in
At the grade-level meeting Ellen was trying to come to terms with the purpose of the task, because it seemed to challenge her belief that teaching is and should be individualistic.

74 E: But my question and the kind of feeling that I get, which scares me a little bit about this whole thing, is each one of us has our own teaching styles and what we do to accomplish those goals and objectives. And what works for me may not work for you and vice versa. So, I kind of got the feeling when people are talking about this if they want to narrow down the language arts because it is so broad//do they want like cookie cutter out of every classroom?

75 D: I really think that's what we're going for.

76 E: Yeah, I think so too. And that makes me very nervous.

77 D: umm humm

Ellen’s fears are focused on the idea of mandating and homogenizing teachers’ styles and instructional processes, more so than content mandates. She stated, “Each one of us has our own teaching styles and what we do to accomplish those goals and objectives” (GLM5, L74a, 74b, 74c). This statement implies that her fears are directed toward the homogenizing of teaching styles. While Ellen and Delia thought that the district was trying to change the individualistic nature of teaching to one of conformity, Marianne, Betty, and Lisa seemed to think that Language Arts is too complex and, therefore, conformity or homogenization of teaching style was not really possible. They asserted that, even if the district told teachers to accomplish the goals and objectives using a specific instructional strategy, it would look different in each classroom because the teachers are all different and, therefore, their teaching styles are different as well.

78 M: But there’s not really a way to cookie cut language arts. It would be so hard.

80 L: Yeah, but you could cookie cut it and then teach it from that specific like - cookie cutter, however you want.
As the discussion continued, the teachers reasserted their belief that teaching is and should be individualistic, specifically as it related to how Ellen chose to implement the SURE program (Students’ Uninterrupted Reading Experience) in her classroom. Briefly, the SURE program is a structure for teachers and students to have uninterrupted reading time. Students are divided into reading groups. Each group is reading a novel based on their reading level. Following the reading, students complete journal entries and have group discussions about what they read.

At the grade-level meeting, Ellen told the teachers “she tried that SURE thing” (GLM5) and “It did not work for me” (GLM5). She felt it was “all over the place” (GLM5) and she could not get her “hands around it” (GLM5). She also felt that students weren’t getting anything out of it. Ellen went to a fourth-grade teacher for some guidance. The fourth-grade teacher told Ellen about how she used bookmarks to focus students’ reading and discussions. Ellen shared the positive experience she was having with using this technique, in lieu of “having them [the students] do those questions, and those journal responses” which was what the “SURE packet” (GLM5) had suggested. The fifth-grade teachers were interested to hear about the bookmarks. Ellen explained, and in the end she said, “It works for me but if we all had to do the SURE thing, then I feel like I’d be like so nervous about it” (GLM5). Lisa then suggested that Ellen was doing the SURE program since her
students were engaged in an Uninterrupted Reading Experience. Ellen questioned Lisa’s statement because the packet stated that students should be reading different books at their own level, and Ellen’s class was reading the same novel. Since Ellen did have students grouped by “ability” and expected the conversations and journal entries to represent the various “abilities,” Lisa and Delia supported Ellen’s decision to organize her reading time as she did.

109  L: I think that sounds awesome.
110  D: It sounds all right to me.
111  L: Yeah.

The above discussion highlights that the teachers believe teaching is individualistic and that they listened to each others’ views and decisions.

In their interviews, teachers also articulated the belief that teaching was individualistic. Delia stated,

I don’t really say much at the grade level meetings if you noticed///... I just kind of listen because that’s just the type of person that I am. Because I’m going to do it the way I want to do it anyway. (Di2)

Ellen thought the grade-level meetings were important but she also felt responsible for trying things out on her own. And although she appreciated the many ideas she heard at the meetings, she did not like to try things that she could not “get her head around” (Ei1). Since this is the first time she was teaching reading, writing, and social studies, she felt overwhelmed at times. Although she believed there were many great ideas discussed at the grade-level meetings, she picked and chose what to bring back to her classroom.

I think that there are certain ideas that come up, like Delia’s chunking with the social studies, I said I’ll try...I liked that idea and I think that that’s something that I understand and that I feel I could do. (Ei1)
Additionally, Marianne reported that “we all have our own teaching style” and “I’m probably not going to do for Africa what Delia was doing” (Mi1).

This group of teachers enjoyed sharing with their colleagues and getting ideas from each other, as reported in the interviews and evidenced in their grade-level meeting conversations. Research confirms that teaching, in the main, is individualistic. Huberman (1993) asserts that teaching is individualistic because teaching is idiosyncratic and personal. It would seem that this group of fifth grade teachers would agree with such an assertion. The second belief factor, it’s best if we get along, is discussed in the next section.

*It’s Best if We Get Along*

This group of fifth-grade teachers placed great importance on “getting along.” Consequently, in the name of collegiality, ideas and assumptions were not questioned. In the following statement Carrie articulated the importance she placed on working with a group of teachers who got along.

I think it’s very important for the five of us to get along and//And when Ellen and Marianne came, and I think my worry was, I don’t like confrontation with anyone. I can be assertive and speak and say my peace, but I don’t like any confrontations. I joke a lot to avoid confrontation. Fine, that’s my escape, but I worried. Because what I thought was, God forbid, what if a teacher that comes in, doesn’t want to be a team player, doesn’t want to work with us, that would hurt me . . . ((WHS)) third grade has that . . . ya know say four against one, or three against two, and they’re constantly battling, constantly arguing and she’s doing this and he’s doing that, and she’s doing this and he’s doing that. I don’t want that ‘cause to me if you need to work together it’s a lot better [to get along]. (Cil)

Ellen had similar views, “I think that everyone really gets along, and listens. We don’t have//there’s no, sort of, riff or, you know//everyone just has a very good relationship. I think that’s important” (Ei1). She continued to talk about a group of
teachers she worked with in another school who didn’t get along, “For two years I
worked on a team where the two people/the two other people hated each other. So, it
was very difficult. You didn’t get anything accomplished. There was nothing
positive” (Ei1). Ellen’s statements about the difficulties of working in a group whose
members did not get along influenced her belief that it was important for the grade-
level teachers to get along. Furthermore, Delia stated, “I don’t know if you notice,
but I kind of like listen [in the grade-level meetings] and I’m like, ‘Yeah, Mm-hmm,
mm-hmm, right,’ and then I go off and do my own thing” (Di1). Implied in Delia’s
statement is the importance that the group members get along. Since Delia had an
individualistic view of teaching, she was able to sit in on the meetings, agree with
people, and then “do her own thing” in the classroom. From her point of view, there
was no need to engage in deep discussions that might possibly offend her colleagues,
since she was going to do what she wanted to anyway. In some ways, this belief
allows teachers to abdicate professional responsibility for working with colleagues.

Marianne articulated making similar choices in the grade-level meetings.
Marianne chose to not speak up in the meetings for fear of sounding like a know-it-
all. She prioritized “getting along” with her colleagues over providing colleagues
with additional ideas or questions that might potentially benefit students.

I also don’t want to seem like// you’re//I know more than//because I probably
have the most experience, but I don’t want to, ya know//I’m new on board. I
don’t want to/be the one that says, “Oh, I know a great way to do that.” Ya
know? They tell me what to do right now, and that’s fine with me. You play
to your audience. (Mi1)

Marianne’s stance of not wanting to seem like a know-it-all supports the belief factor
that it’s best if we get along.
Belief Factor Synthesis

The belief factors of teaching is individualistic and it’s best if we get along contributed to teachers’ behaviors in the grade-level meetings and in their work outside of the grade-level meetings. While the organization of teaching might be one that supports a belief that teaching is individualistic, many argue and research supports that “teachers become isolated in the guise of professionalism” (Brause, 1992, p.113). Additionally, while it is important for group members to get along, in order for small-group work to be successful some conflict is necessary, and actually inherent in group work (Achinstein, 2002; Cragan & Wright, 1991; De Dreu, 1997; Deutsch, 2006a, 2006b; Sole, 2006; Uline, Tschannen-Moran & Perez, 2003; Wood, 2007). As the findings are discussed in the subsequent chapters, the belief factors and how they connect with and influence the unwritten rules and teachers’ behaviors are explicated.

Context and Belief Factors Synthesis

The context factors framed the environment in which the grade-level meeting occurred, while the belief factors contributed to how teachers approached the grade-level meetings. The unwritten rules and behaviors, which are discussed in the subsequent chapters, are manifestations of the context and belief factors interacting. Figure 12 visually represents the four dimensions: context factors, belief factors, unwritten rules, and behaviors. The dimensions, though separate, are nested. Each influences the others. While the model is stagnant, despite the use of the dotted lines to provide the illusion of movement, the interactions are dynamic. The dotted lines and arrows on the bottom represent the back and forth interactions.
The next chapter, Chapter VI, will discuss the unwritten rules which are represented in the third ring and subsequent chapters will discuss the behaviors which are represented in the fourth and smallest ring.
CHAPTER VI

FINDING 1: UNWRITTEN RULES

This chapter discusses Finding 1 from the study of fifth-grade teachers' grade-
level meetings: *In the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings, unwritten rules
were evident and left unexplored.* Throughout the grade-level meeting discussions,
veteran teachers to the school informed newer teachers about what was done in the
past by sharing stories and commenting on district and school initiatives. While the
intended purpose of the grade-level meetings was to “share practice,” an unintended
consequence of the meetings was that it served as a place for veteran teachers to
expose but not address or discuss unwritten rules. This contributed to the
perpetuation of the status quo. Unwritten rules are the norms of an organization.

Unwritten rules tend to supersede written rules in that they greatly influence the way
members navigate and participate in the workplace and how members go about doing
their jobs. Unwritten rules develop within an organization and represent tacit
assumptions of members, individually and collectively. The unwritten rules,
evidenced, in this study developed within an environment of the context and belief
factors. Four unwritten rules surfaced: (a) participate to be noticed, not to be
involved; (b) if no one is watching, do what you want; (c) it’s always something, but
it too will pass; and (d) don’t rock the boat. Each unwritten rule will be discussed to
illustrate how the grade-level meetings contributed to the perpetuation of the status quo.

 Participate to be Noticed not to be Involved

The more senior teachers in the grade-level group shared stories about the school and made comments about school and district initiatives. The stories and comments provided a backdrop for the newer teachers to understand the school’s culture and history and provided them with information about how to work within this school’s culture. One example observed by the researcher was a discussion about new teachers volunteering for the fall festival, an after-school event organized by the parent association. The veteran teachers, who were also tenured, explained to the newer teachers that “you really just need to show your face. Go for 20 minutes and leave. Find Arthur. Say hi. And leave 5 minutes later.” The unwritten rule, participate to be noticed, not to be involved, was also evidenced in how teachers participated in the grade-level meetings. As discussed in Chapter V, teachers were present at the grade-level meetings and took minutes, just as they were told. However, there was little evidence of true investment, particularly when discussing professional issues, which is discussed in more depth in Chapter VI. The fifth-grade teachers participated in the grade-level meetings and completed the minutes but were not fully involved, thus illustrating another manifestation of the unwritten rule, participate to be noticed, not to be involved.
If No One is Watching, Do What You Want

The second unwritten rule that surfaced was *if no one is watching, do what you want*. This unwritten rule was evidenced during a Common Science discussion. Common Science was a period once a week where 4 of the 5 fifth-grade teachers paired up to teach science modules to two classes at a time. Common Science was instituted by the principal the year of this study. Through an e-mail correspondence, Arthur explained that “Common Science was part of a science initiative that looked at us cementing the fact that science is not to be taught by one person and in isolation from the rest of the curriculum” (6/12/07). Arthur told the teachers he wanted them to teach science once a week, in addition to the science class students went with a science specialist two times a week. Although the principal told the teachers to teach science, albeit without ascertaining teachers’ knowledge on this topic, he did not mandate how they taught it. Therefore, the fifth-grade teachers developed a format for incorporating science into their teaching responsibilities. Ellen and Delia taught a Simple Machines Module and Lisa and Carrie taught a Landforms Module. The remaining fifth-grade teacher, Marianne, taught test preparation to the class not participating in either science-module. Classes would rotate from one science module to another and then through the test prep module in six-week cycles.

Throughout the year, issues with Common Science were discussed at the grade-level meetings. The discussions included problems with finding the correct materials, locating the teaching guides, and teaching social studies during the Common Science period. During one particular Common Science discussion, the
fifth-grade teachers collectively decided to stop doing Common Science and to not
tell the principal of their decision. (A full transcript can be found in Appendix E.)

When Lisa asked the other fifth-grade teachers if they wanted to switch for
Common Science, referring to the cycle schedule the teachers created earlier in the
year, Carrie, Delia, and Ellen quickly answered that they did not want to switch
classes for Common Science. In line 817 Carrie stated that the teachers did not have
to continue Common Science because “no one’s checking it right now.” The “no
one” was really the principal Arthur. In other words, there was no direct form of
accountability.

817 C: No, because you know what, no one’s checking it right now, and
no one/

Another example of this unwritten rule occurred during a discussion about the
November parent-teacher conferences. Teachers discussed the logistics of parent-
teacher conferences in a grade-level meeting, specifically to inform the newer
teachers. As part of this discussion Carrie, Delia, and Betty, the veteran teachers to
the school, explained how to report information to parents during the first conference.
In lines 444a-444h, Carrie explained that, even though parents did not receive official
report cards and grades at this first conference, she believed it was ridiculous that
parents would not see their child’s grade until the end of January when the first report
cards officially was went. Therefore, she gave parents grades, implicitly suggesting
that the newer teachers do the same.

444 C: Comments. For the reading and I put//the first thing that I’ll say to
444a the parents is, we do not give report cards so// Ellen this is for you
444b too// First we say to the parents, we do not give report cards for the
444c conference but I feel that you need to know before the end of January
444d how your child is doing. Getting through half the year without
knowing your child’s grade yet is, ya know, ridiculous. Ya have to
tell parents that. So, these are not actual report cards but if your child
was to get a grade as of now, these are the grades. These are the
reasons why. This is what he still needs to work on. This is what he’s
doing good at. So for reading, I might say, B minus. Doesn’t complete
journal questions or struggles with comprehension.

In line 445 below, Betty asked Carrie if she Xeroxed the report card. Carrie
responded that she created her own, while Delia informed the group in line 449 and in
453, below, that she copied the report card because it was easier.

B: You Xerox a copy of the report cards?
C: Unh-unh. I just make my own. I have a copy somewhere.
B: So you literally give the parents//
C: Yeah, we don’t//this is really the
report card. We don’t give this. That’s
just too much looking at the report. You
don’t give that, right?
D: I do.
C: Oh, that is what you do give to the parents?
D: Mmhmm.
C: Oh, I can//I only make my own like reading. And I left a space//
D: No, I don’t do that. It’s less
work.
C: Okay. So, you could do that too. You could photocopy the report
card, the one side it says, Language, Arts, Reading.
B: The academics, ya know.

While this discussion highlighted the belief factor that teaching is
individualistic, it also illustrated the unwritten rule, if no one is watching do what you
want. Reporting to parents through parent-teacher conferences and report cards were
the school’s written rules. However, the enactment of the written rule was realized in
the unwritten rule that Delia and Carrie had just explained. After Delia and Carrie
explained what they did, Ellen questioned when the official report cards went home.

Delia and Carrie then explained to Ellen the written rule: report cards and grades were
given to parents at the end of the second marking period, which was in the last week
in January.

463  E: When do the actual report cards go home?
464  ...  
465  D: Not until second marking period in January, February.
466  C: Last week of January.
467  E: The last week of January, that's when the first report card that goes
home?
468  C: Yes//
469  D: The second marking period and forth-marking period are the only
marking periods you have the report cards. The first marking period
and the third marking period are conferences.
470  E: Okay.

Carrie began to reiterate that parents did not get to see their child’s grades
until January when Delia interrupted and explicitly stated that the fifth-grade teachers
would be giving parents their child’s grade during the first conference in November,
in line 472 below. In line 473 Ellen asked “why?” It was unclear whether Ellen’s
question referred to the written rule or what the grade-level was going to do. Since
Ellen’s question was never acknowledged, and she did not ask again, the purpose of
her question remained ambiguous, an issue discussed further in Chapter VII.

471  C: Some parents don’t get to see their children’s grades until//
472  D: Unless you give it in conferences and that’s how we’re going to do it.

473  E: Why?

The teachers believed they could make their own judgment call and go against the
school’s written rule because there was no direct form of accountability, no one was
checking. The teachers believed it was more important to communicate student
grades to parents than follow the written rule. Specifically, these teachers created a
grade-level rule to give out report cards and/or grades during the November conference, despite the school’s written rule not to. This discussion illustrates how the unwritten rule if no one is watching, do what you want surfaced within the grade-level meeting discussions.

It’s Always Something, But It Too Will Pass

The third unwritten rule was *it’s always something, but it too will pass*. This unwritten rule was represented when Lisa reported to the group what the head of social studies for the district said about the high reading level of the social studies textbook. Lisa, as part of her responsibilities on the social studies curriculum committee, asked the head of social studies about the textbooks during one of the committee’s meetings. The head of social studies suggested that the teachers use the textbook to teach reading strategies, like text structure and breaking down the text into smaller more manageable chunks. Towards the end of the discussion, Delia commented that she felt like the teachers were teaching reading strategies all day, and Marianne and Carrie agreed.

261 D: I feel like all we’re doing, alllll dayyy is teaching reading//reading every subject
262 M: Umhmm, reading strategies.
263 C: I know.

In line 264, Delia commented that a few years ago “it was differentiation.” Betty agreed. Implied in Delia’s statements was that first it was differentiation, now it’s going to be strategies and it will be something else next. Sort of like the “flavor of the month” coming from the district. It seemed that the teachers viewed the district
initiatives very superficially as well, with little thought as to how the different
initiatives might benefit student learning.

264 D: Oh, my gosh. I feel like, you know, a couple of years ago it was
differentiation.
265 B: Uh-huh.
266 D: I feel like we’re moving toward strategies, that we’re going to be
like knocked over the head with it.

Another discussion that represented this unwritten rule occurred when Lisa
asked the group if anyone knew about differentiation workshops because it was part
of her Professional Improvement Plan (PIP) (see Appendix C). Betty commented that
the district’s focus on differentiation will be out the window and something new will
come in, thus implying that Lisa should not worry about learning about differentiation
since the district’s focus will change to something new, possibly reading strategies as
discussed in the previous excerpt.

301 L: If anyone comes across the differentiation workshop, let me know.
302 C: For which subject?
303 D: Just keep working here.
303 C: Eventually, you’ll just have to differentiate on your own.
304 B: Eventually, this will be out the window and something new will
come in.

Although Betty’s stance potentially undermined Lisa’s desire to learn more
about differentiation and take her PIP seriously, Lisa defended her desire to learn
more in line 305 below.

305 L: Yeah, I know but I’m try//it’s my PIP and I’m working on it and I
think that would be just something good to add that I did for my PIP, so.

This exchange might be representative of a change in the organizational
culture and the unwritten rules since Lisa, a newer teacher, wanted to learn more
about differentiation even if it too will pass. Implicit in Lisa’s stance was that she
believed differentiation might be beneficial to her teaching and students and, therefore, illustrated that she was intrinsically motivated to learn more. This differed from Betty’s stance that learning about differentiation was only important for external reasons, like if someone is watching. Lisa’s stance also challenged the unwritten rule, it’s always something, but it too will pass.

Don’t Rock the Boat

The last unwritten rule was don’t rock the boat. As discussed in Chapter V, teachers’ investment in the grade-level meetings was tenuous. While the teachers valued meeting with their colleagues, they did not necessarily believe that the grade-level group needed to meet every “A” day. As discussed in Chapter V within the context factors discussion, despite teachers’ mixed feelings about the grade-level meetings, they continued to meet without ever addressing their concerns with the principal. Instead, they chose to do “seat time” and go through the motions of meeting, since they did not want to rock the boat.

Additionally, this unwritten rule was evidenced during the parent-teacher conference and report card discussion that was used to illustrate if no one is watching, do what you want. While the veteran teachers did not agree with the school’s written rule of withholding grades from parents until the first report card went home at the end of January, they chose not to speak with Arthur, did what they wanted and did not rock the boat.

Another example of how this unwritten rule manifested itself happened toward the end of a discussion about Common Science. The teachers had just
decided to stop teaching Common Science. When Lisa asked the group if they should bring it up with Arthur, they responded as follows:

838 L: Do you think we should ask?
839 D: No.
840 C: No.
841 B: Never ask
842 M: No, because he’s the one that recommended that I teach New Jersey ASK when//
843 C: Lisa, no.
844 D: Yep. No, we’re not asking. We’re not telling.

In line 841 Betty stated, “Never ask.” Clearly the message here is don’t rock the boat which works in tandem with the unwritten rule if no one is watching, do what you want. Evidenced throughout the grade-level meetings, a pattern of behavior about staying under the radar and not rocking the boat emerged.

Finding 1 Synthesis

Unwritten rules are extremely powerful. As discussed earlier in this chapter, they represent the underlying assumptions and mental models of group members and of an organization and are shaped by the context and belief factors. Further, since the unwritten rules represent the norms of behavior, if they are left to hover under the surface without being questioned or fully understood, change and learning have little chance of occurring and the status quo will continue to be perpetuated. However, there is hope, as evidenced in the PIP discussion. Unwritten rules can change when members begin to subtly challenge or go against the unwritten rules. The next chapter discusses Finding 2, which addresses the superficiality of teachers’ grade-level meeting discussions including the conflict-avoidance discussion strategies and the “helpful” leader behaviors embedded in this second finding.
CHAPTER VII

FINDING 2: CONFLICT-AVOIDANCE DISCUSSION STRATEGIES
AND THE "HELPFUL" LEADER

This chapter discusses Finding 2 from the study of a group of fifth-grade teachers' grade-level meetings: The institutionally mandated grade-level meetings' professional discussions were superficial. For the purposes of this study, superficial discussions were discussions that remained on the surface. They were casual and at times one-dimensional. The discussions centered on the implementation of ideas, sharing and enactment of specific and somewhat arbitrary instructional activities, and details for organizing classroom activities. Clarifying questions were the predominant type of question asked. Questions of purpose or student learning rarely occurred, nor did a critical analysis of teaching ideas and practices, which would have provided multiple dimensions to the discussions.

The context and belief factors and the unwritten rules interacted to create grade-level meetings in which the discussions remained superficial. The superficial discussions did little to challenge teachers' instructional decisions, curriculum choices, or underlying beliefs about teaching and learning. Furthermore, the superficial discussions perpetuated the status quo. The behaviors contributing to the superficial discussions in the studied grade-level meetings are identified as conflict-avoidance and the "helpful" leader. The context factors, (mandatory meetings, time
constraints, and vague purpose) and the belief factors, (teaching is inherently individualistic, it’s best if we get along) and the unwritten rules contributed to the behaviors of conflict-avoidance discussion strategies and the “helpful” leader. The behaviors, in turn, resulted in grade-level meeting conversations that remained on the sharing level, with little critical discussion or reflection.

It has been reported that teachers’ conversations remain on the sharing level when conflict is avoided because teachers do not want to offend colleagues (Achinstein, 2002; Senge, et al. 2000; Wood 2007). This could explain these teachers’ behaviors, since four of the five teachers made comments in the interviews that they did not like confrontation and tried their best to avoid it. Growing evidence supports the belief that some types of conflict are not only inevitable but an integral part of small group development (Cragan & Wright, 1991), that conflict improves decision making (De Dreu & Van De Vliert, 1997; Deutsch, 2006a, 2006b; Uline et al., 2003) and learning (Dewey, 1938; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Uline, Tschannen-Moran and Perez (2003) assert that, “conflict is necessary for true involvement” (p. 790) of small group members. Sole (2006) asserts that “the greatest single source of significant group development is the experience of conflict well resolved” (p. 809). Therefore, the avoidance of conflict will lead to groups and group members who are somewhat removed from the group’s work, talk around issues and engage in many “helping behaviors” (Sole, 2006).

Conflict-Avoidance Discussion Strategies

In the grade-level meetings, the teachers in this study worked hard to avoid conflict with each other. This section addresses the conflict-avoidance discussion
strategies that led to superficial discussions. The discussion strategies that helped teachers avoid confrontation and thus avoid conflict perpetuated the status quo and created a work environment where “we all get along.”

As reported by the teachers in interviews and discussed in previous chapters, this group of fifth-grade teachers “got along.” They felt that the group, regardless of the grade-level meetings, would communicate with each other. On numerous occasions the researcher witnessed the fifth-grade teachers talking, either socially, asking how things were going, or professionally, asking for materials or advice. However, there was also an underlying current in the interviews and evidenced in the grade-level meetings about avoiding conflict and “playing to your audience.” It seemed that these teachers put a greater emphasis on getting along with colleagues than learning from their colleagues. Learning was unlikely to occur in an environment where conflict was avoided, since learning involves internal as well as external conflict when working with others. I identified three discussion strategies teachers used throughout the meetings that helped teachers avoid confrontation and thus avoid addressing any conceptual, ideological, or personal conflicts. The discussion strategies included the use of: judgments and evaluations, questioning, and humor. The first two strategies will be illustrated through an in-depth analysis of one excerpt, Topics of Inquiry. The third strategy, using humor, will be illustrated using an excerpt entitled, Common Science.

In the Topics of Inquiry excerpt, Lisa told the group about an idea for a project she wanted to do with her class during Topics of Inquiry. Topics of Inquiry was a time during the school day when students engaged in producing projects related
to the social studies units they were studying. Students often did the projects in
groups and parents often came to the classrooms to help. Lisa explained the gist of
the project idea in the beginning of the exchange: a research-based photo album or
scrapbook that would go along with the novels students were reading. The other
teachers at the meeting provided Lisa with their comments about her scrapbook idea
and offered Lisa four additional ideas (Country in a Box, a true-to-the-book
scrapbook, a scrapbook journal, and a Creative Catalogue).

Episode 1: Lisa’s Idea
Lisa’s idea is a research-based photo album or scrapbook based on the novels
students were reading. The novels all had to do with WWII, more specifically
the Holocaust. Lisa suggests that her students create a scrapbook or photo
album based on the characters in the novels and their experiences,
embellishing the scrapbook or photo album with internet research about the
times and places mentioned in the books. (The books used in Lisa’s class
during Topics of Inquiry were, Lily’s Crossing by Patricia Reilly Giff, Devil’s
Arithmetic by Jane Yolen, Hide and Seek by Ida Vos, and Number the Stars
by Lois Lowry)

Episode 2: The Response
Delia, Ellen, and Marianne respond to Lisa’s idea suggesting she proceed
“with caution.”

Episode 3: Other Ideas, Country in a Box
Marianne offers an idea she names Country in a Box wherein students
research a country and put items that represent the researched country in a
decorated box. Students then present the box and items to the class.

Episode 4: Reiteration of Lisa’s Idea
Carrie comes to the meeting late because she was talking with the school
psychologist about a student in her class. When Carrie arrives, she asks the
group what idea they are talking about so Lisa tells Carrie her idea.

Episode 5: Food
While Lisa explains her idea, Carrie interrupts by asking about the snacks on
the table.
Episode 6: Another Scrapbook Idea and a Scrapbook Journal
Carrie offers another scrapbook idea that is completely based on the books students read. During this episode Carrie describes and goes through almost page-by-page some samples of scrapbooks students completed last year. While going through a scrapbook, Carrie realizes that the particular scrapbook is written more like a journal, so suggests that as an idea as well.

Episode 7: A Creative Catalogue, Idea 4
Carrie brings up a fourth and final idea called a Creative Catalogue, in which students draw different artifacts from the book and assign a price to each one.

Episode 8: Lisa Decides on a Country in a Box
This last episode occurred towards the end of the meeting. Lisa brought up the topic again and announced to the group that she would do the Country in a Box project idea with her class.

Full transcript can be found in Appendix F.

Discussion Strategy 1: Judgments and Evaluation
In the Topics of Inquiry discussion, as teachers talked about Lisa’s idea and additional ideas were suggested, vague positive evaluative comments were given with little or no indication of reflection about the ideas. Evidence of the rapidity with which the comments were generated is apparent in a portion of the Topics of Inquiry excerpt below. In this section of the discussion, Marianne only partially explained the Country in a Box project when Lisa said in line 119, “that’s a really good idea.”

116 M: A Country in a Box. I started asking Ruth to start collecting the Xerox paper boxes/
117 D: The what?
118 M: //and then do a Country in a Box. Like in pairs, I was going to maybe have the kids//for Europe, do//like on the Internet, or wherever they want to gather their information, like//
119 L: That’s a really good idea.

Five lines later, in line 123, Lisa repeated “that’s a good idea.” In line 134 Delia stated that she thought Lisa’s original idea was a “great idea” although she discouraged Lisa from doing it with her class. Marianne’s evaluative comment for the
Creative Catalogue was “that’s cute too.” At the end of the meeting Lisa stated that she would do a Country in a Box because “it was cute.” The rationale articulated for why an idea was “good” included statements like “the kids are so quiet.” Carrie stated in the meeting that her scrapbook idea was great because, “you could hear a pin drop. They don’t act up, they don’t talk, they love doing it. So, it works really well.”

The evaluative comments teachers made in the grade-level meetings were general and nonspecific; words like good, great, and cute were used. Additionally, teachers made judgments about different ideas very quickly without asking for much information or clarifying the purpose. Following is a list of the evaluative comments and the idea the comment referred to from the Topics of Inquiry discussion:

84D: Because I think it’s a great idea. Lisa’s initial idea
100L: That’s a good idea. Response to Ellen’s packet
119L: That’s a very good idea. Country in a Box
123L: That’s a good idea. Country in a Box
134D: I think your idea is a great idea. Lisa’s initial idea
175E: The samples? They’re great. True-to-the-book scrapbook
190D: Oh good. True-to-the-book scrapbook
193L: Okay, that’s cute. Country in a Box
210M: That’s cute too. Creative Catalogue
794D: It is a great idea. It is a great idea. Lisa’s initial idea

The judgments and evaluative comments in some ways might illustrate that the teachers were engaged and interested in what each other was saying. However, the judgments occurred so quickly, before the speaker really explained her idea, and
the evaluative comments were vague; therefore, the conversations remained on the surface. Consequently, it is more likely that the teachers had only a superficial façade of interest and engagement, particularly since reflection of ideas or comments and questions about student learning were absent from the discussion.

Discussion Strategy 2: Questioning

The second discussion strategy addresses the questions teachers asked during the grade-level meetings. Teachers showed interest in what their colleagues were saying by asking questions and engaging in the conversations. However, a closer look at the dialogues show that the teachers asked superficial and surface level questions that dealt mostly with clarifying statements and implementation. For example, in the Topics of Inquiry discussion the questions dealt with the procedures and logistics of peoples' ideas, rather than on conceptual issues. The teachers in this study avoided conflict with their colleagues in the grade-level meetings by asking mostly clarification and implementation questions and therefore ideas, purpose, and underlying assumptions were never questioned. The clarifying and implementation questions from the Topics of Inquiry discussion were:

69B: Of the character or the person in your class?
71E: The characters in the book, right?
95D: Oh, you did?
121D: Like actual things or/?
74D: Where are you getting the pictures from?
146C: Can they draw it or make it up what you might find there?
203L: My only question on what you just said is can you do it in groups?
Another type of question teachers asked was Opinion questions. Many of these questions were hedged, meaning teachers turned statements into questions, possibly because they felt insecure about their statement or they wanted to avoid taking a stand that may have offended someone. For example, when Lisa first introduced her scrapbook idea she stated, “I think it’d be cool to have each group make like a photo album? Or is that dull?” (GLM3). The rising intonation at the end of the first statement and the question that follows, “Or is that dull?” connotes her uncertainty, as well as possibly her avoidance of taking a stand, since taking a stand might lead to a confrontation or conflict.

Teachers may have asked mainly superficial questions because they did not want to challenge or offend colleagues by asking deeper questions of purpose. Further, since teachers were not fully invested in the grade-level meetings they had a façade of interest with little evidence of deep commitment. The preponderance of clarification questions could be a result of the teachers not explaining their ideas clearly, which could be the result of poor communication skills or, as stated earlier, the manifestation of the context and belief factors and the unwritten rules.

Furthermore, Country in a Box, the two additional scrapbook ideas, and the Creative Catalogue were superficial in nature, meaning there was little or no place for students to be reflective, show connections, or think beyond the text or information given. Subsequently, the discussions about the activities were also void of purpose. The teachers did not engage in a dialogue about whether students would gain a deeper understanding of the novels, or a broader understanding of the times in which the novels took place. The dialogue consisted of logistics and vague opinions.
Discussion Strategy 3: Humor

The third conflict-avoidance discussion strategy teachers used in the grade-level meetings was humor. While this strategy helped to relieve infrequent occurrences of tension, it also left disparate beliefs and opinions unexamined.

As discussed in Chapter VI, Common Science was a period once a week where 4 of the 5 fifth-grade teachers paired up to teach science modules to two classes at a time. In this particular Common Science discussion, the fifth-grade teachers collectively decided to stop doing Common Science and not to tell the principal of their decision. Lisa began the discussion by asking if teachers wanted to switch classes and continue the rotation for Common Science. The annotated episodes follow to provide the reader with the content and context of the discussion.

Episode 1: Question and Response
Lisa asks the teachers if they want to switch for common science. They all say no.

Episode 2: Rationale
Carrie, Ellen, and Delia provide rationale for why they do not want to switch for common science.

Episode 3: Are you done?
Lisa asks Ellen and Delia if they are done with teaching their science module.

Episode 4: What now?
Lisa asks the teachers what they should do now. Marianne suggests each teacher should do test preparation with her students.

Episode 5: Should we ask?
Lisa wonders if the teachers should ask the principal. All say no.

Episode 6: Let’s move on
Ellen notes that the period is almost over. Lisa removes “common science” from the minutes by scribbling it out.

Full transcript can be found in Appendix E.
In Episode 5, Lisa asked if the teachers wanted to ask Arthur about stopping Common Science to do test preparation. The teachers responded with a resounding "no". Tension mounted as this was the third inquiry of Lisa’s that was rejected by the group. Her first solicitation was if teachers wanted to switch for Common Science. The second was about what science rotation to do next, and this final one was about informing Arthur of the grade-level teachers’ decision to stop Common Science.

Delia sarcastically joked that if Lisa told Arthur, she would “break her legs.” The content of the message was so exaggerated and Delia’s tone was such that all the teachers laughed and the interaction continued lightheartedly.

844 D: Yep. No, we’re not asking. We’re not telling. If you tell, I’ll break your legs.
845 ((Collective LGH))
846 L: What I’m going to go and say, I just want to tell you something.
847 C: I’m the rat of the fifth Grade. ((LGH))
848 L: I know right. ((LGH))
849 B: Write a note. It’s a secret note.
850 L: Yeah. Okay.
851 D: An anonymous letter.

So while there was mounting tension as Lisa pushed the group first to make a decision about Common Science and then by asking about telling Arthur, Delia successfully used humor to relieve the tension. However, the humor also glossed over the differing viewpoints. The humor was used to avoid conflict and not talk more specifically about why Lisa wanted to mention their decision to Arthur and why the other teachers were completely against it. The use of humor in this case left differing view points unexamined and contributed to the superficial nature of the grade-level discussions.
The three discussion strategies kept the conversations superficial. The teachers spoke about procedural, organizational, and implementation aspects of different ideas. The discussions were focused on the what and how of ideas with little or no discussion about the why. The discussion strategies seemingly moved the conversations along; however, in reality, conflict and confrontation avoidance left purposes and beliefs unexamined. The behavior the “helpful” leader also contributed to the superficial discussions, which is described in the following section.

The “Helpful” Leader

Small-group literature emphasizes the importance of the leader in the group. Groups tend to follow the style of the leader, which may or may not be beneficial for group development, decision making, or growth (Riley, 2001; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003). Research on grade-level meetings in elementary schools suggests that the leadership of the group has great influence on the group’s productivity, members’ feelings towards their group work, as well as the artifacts produced (Britton, 2004; Riley, 2001; Shields, 1997; Shiu & Chrispeels, 2003).

Sole (2006) writes about the differences between helping and supporting behaviors. He defines help as “doing something so that another person need not do it” (p. 806). He defines support as “contributing to a person’s capacity” (p. 806), meaning contributing to a person’s “creativity, contribution, commitment, or productivity” (p. 806). The saying, “Give a man a fish you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” articulates the difference between helping and supporting: helping behavior is represented in the former statement and supporting behavior is represented in the latter statement of the adage. Helping is
usually easier and more efficient in the short-term than supporting. Furthermore, helping behaviors are often about power and control because the person in need of help continues to be dependent on the person helping. However, when someone provides supportive behaviors, the person in need's capacity grows and, if the support is appropriate, the person in need will learn to complete the task on his or her own and no longer be dependent on the person providing the support. Helping leads to just doing, while supporting leads to asking questions, scaffolding, engagement, and ultimately understanding.

In the grade-level group studied, Carrie, the assumed leader by the group, as individually reported in teachers' interviews, had been a classroom teacher at the research school the longest of the classroom teachers. Additionally, she was gregarious and confident. While she was the assumed leader of the group, she was not in charge of the meeting or the topics of discussion. All teachers brought ideas to the meetings when they wanted. Carrie thought it was important to share ideas with colleagues and for everyone to get along, so she tried to perpetuate that feeling of camaraderie and openness with new teachers who joined the grade-level group. At the grade-level meetings, when other teachers had questions about curriculum or procedures, Carrie shared what she had done in her classroom and gave the other teachers carte blanche to use the materials and information. “I’m the one who’s here the longest, I’ll share anything. If you want something, you can have it. I have books” (Ci1). The excerpt below corroborates the above statements. In this excerpt Carrie responded to Lisa’s request for additional project ideas and suggested a scrapbook idea her students completed last year.
C: You know what? Did you do the scrapbook last year? Like, when I didn’t have enough parents for Topics of Inquiry did I show you the scrapbook?

E: Yeah, I have//I have a couple in my room that you gave me.

C: The samples?

E: The samples. They’re great.

C: It goes along with the story and they have to make a scrapbook like it’s their diary of/and ya know, it was a plane crash and they put like a piece of cardboard cutout. They did it all black, like it went on fire. And they taped it into, “This is the plane I was on. That’s the only part left to it.” . . . And, “I was in the mountains and, you know, I had to use my compass to find my way.” There’s going to be like a compass and they had to write about why that was important in the book. So, that would be really good for those books.

Carrie’s desire to help by sharing the sample scrapbooks also led her to monopolize the conversation which stifled the discussion and any collaborative idea generation. Furthermore, her “helping” implicitly articulated a potential unwritten rule that new teachers to the school should follow the traditions established. Support for this unwritten rule was limited and therefore was not included in the Chapter VI discussion. The excerpt below illustrates another way Carrie’s “helping” stifled conversations.

B: Backward design?
M: I have questions.

C: Well we have an Asia unit put together if anyone wants it. Paula and I put it together. You can just have it.

Carrie’s offer to give everyone her Asia unit stopped the discussion and Marianne never had the opportunity to ask her question. This potentially could have been an opportunity for the teachers to plan together, generate ideas, or learn more about the curriculum.

At another grade-level meeting, Ellen asked about differentiation for students who were learning English as a second language. Ellen’s concern stemmed from her
belief that these students had difficulties solely because of language, and that the
students were capable of high level thinking. In the excerpt below, Ellen asked about
the purpose and implementation of differentiation, as well as about helping individual
students in her class. Carrie responded quickly, trying to help with Ellen’s question.

334  E: I have a question. The whole thing with the differentiation, I’ve got
kids in//I’m very lucky and I don’t have many kids in my room that are
low, like very low. And the//but the kids that I do have that are
struggling a little bit the majority of the reason why they’re struggling
is the language barrier. Because they’re writing//they’re translating it
in their head and writing it the way that it sounds. It’s like translating
like literal Spanish to English. So it’s tough because I don’t want to
give lower work because they’re perfectly capable of all that.

335  C: Just modify it a bit. Instead of five paragraphs make it three.
Instead of 15 spelling words make it 10.

Ellen, dissatisfied with Carrie’s response continued.

336  E: Well see, a a, the problem that I have with that is that they’re
capable. So I think should push//

337  B: Sofia would not be happy, Sofia
would not be happy with the lesser
assignments.

338  E: Right. But, I’m also talking about like Martha some of her//like
she//the way that she writes is like a literal translation of Spanish into
English. So I should push her to make sure that she writes it all//

After Ellen said that lowering the expectation was a problem because the
students were capable (GLM8), Carrie did not say anything for over a minute, until a
new topic was discussed. So while Carrie told the teachers what they should do, if
challenged in any way, Carrie removed herself from the conversation, thus avoiding
any confrontation or conflict and not supporting the teachers as they tried to work
through understanding, in this case, the instructional concept of differentiation.

Carrie had a powerful role in the grade-level meetings. She had the most
experience at the school of the classroom teachers. Sharing was something she did
frequently and freely, and her overall outspoken demeanor influenced the grade-level meetings greatly. In some ways, her knowledge was an invaluable resource for the teachers; in other ways, her keenness for sharing stifled idea generation.

Finding 2 Synthesis

The conflict-avoidance discussion strategies and the “helpful” leader behaviors contributed to making the meetings’ professional discussions superficial. These behaviors supported the belief factors that teaching is individualistic and that it was best if we all got along. The next chapter addresses Finding 3, the social aspects of the grade-level meetings. The behaviors sharing personal stories and breaking bread together are discussed.
CHAPTER VIII

FINDING 3: SHARING PERSONAL STORIES AND BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

This chapter discusses the third finding from the study of fifth-grade teachers' grade-level meetings: The informal and casual tone of the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings provided an opportunity for teachers to get to know their grade-level colleagues. While the stated purpose of the grade-level meetings was to share practice, an unintended consequence was that it served as a place for teachers to get to know each other on a personal level. The informal and casual tone of the grade-level meetings increased teachers' comfort level with their colleagues and, as reported in their interviews, created an environment in which these grade-level teachers enjoyed working together. This chapter discusses the behaviors which are related to the social aspects of the grade-level meetings. As mentioned in previous chapters, the behaviors occurred within an environment framed by the context and belief factors. There are two behaviors within Finding 3: sharing personal stories and breaking bread together. First, the informal and casual tone of the meetings will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the two behaviors: sharing personal stories and breaking bread together.
Informal and Casual Tone

Gee (2005) discusses "informal" and "formal" social languages. The "formal" social languages are usually seen as more academic in nature and are often considered to be "decontextualized" in the sense they are written or spoken in such a way as to be explicit regardless of context. In contrast, the meanings of "informal" social languages are considered to be more context based, whereby conversation participants are able to infer meaning based on the context. The "informal" and "formal" social languages are similar to Bernstein's "restricted" and "elaborated" linguistic codes (1975). In the grade-level meetings analyzed for this study, "informal" social languages were used, similar to the "restricted" linguistic codes discussed by Bernstein in which the "major function of this [the restricted] code is to reinforce the form of the social relationship (a warm and inclusive relationship)" (p. 78). In the grade-level meetings signs of "solidarity, informality, and participatory communication" (Gee, 2005, p. 106) occurred. These characteristics represent the use of "informal" social languages and conversations among people within a speech community (Kutz, 1997). As members of a speech community, teachers together created a speech community, in this case, as "teacher colleagues" and as "girlfriends." Consequently, the teachers recognized various patterns and switches in communication in rapid and intuitive ways, which was evidenced by the pace of the conversations and the use of "uum", "like", and other colloquialisms. Additionally, Ellen reported that the grade-level meetings seemed more like "a meeting of girlfriends a lot of times," (Ei1). Similarly, Lisa reported, "the grade level meeting is
just like//everyone just kind of talks” (Li1) which implies the social element of the meetings.

Ellen felt that the meetings were informal and casual because the five classroom teachers were so close in age and all female. The five classroom teachers’ ages ranged from their late 20s to early 30s.

And the fact that we are all girls. . . . And so we’re all within five years of each other//And I think that, that makes us feel a little bit more comfortable with each other and just able to share our ideas, where I know like, the other two grades, there are big age gaps and the number of years people//the experience levels are just//are very different. (Ei1)

The informality and casual tone contributed to the social aspect of the meetings. The teachers reported in their interviews that the grade-level meetings helped them to “get to know” each other and feel more comfortable working together. Ellen stated, “even though we’re supposed to stay on topic and talk about things, I think that there’s just, like, a large part of the social aspect of it so we all know a little bit more about each other, so we feel a little bit closer to each other” (Ei1).

It seemed that the informal casual tenor of the meetings provided a forum for the teachers to get to know their colleagues. While the veteran teachers set the tone for the meetings by sharing personal information in the first few grade-level meetings, the social aspect of the grade-level meetings seemed to have a greater impact on the newer teachers, Lisa, Marianne, and Ellen, as reported in their interviews. It would seem that the grade-level meeting discussions provided this group of fifth grade teachers with emotional and social support. The emotional and social support seemed to translate into teachers who enjoyed working at the school. In an interview Marianne stated,
coming here [to this school] was such a breath of fresh air, like, literally. The teachers are all happy, they’re positive. . . . And people truly enjoy what they are doing here. (Mi1)

Within the informal casual tone of the grade-level meetings, the sharing of personal stories occurred. Sharing personal stories is one the behaviors within Finding 3 which is discussed below.

Sharing Personal Stories

Dee and Henkin (2001) and others (Cragan & Wright, 1991) contend that the sharing of personal information is important to group development. Dee and Henkin (2001) identified four functions of sharing personal information within a group. They state that sharing personal information facilitates open communication; allows group members to learn about each other’s strength and weaknesses; facilitates the development of group identity; and, when self-disclosure is reciprocated it serves as an indicator that group members are truly listening. All of the four functions seemed evident in the grade-level meetings, and will be discussed below.

Each of the teachers in the grade-level group shared personal stories throughout the course of the year. Betty shared stories about her daughter, who was a district attorney. Delia shared stories about shopping, health concerns, and her boyfriend, who was a police officer. Lisa shared stories about her boyfriend and family. Carrie shared stories about her health and her children. Ellen shared stories about her childhood, her own learning styles, and house search. Marianne told personal stories about her boyfriend and then her wedding plans toward the end of the year.
There were two types of personal stories evident in the grade-level meetings. The first type dealt with private issues, whereby the storyteller confided in the grade-level group. The second type of story communicated information to the grade-level group about the individual group member’s, a family member’s, or boyfriend’s accomplishments. These stories were told to entertain and/or to celebrate. For example, when Delia’s boyfriend was involved in apprehending a drug dealer, Delia shared that information with the grade-level group. Both types of personal stories, those that comforted and those that entertained, helped to create a level of intimacy within the group and develop trust among the grade-level meeting participants.

**Personal Stories that Comfort**

The personal stories that dealt with private issues seemed to provide comfort and support for the person telling the story. The following excerpt is an example of a private personal story. The story was communicated at a grade-level meeting in October in which the fifth-grade teachers discussed what costumes to wear during Halloween. In this excerpt, the teachers discussed a decade theme for their costumes. For example, one teacher would dress from the 1920s, one teacher would dress from the 1930s. Someone suggested Delia would dress like someone from the 1970s. When someone suggested she wear an Afro, Delia told the group about a health issue that she was concerned about. Below are the annotated episodes to familiarize the reader with the excerpt content. The full transcript can be found in Appendix G.

Episode 1: My Hair is Falling Out
Delia informs the group that her hair is falling out.

Episode 2: Have You Tried...?
Betty and Carrie offer suggestions to help.
Episode 3: I’m Very Upset
Delia says she does not know what to do but is very upset.

Episode 4: What About Your Mom?
Carrie asks about Delia’s mom whose hair is also falling out. Delia says that her doctor thinks it might be a hormonal thing because she and her mom have it.

Episode 5: The Blood Test
Delia is getting the blood test today and Betty offers some comforting words that it might just be a hormonal imbalance.

Episode 6: It’s Really Upsetting
Whatever it is, Delia says it is really upsetting.

Episode 7: But Anyway
Delia brings the group back to the Halloween costume discussion stating that she “won’t be having any sort of Afro.”

The private nature of the story illustrated the level of camaraderie and closeness that bonded this group together. Delia confided in the group for support. Her first statement “I have no hair,” signaled a change in conversation direction from school talk to personal talk. “I went to the dermatologist last week/?” directly followed the statement: “I have no hair” which added weight to the issue. The transition occurred seamlessly with the other teachers following Delia’s direction by asking questions and offering supportive suggestions. Since the teachers were members of the same speech community, they picked up on Delia’s switch and followed her lead. Three times in the two-minute discussion, Delia articulated that she was upset. After the third time, where she stated “I went home and cried” the group sighed and there was a 5-second pause. After the 5-second pause, Delia transitioned back to the school talk by saying, “But anyway//what are we on??//[2-second pause]
So point being, I won’t be having any//We//I won’t be having any sort of Afro.”
Again the group followed Delia’s lead and continued the Halloween costume
discussion, an indicator that the teachers respected Delia’s wishes. Delia told this story in early October, thus setting the tone, and modeling for the newer teachers, that the grade-level meeting might be a place to share and discuss private personal issues. As discussed previously not all of the personal stories dealt with such private issues. The second type of personal story, to entertain and celebrate, is discussed below.

*Personal Stories that Entertain and Celebrate*

The personal stories that entertained or celebrated offered a different dimension for teachers to get to know each other. First, the mere fact that the teachers shared stories of personal and family accomplishments implies that, at least in the storyteller’s mind, the other teachers would be interested. From the teachers’ responsiveness during these stories, it was evident that the teachers, in the main, were in fact interested in their colleagues’ stories and, in turn, their colleagues. Furthermore, the entertaining stories provided laughter and a sense of levity to the teachers’ often hectic work day. The following excerpt is representative of a humorous personal story. This excerpt occurred at the first grade-level meeting after the school’s holiday party. The teachers talked about gag gifts included at the holiday party gift exchange. The annotated episodes follow and the full excerpt can be found in Appendix H.

**Episode 1: The Humping Santa Claus**

Carrie mentions the figurine of Mr. and Mrs. Claus humping in the bathtub. Lisa tells the group that she got that gift and decided to rewrap it and give it to her brother’s new girlfriend. She signed the card as if it had come from her grandmother. The other teachers laugh and comment that Lisa’s plan is very funny.
Episode 2: Carrie’s Family Holiday Story
Lisa’s story reminds Carrie of a Thanksgiving family story, whereby Carrie’s brother brought a whoppie cushion to the table and proceeded to “fart” throughout the meal whenever their Aunt moved.

Episode 3: And I Thought My Family was Psychotic
Delia responds sarcastically that she thought her family was psychotic and the teachers reiterated that Lisa’s idea was hysterical and hopefully would be received as such.

The teachers laughed during this discussion and used words like “hysterical” “too funny” and “that is great.” The sharing of humorous family stories helped bond this group together. Laughter can be therapeutic (McGann, 2006). It signals acceptance and positive interactions and is about making and strengthening human connections (Duncan, 1982). Laughter brings people closer together. Additionally, “humor strengthens” team identity (McGhee, 2007), which seemed to be the case with this group of fifth-grade teachers.

Sharing personal stories provided the teachers with glimpses into their colleagues’ lives outside of school. By sharing parts of their outside lives with their colleagues, the teachers maintained an intimacy and informality with their colleagues that, as reported by Lisa, Marianne, and Ellen (the newer teachers), contributed to their comfort level and enjoyment of work. The second behavior that contributed to the informality and intimacy of the grade-level meetings was the presence and sharing of snacks, or breaking bread together, which is discussed in the next section.

Breaking Bread Together
Teachers shared snacks together during the grade-level meetings. The breaking bread together occurred organically. There was no established assignment or sequence of who should bring snacks. Teachers brought crackers, pretzels, and
candy left over from classroom parties or from home and placed the snacks in the middle of the table. On occasion, the researcher also contributed snacks. The grade-level meetings often began with some comments about the snacks.

D: What are these?
B: Savory corn chips. They’re not going to be your favorite.
D: Yeah?
R: I really like them.
M: I really like tootsie rolls.
B: Here Delia. Have some.
D: I don’t want anything. Yeah, I weighed myself this morning and I almost died. I almost died. I don’t know how I’m fitting into any of my clothes.
B: Do you want to start?

Throughout the meetings, teachers ate the snack and sometimes interrupted discussions to ask for more snack or to comment on the snacks, as illustrated in the excerpt below. In lines 159, 164 and 165 (bolded) Lisa and Carrie talked about the Topics of Inquiry projects amidst the food discussion.

[C makes a face while eating a cracker that was on the table]
B: Get a drink.
L: /of their experiences. [referring to what students could include in the Topics of Inquiry scrapbooks. In this case students could include information about what the characters from the book experienced.]
C: Yeah, you might get used to it.
C: Or maybe herb-flavored?
L: Did you ever see the scrapbooks? [reference to the true-to-the-book scrapbooks Carrie did with her class in previous years.]
L: Yeah, I have one.
C: We would like them a little seasoned next time.
L: Yeah, definitely. This cream cheese is so good.
C: What’s that?
L: It’s cream cheese//chive and onion cream cheese.
C: Oh see, it could go with the cracker.
L: Yeah it is really good.
The presence of snack foods contributed to the casual, informal tone of the grade-level meetings. Additionally, within the informal context the snacks contributed to the social fabric of the group. It has been said that breaking bread “nurtures a sense of belonging” (Van Der Weyden, 2004) which seemed to be the case with this group of fifth-grade teachers.

Finding 3 Synthesis

The sharing of personal stories and breaking bread together served as adhesives that bound together this grade-level group. Consequently, the teachers saw themselves as a group, which in turn helped others see the fifth-grade teachers as a group. During a grade-level meeting in December, after the school holiday party, Marianne recounted, “I was downstairs this morning. I//all the people that were in the office were like, ‘Next year we’re sitting with the fifth grade’” (GLM7).

Furthermore, when guests came to speak at the grade-level meetings, (e.g., the school nurse, the school secretary, the school counselor) they commented on the presence of snacks and the informality and “fun” feeling of the fifth-grade meetings.

The literature on small-groups discusses the importance of group cohesion as the antecedent to group identity (Dee & Henkin, 2001). Cohesive groups have members who care about each other and are interested in each member’s well-being. It would seem that this group of fifth-grade teachers was a cohesive group because they identified themselves as “the fifth-grade group,” were proud of this identification, and cared about the personal well-being of the individuals within the group. From a positive stand point, cohesiveness can build trust within a group, and can support the development of a group’s identity, which seemed to be the case for
this grade-level group. Many researchers have noted the importance of collegial relationships for novice teachers (Kennedy, 2004), for teacher community (Westheimer, 1998), and for the improvement of schools (Barth, 1990).

Others caution (Achinstein, 2002; A. Hargraeves, 2003; Little, 1982) that some collegial relationships may in fact stifle individual teacher learning and school improvement because teachers turn away from challenging colleagues and engaging in interactions that might offend (Senge et al., 2000). This can sometimes occur if a group’s cohesiveness is based solely on the social aspects of the group’s interaction which seemed to be the case with this grade-level group. The context factors and belief factors shaped the casual and informal tenor of the meetings. The tenor of the grade-level meetings contributed to the teachers’ social interactions, whereby sharing personal stories and breaking bread together provided teachers with opportunities to get to know each other, and to develop trust in their grade-level colleagues.
CHAPTER IX

FINDING 4: WATERING DOWN THE CURRICULUM AND FILTERING THE MINUTES

This chapter discusses the fourth finding from the study of fifth-grade teachers’ grade-level meetings: As represented in the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings, teachers avoided conflict. This conflict-avoidance influenced their curriculum choices and interactions with the principal. As discussed in the previous chapters, the behaviors occurred within an environment that was framed by the context and belief factors. This chapter discusses the behaviors about conflict-avoidance within teachers’ work as represented in the grade-level meeting discussions. Two behaviors contributed to this finding. The first is watering down the curriculum and the second is filtering the minutes.

Curriculum Choices: Watering Down the Curriculum to Avoid Conflict with Parents and Students

Studies (Johnson, 2004; Kennedy, 2005) about teachers’ work report that teachers make many curriculum choices each day. The teachers in this study also had many curriculum choices to make as illustrated in the grade-level meeting discussions. The choices teachers in this study made were influenced by the context and belief factors. The belief factor we should all get along, as well as the unwritten rule by don’t rock the boat resulted in behaviors that avoided conflict with parents
and students. The analysis below uses the Topics of Inquiry excerpt to explicate watering down the curriculum. The annotated episodes are listed below to refamiliarize the reader with the context and content of the discussion. The analysis follows the annotated episodes.

In the Topics of Inquiry excerpt, Lisa told the group about an idea for a project she wanted to do with her class during Topics of Inquiry, a time during the school day when students engaged in producing projects related to the social studies units they were studying. Students often did the projects in groups and parents often came to the classrooms to help. Lisa explained the gist of the project idea in the beginning of the exchange: a research-based photo album or scrapbook that would go along with the novels students were reading. The other teachers at the meeting provided Lisa with their comments about her scrapbook idea and offered Lisa four additional ideas (Country in a Box, a true-to-the-book scrapbook, a scrapbook journal, and a Creative Catalogue).

Episode 1: Lisa’s Idea
Lisa’s idea is a research-based photo album or scrapbook based on the novels students are reading. The novels all have to do with WWII, more specifically the Holocaust. Lisa suggests that her students create a scrapbook or photo album based on the characters in the novels and their experiences, embellishing the scrapbook or photo album with internet research about the times and places mentioned in the books. (The books used in Lisa’s class during Topics of Inquiry were, Lily’s Crossing by Patricia Reilly Giff, Devil’s Arithmetic by Jane Yolen, Hide and Seek by Ida Vos, and Number the Stars by Lois Lowry)

Episode 2: The Response
Delia, Ellen, and Marianne respond to Lisa’s idea, suggesting she proceed “with caution.”
Episode 3: Other Ideas, Country in a Box
Marianne offers an idea she names Country in a Box, whereby students research a country and put items that represent the researched country in a decorated box. Students then present the box and items to the class.

Episode 4: Reiteration of Lisa’s Idea
Carrie comes to the meeting late because she was talking with the school psychologist about a student in her class. When Carrie arrives, she asks the group what idea they are talking about so Lisa tells Carrie her idea.

Episode 5: Food
While Lisa explains her idea, Carrie interrupts by asking about the snacks on the table.

Episode 6: Another Scrapbook Idea and a Scrapbook Journal
Carrie offers another scrapbook idea that is completely based on the books students read. During this episode, Carrie describes and goes through, almost page-by-page, some samples of scrapbooks students completed last year. While going through a scrapbook, Carrie realizes that the particular scrapbook is written more like a journal, so suggests that as an idea as well.

Episode 7: A Creative Catalogue, Idea 4
Carrie brings up a fourth and final idea called a Creative Catalogue, in which students draw different artifacts from the book and assign a price to each one.

Episode 8: Lisa Decides on A Country in a Box
This last episode occurred towards the end of the meeting. Lisa brought up the topic again and decided to do the Country in a Box idea.

Full transcript can be found in Appendix F.

The following analysis will show how teachers made curriculum choices specifically to avoid conflict with parents and students. This led to teachers organizing experiences for students that superficially covered curriculum topics. Teachers watered down the curriculum because they did not want to expose students to anxiety-provoking material and did not want to deal with parents’ complaints. Therefore, curriculum choices might not have been in the best interest of students’ learning or their understanding of the major concepts integral to the topic. The analysis begins with the first comments Delia, Maria, Ellen, and Betty had about the
project. After Lisa told the teachers about her idea, Delia, Ellen, and Marianne’s main comments were of caution. Within a 92-second time frame, Maria, Lisa, and Delia used the word “careful” three times in the discussion about Lisa’s project idea. Each time the word “careful” was used its meaning was a bit ambiguous and in the end seemed to have layered meanings. These meanings needed to be constructed by each individual at the meeting as the teachers continued to use the word in different statements. In line 86, below, Marianne used the word “careful” for the first time.

82 D: I’m going to tell you something and not to discourage you from//
83 L: No, I want//
84 D: //because I think it’s a great idea but
85 [3 sec pause]
86 M: You’re going to have to be really careful with pictures if you Google that.
87 L: I know.

Marianne’s comment in line 86 about being careful about the pictures was ambiguous. It could have been interpreted to mean that Lisa needed to be careful about the pictures students were exposed to because they may be inappropriate and may have caused some students anxiety. However, it might also be interpreted that Lisa had to be careful because students might see pictures that they would then tell their parents about and then Lisa would have parents calling to complain. Additionally, it might be that emotion should be removed from learning. Although it seemed that the teachers understood that “careful,” in this instance, applied to students’ feelings, it is hard to be sure what was meant by “careful.” Delia’s next comment in line 88 below, suggested that at least her understanding of Marianne’s use of “careful” was that of concern for students. Delia began her statement in line 88, below, with “that’s the first thing,” referring to Marianne’s statement, possibly
meaning you have to be careful not to offend students. Delia continued with "the second thing" which was about a parent phone call. Delia, although she did not use the word careful in her statement, in some ways was adding a layer of meaning to the word as it related to this discussion.

88  **D:** That’s the first thing and the second thing is that I already had a call from a parent saying that last year in Library, Mrs. Mathers did a unit on the study of the Holocaust//

89  **L:** mmhm

90  **D:** //And her child had nightmares.

91  **E:** Yeah, I heard about that. Thought that people were going to come and get her out of her house.

Lisa seemed to understand that Delia’s message was to be careful because you might get calls from parents since Lisa responded in line 94 that she spoke to parents she was concerned about. However, Lisa’s statement was also ambiguous. Did she mean she spoke to parents she thought might be vocal about their children learning about the Holocaust, or did she mean that she spoke to parents of students she thought might be upset with some of the material? However, Delia’s comment in line 95 suggested that the concern here was about the parent complaints and not the project’s potential effect on students.

92  **D:** Soooo

93  **E:** Yeah

94  **L:** I talked to the parents that I was concerned about//

95  **D:** Oh, you did? Okay.

In line 96, below, Lisa stated that she still needed to be “careful.” Her use of the word “careful” here might mean careful not to upset students, careful not to upset parents, or a layered meaning incorporating both of the ideas.

96  **L:** But um. But I still do have to be careful.
It would seem that the teachers' concerns were for how the project might affect students emotionally, which is important, but it is also evident that the teachers did not want to upset students for fear that the parents would be on their backs, as had happened in the past (see line 110b below). Delia’s statement in line 110 below supported the layered meaning of “careful.” The beginning of her statement in line 110 addressed the needs of students and the latter part of the statement referred back to the parents, illustrating that the teachers avoided conflict from causing students anxiety and from parent complaints by making certain curriculum choices.

110 D: Where I think they’re [some students] super, super sensitive. And for a 10-year-old to deal with the fact that people are like snatched out of their homes and killed for no reason/ I don’t know. Because I actually, a couple of years ago, I wanted to do a project about this. And I got a couple of parents who were like, “No way.” So, I mean, you just have to be careful. That’s it.

Since, Carrie came late to the meeting and missed the beginning discussion Lisa re-explained her idea. In line 142, below, Lisa used “sketchy” to describe studying the Holocaust following Delia, Maria, and Ellen’s thinking that she would have to be “careful” if implementing her project idea with students. In the excerpt below it seemed that Lisa was more concerned with not causing students anxiety than with the parent complaints. Although Lisa had a positive experience studying the Holocaust last year with her class as indicated in line 142, she still was swayed not to implement her idea because of her colleagues’ cautioning.

142 L: //And because I know it’s a sketchy thing to study, but I did it last year. And some of my lowest kids were so interested//
143 C: Sure.
144 L: //So why not try it again. I was like, you know, ‘Why not try it again?’ So, I picked books, like I have two that are more on the descriptive side and I have two that are on the safe side, like Lily’s Crossing, has to kind of do with that, but not really. And I thought the
sense like, who I thought maybe wouldn’t be able to handle. And when I did my book talks at the same time, I said like, “I need you to be honest now because I don’t want you to be, you know/”

145 C: Sure, upset later.

146 L: “//upset about it.” So, I was thinking of having them do like a photo album or scrapbook as their topic of inquiry.

It seemed that Lisa thoughtfully organized her classroom and Holocaust study in an attempt to avoid causing students’ anxiety. She spoke with parents and students, and also chose different kinds of books based on her understandings of students’ readiness to handle the material. However, she seemed to question her decisions and ideas. One explanation of why Lisa felt unsure about her idea might be because of her colleagues’ comments of caution. However, it is important to remember there were numerous context and belief factors operating concurrently, and thus also contributing to her choices and behavior.

As discussed in Chapter V, one of the belief factors was teaching is individualistic. Therefore, Lisa could have listened to her colleagues’ comments and still done what she had planned. But, she did not. Instead, she decided, at least in the meeting, to ask her colleagues for additional ideas, which may have been because of another belief factor: it’s best if we get along. Four additional ideas were discussed: Country in a Box, a true-to-the-book scrapbook, a scrapbook journal and Creative Catalogue. Marianne brought up the first idea and Carrie brought up the other three.

In line 132, below, Lisa used the word “safer,” stating that Marianne’s idea of a Country in a Box was “safer” than her initial idea. Note that Lisa’s comment was not about the conceptual value of the project or how it might contribute to students’ learning. Her comment was only about safety. Similar to the word “careful” the
meaning of “safer” can be construed in a variety of ways: safe from causing students
anxiety, safe from parent complaints, or a combination of the two.

132  L: No, no, that’s safer than my idea.
133  C: What’s safer?

Carrie brought up the second and third idea. The second idea was similar to
Lisa’s idea in that it was a scrapbook about the different novels students were
reading. However, the scrapbook Carrie explained was “so true to the story” that
students would get their information solely from the book, restricting themselves to
the book and their interpretation of the text without any exploration of related
documents from the same historical time. Lisa’s reaction was once again that this
idea was “safer” (L177) Carrie agreed in line 178.

176  C: It goes along with the story and they have to make a scrapbook
like it’s their diary of//and ya know, it was a plane crash and they put
like a piece of cardboard cutout. They did it all black, like it went on
fire. And they taped it into, “This is the plane I was on. That’s the
only part left to it.” That, you know, was/is there. And, “I was in the
mountains and, you know, I had to use my compass to find my way.”
There’s going to be like a compass and they had to write about why
that was important in the book. So, that would be really good for those
books.
177  L: That’s//kind of keeps my idea but it’s safer as well.
178  C: Oh, definitely. Because you don’t want your scrapbook of like
horrible things of the Holocaust.
179  L: Yeah.

As teachers talked about Lisa’s idea and additional ideas were suggested,
there was little or no indication of reflection about the ideas. For example, Carrie’s
comment in line 178 above goes unquestioned and unexamined. The Holocaust was
horrible, so why wouldn’t the scrapbooks illustrate that? Additionally, since there
were many heroic, compassionate, and brave people during that time, the scrapbooks
could have highlighted how, within such a horrific time, exceptional people existed—
which was, in the researcher's opinion, one of the big ideas in many of the novels students were reading.

At the end of the meeting Lisa announced that she would do a Country in a Box. Delia told Lisa that she thought Lisa could still do her initial idea (L.178). Because Lisa was concerned with what her colleagues thought, as well as concerned about avoiding conflict with parents and students, Delia’s statement might have changed her mind back to her initial idea, given that Lisa reported success studying the Holocaust with her class the previous year. However, at that point Lisa articulated in the meeting that she would use Country in a Box as her Topics of Inquiry project because it was “safe.” The researcher later learned that Lisa never implemented the Country in a Box project. Instead, her students, in groups, created power-point presentations about the countries in which the novel they read took place. Lisa’s decision is an example of the how the belief factors teaching is individualistic and it's best if we get along were realized, both in and out of the grade-level meetings.

Watering Down the Curriculum Synthesis

When Lisa introduced her initial idea, she talked about purpose, including that students could gain a deeper and broader appreciation for the times and settings in the novels. Nevertheless, although she characterized her idea as “too sketchy” (GLM3, L.142), her colleagues did not discuss any details or encourage thinking in depth about Lisa’s idea. In contrast, the sample scrapbooks Carrie’s class had done in previous years were discussed in detail. These scrapbooks were glorified retellings of the stories. Additionally, Country in a Box and the Creative Catalogue were superficial
in nature, providing little or no place for students to be reflective, show connections, or think beyond the text or information given. Consequently, the discussions about the activities were also void of advancing students’ conceptual development. The teachers did not engage in a dialogue about whether students would gain a deeper understanding of the novels, or a broader understanding of the times in which the novels took place.

The teachers seemed uncertain whether students were capable of handling the difficult material within the district’s curriculum and were not willing to take a risk and work through the difficult material with students. Discussions about scaffolding the difficult material so students might understand the more complex and potentially unsettling concepts were absent, except when Lisa briefly alluded to her choice of books for different students based on her belief of what Holocaust content individual students were capable of handling (GLM3, L144). Rather, the teachers chose to organize projects and activities that superficially covered the material and somewhat candy-coated the content. Projects were watered down and superficial to mask the depth and weight of the issues. Teachers chose curricula projects and activities that were “safe,” thus avoiding conflict with parents and students. In a time when public school teachers are under a great deal of scrutiny, teachers may be avoiding conflict in an attempt to protect their jobs. As reported in the New York Times (Blumenthal, 2006) a teacher from Texas was fired because she brought students to a museum where they walked past naked sculptures and paintings. Parents complained to the administration and the teacher was fired. It seemed that the grade-level teachers may be working from a mind-set of being “careful” to stay under the radar and not rock
the boat so their jobs will be “safe.” The following section discusses the second conflict-avoidance behavior which is about filtering the minutes to avoid conflict with the principal.

Interactions with Principal: Filtering the Minutes

The second behavior exemplifying avoiding conflict in teachers’ work as represented in the grade-level meeting was filtering the minutes. While filtering the minutes occurred in the note-taker’s mind throughout the minute taking process, at times, the filtering was done consciously and openly. When it was done consciously and openly, for analysis purposes, it was considered a conflict-avoidance behavior. Filtering the minutes may be representative of how these teachers approached other situations with the principal. For example, as discussed in Chapter V and VI within the context factors discussion, despite teachers’ mixed feelings about the grade-level meetings, they continued to meet without ever addressing their concerns with the principal. Therefore, a pattern of behavior about staying under the radar seemed to emerge, which is aligned with the belief factor it’s best if we all get along and the unwritten rule don’t rock the boat. The avoidance behavior of filtering minutes occurred because teachers wanted to avoid conflict with Arthur. In this section, two excerpts will be discussed: Lesson Plans and Daily Bulletin and Common Science.

The conversations about Lesson Plans and Daily Bulletin occurred when Delia reminded the teachers that they were supposed to discuss the Language Arts framework in the grade-level meetings because it was listed on the Daily Bulletin. Since this excerpt is quite long, including 41 episodes, the episodes and full transcript
have been placed in Appendices I and J, respectively. However, a narrative summary follows to familiarize the reader with the content and context of the discussion.

During the first part of the discussion, teachers tried to remember what was written in the Daily Bulletin, which the teachers received via e-mail each day. As the teachers tried to construct from memory what was in the bulletin, they discussed how they assessed students and continued by questioning how and in what context students were supposed to be answering the questions included in the bulletin.

The Daily Bulletin read:

During common planning time, grade level notes should reflect discussion about the evidence we are accepting that shows students are making progress toward achievement in the Strands and Cumulative Progress Indicators (CPIs) contained in the Language Arts framework.

Questions students should be capable of answering in regards to relevance of what is taught.
What is the purpose of this lesson?
Why is it important to learn?
In what ways am I challenged to think in this lesson?
How will I apply or communicate what I have learned?
How will I know how good my work is and how can I improve it?
(Daily Bulletin 1/18/06)

Lisa offered to “pull up” the bulletin from the computer so teachers could read exactly what was written in the bulletin. However, Carrie said that she had already read the bulletin and told Lisa there was no need for her to get it from the computer. However, since the teachers did not have the document in front of them, without the exact questions, teachers talked around the different points listed in the bulletin and the discussion remained on the surface. Betty suggested that it was through observations that Arthur wanted the questions on the Daily Bulletin answered. Lisa then stated sarcastically that she couldn’t wait for her observation. Lisa’s statement
prompted Carrie to tell a two-minute story about a district supervisor who was in her room to conduct an observation of one of the special education teachers. Throughout the observation, the supervisor rifled through Carrie’s desk drawers and read papers on her desk. When the teachers began talking about the bulletin again, their conversation was about ascertaining what Arthur wanted them to include in their lesson plans based on his various Post-It comments, rather than the bulletin statement. Some of the Post-It comments, as reported by the teachers in the grade-level meeting included:

“Thank you. I love your lesson plans.”

“How are you assessing?”

“Thank you. Great plans.”

“How will that be done?”

“Your how shouldn’t be in your objective.”

While Carrie and Ellen were reviewing Carrie’s lesson plans, Lisa asked about what to write on the Meeting Plan/Agenda minutes to document the discussion. Lisa and Carrie crafted the following:

538  L:  Maybe we should put on that we compared how we incorporate the framework// [referring to the Meeting Plan/Agenda]

539  C:  Yeah. We each compared our lesson plans, just how we incorporate the Language Arts framework.

The entire discussion only peripherally discussed what was written in the bulletin. Towards the end of the meeting, Lisa and Carrie, in an effort to avoid any potential conflict with Arthur, crafted what to write on the Meeting Plan/Agenda minutes to be more in-sync with the contents of the bulletin. Lisa may have felt it necessary to ask what to write on the Meeting Plan/Agenda because a large portion of the discussion
consisted of the teachers trying to understand what Arthur “wanted” in the lesson plans. Since the teachers only discussed what was mentioned in the Daily Bulletin peripherally, Lisa wanted some guidance in documenting the conversation, so as to avoid conflict with Arthur (the teachers presumed he read the minutes). Unfortunately, these minutes were never placed in the staff room, and as such the researcher does not have a copy. There are two possibilities as to why the minutes were not in the staff room. One is that the teacher who took the minutes that day (Lisa) did not give them to Arthur. The second possibility is that Lisa gave the minutes to Arthur and he did not put them in the staff room. Regardless, they were not in the staff room when the researcher went in to copy them. It was peculiar that the minutes of this meeting were not in the staff room, particularly since most of the minutes were in the staff room.

Another example in which teachers filtered the minutes occurred after the Common Science discussion. A narrative summary follows to refamiliarize the reader with the content and context of the discussion. (The full transcript can be found in Appendix E).

Common Science was a period once a week where four of the five fifth-grade teachers paired up to teach science modules to two classes at a time. Ellen and Delia taught a Simple Machines Module and Lisa and Carrie taught a Landforms Module. The remaining fifth-grade teacher, Marianne, taught test preparation to the class not participating in either science module. Classes participated in the Science Modules and test preparation on a rotating basis. Throughout the year, issues with Common Science were discussed at the grade-level meetings. These issues included problems
with finding the correct materials, locating the teaching guides, and teaching social studies during the common science period. In this Common Science discussion, the fifth-grade teachers collectively decided both to stop doing Common Science and to not tell the principal of their decision.

Lisa initiated the conversation when she asked the other grade-level teachers if they wanted to switch for Common Science. All teachers said, “No.” Lisa then asked if the teachers had completed teaching their Module and when they wanted to switch. All teachers said they were finished but did not want to switch, ever. Lisa asked teachers, “what now?” The teachers decided to each do test preparation during the Common Science period so if Arthur happened to be in their rooms when they were supposed to be doing Common Science they could all tell him that they decided to do test preparation instead. The fifth-grade teachers collectively decided to stop doing Common Science and to not tell the principal of their decision. Lisa wondered if they should ask Arthur about the switch. All teachers said, “No, absolutely not.” Lisa wound up crossing “common science” off the meeting minutes since she did not want the principal to know that the fifth-grade teachers had decided to stop doing Common Science (see Figure 13).

Lisa’s scribbling out the Common Science reference on the meeting minutes showed that the teachers sought to avoid conflict with the principal.
Finding 4 Synthesis

The context and belief factors interacted in such a way that the teachers' behaviors outside the grade-level meetings, as represented within the meetings...
consisted of various conflict-avoidance behaviors including watering down the curriculum to avoid conflict with parents and students and filtering the minutes to avoid conflict with the principal. A pattern of behavior emerged about staying under the radar and not rocking the boat, one of the unwritten rules discussed in Chapter VI, which is in line with the belief factor it's best if we get along. Additionally, it seemed teachers wanted to be liked by their peers, the parents, and the principal. Therefore, many of their behaviors might have stemmed from a fear of not being liked. The above discussion demonstrated that these teachers would rather avoid conflict, because they wanted to be liked, than work with students and parents through difficult curricula. Additionally, as evidenced in the above discussion, these teachers would rather avoid conflict than work with the principal to change that which they felt was inefficient or ineffective.
CHAPTER X
HYPOTHESES AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the hypotheses and implications from the study of fifth-grade teachers’ grade-level meetings. Four hypotheses were developed based on the corpus of data and findings.

1. If grade-level meetings are to achieve their desired results of improving and informing professional practice, context and belief factors must be addressed and reflected upon before, during, and after implementation.

2. While educational settings, such as grade-level meetings, are established to elicit and support change, they may in fact perpetuate the status quo when unwritten rules go unchallenged.

3. If grade-level meetings are to support the development of professional learning communities, teachers need to know, internalize, and use critical professional discourse and reflection skills, both in the grade-level meetings and as part of their daily interactions and decision making.

4. Educational settings, such as grade-level meetings, help build trust among colleagues.
The hypotheses will be discussed in relation to the theoretical rationale and literature on professional development, adult learning, school reform, and small group development used to frame this study, followed by future research and educational implications.

Hypothesis 1

*If grade-level meetings are to achieve their desired results of improving and informing professional practice, context and belief factors must be addressed and reflected upon before, during, and after implementation.*

Grade-level meetings are a form of job-embedded professional development. Proponents of job-embedded professional development describe the need for teacher research and inquiry, engagement in practical tasks of instruction and assessment, exploration of relevant subject matter, and consistent feedback and follow-up activities (Education Week Research Center, 2004), as well as ongoing critical reflection about practice (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). These characteristics did not occur within the study’s grade-level meetings for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, the fact that the context and belief factors were never addressed. Additionally, there were no mechanisms or structures in place that required the teachers to participate in the grade-level meetings in such ways. Another reason, which will be discussed later, might be because teachers were not equipped with the skills necessary to engage in critical reflection and discussion about practice.

Context factors, such as meeting purposes, teacher initiative, and time all must be clarified and explicitly discussed before grade-level meetings are to be as beneficial as possible. The context factors and belief factors in this study actually
worked against the beneficial impact of grade-level meetings because teacher buy-in was tenuous, time was limited, the purpose was vague, teachers believed teaching was individualistic, and teachers believed that it was more important to get along with colleagues than to engage in critical discussions about practice.

However, the specific context and belief factors are not as important as the discussion about uncovering them. Since each school, even each grade-level group, will work within different context and belief factors, it is the critical discussion and uncovering of the context and belief factors, as well as the continuous revisiting of the context and belief factors, that will move grade-level meetings closer to the job-embedded professional development described by researchers (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Education Week Research Center, 2004).

Hypothesis 2

*While educational settings, such as grade-level meetings, are established to elicit and support change, they may in fact perpetuate the status quo when unwritten rules go unchallenged.*

Educational settings such as grade-level meetings may in fact perpetuate the status quo when unwritten rules and norms of behavior remain unexamined. Unwritten rules are extremely powerful. As discussed in Chapter VI, they represent the underlying assumptions and mental models of group members and of an organization. Further, since unwritten rules represent norms of behavior, if they are left to hover under the surface without being questioned or fully understood, change and learning have little chance of occurring and the status quo will continue to be perpetuated. Many researchers and educators contend that job-embedded professional
development does not guarantee teacher growth and learning because the existing school cultures are too powerful. Schools have, in the past, resisted change, in part because their powerful discourse communities enculturate teachers into traditional ways of thinking and acting (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Sarason, 1990). Therefore, as evidenced in this study, teachers' mental models and implicit assumptions remained unchallenged and, as such, the grade-level meetings perpetuated the status quo. Some claim that education reform on the school level, as well as on a large scale, has and will continue to fail because the work tends to offer strategies and solutions based on already existing mental models which contribute to the development of the unwritten rules. Structures, goals, and explicit work around the unwritten rules, mental models, and implicit assumptions are needed if grade-level meetings are to contribute to teacher learning and ultimately student achievement.

Hypothesis 3

*If grade-level meetings are to support the development of professional learning communities, teachers need to know, internalize, and use critical professional discourse and reflection skills, both in the grade-level meetings and as part of their daily interactions and decision making.*

Education reformers continue to assert that teacher collaboration has the potential to cure the ills of education. However, many also argue that providing teachers with time to work together in groups is not enough (Achinstein, 2002; Liebermann, 1995; Little, 1990; Stevens et al., 2006; Supovitz, 2002; Supovitz & Christman, 2005). This study supports that viewpoint, in that although the grade-level meetings were part of the teachers' day, "structured, sustained, and supported
discussions” (Supovitz & Christman, 2005, p. 650) about instruction did not occur. Supovitz (2002) argues that, for teacher collaboration to affect classroom instruction, groups need “organizational structures, cultures of instructional exploration, and ongoing professional learning opportunities to support sustained inquiries into improving teaching and learning” (p. 1591). While the researcher agrees with Supovitz’s assertions, they are nonspecific. I believe, based on the extensive analysis of various data, that teachers may lack the skills necessary to engage in deep, structured, and sustained conversations that might lead to improved practice. Another possibility is that teachers might have the skills but are not using them in such settings because of competing context and belief factors and unwritten rules. Wood (2007) made similar assertions, finding that many of the underlying assumptions at the schools she studied ran counter to the tenets of the reform initiative focused on developing professional learning communities.

Therefore, if teachers do have the skills necessary to engage in critical professional discourse but are not using them, uncovering the context and belief factors and the unwritten rules could be an initial step toward implementation of professional learning communities. This initial step would move teachers closer to utilizing the critical professional discourse skills necessary for developing and participating in a professional learning community. Hence, teachers must not only be educated in the art of critical professional discourse and reflection; they must also be expected to use such skills.

The importance of reflection must also be emphasized. It is more than reflecting on practice, but reflecting on the context and belief factors, the meeting
processes, and, ultimately, the meeting’s benefits or limitations. Reflection, after all, is at the heart of the learning process—that which drives it. “Reflection is the process of giving meaning to and so understanding experience,” (West-Burnham & O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 80). Dewey defined reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (1933, p. 9).

However, implicit in the idea that reflection is necessary for grade-level meetings to be beneficial is that the grade-level meetings are purposeful and that teachers believe that what they are doing will improve their practice.

Therefore, as mentioned previously, context and belief factors must be uncovered and the purpose of the grade-level meetings must be well-defined. However, I cannot stress enough the importance of skill development and skill utilization: it is one thing to know the skills, and another to actually use them. Without knowing and practicing the skills of professional discourse and reflection, teachers will “just talk” at grade-level meetings and other similar settings. I believe that teachers need to practice active listening and communicating in a focused, purposeful way. Teachers need an understanding of “dialogue” whereby “language functions as a device for connection, invention, and coordination” (Kofman & Senge, 1993, p. 11).

If learning and teacher development are goals of teacher collaboration, job-embedded professional development, and the formation of professional learning communities, then teachers must be taught and must internalize and engage in, critical
professional discourse and reflection. These issues must be addressed if, as the many
educational reformers assert, teacher collaboration and professional learning
communities are to improve student achievement.

Hypothesis 4

*Educational settings, such as grade-level meetings, help build trust among* colleagues.

The culture of teachers' work is characterized as both individualistic and
isolating (Barth, 1990; Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975). In individualistic cultures,
collegial relationships are adversarial and competitive (Barth, 1990; Brause, 1992; A.
Hargraeves, 2003). In contrast, collaborative cultures support more positive collegial
relationships (Barth 1990; Westheimer, 1998) and are the focus of many reform
efforts. The grade-level meeting is one educational setting instituted to promote a
collaborative culture, which in turn has the potential to support more positive
collegial relationships. While the grade-level meetings in this study did not promote
professional collaboration, they did support positive collegial relationships. The
grade-level meetings provided the teachers with a place to get to know their
colleagues. The grade-level teachers in this study shared personal stories with their
colleagues, which allowed them to see each other not just in their roles as teachers,
but also as people with a multitude of interests and concerns. As such, individual
identities emerged as personal stories, interests, and talents were made public. When
teachers are given time to get to know each other, trust has an opportunity to develop.
As trust builds, teachers feel more comfortable with their colleagues and may begin to
engage in more reflective and critical discourse. The more teachers get to know and
understand their colleagues, the more comfortable they may become to ask questions, initiate change, and capitalize on the individual strengths, interests, and talents of their colleagues. The regular meetings of this small group of individuals provided time for trust to develop.

Implications for Future Research

This study of fifth-grade teachers’ grade-level meetings suggests that many complexities and nuances exist when teachers work together. Additional research exploring different types of grade-level groups, for example, grade-level curriculum writing groups, grade-level study groups, or different grades (e.g., k-3) could offer more insights into the benefits of various kinds of grade-level groups. Further research could explore the different context and belief factors present within grade-level groups correlating their effects on the grade-level meetings’ work and its influence on teachers’ work. Research could examine grade-level groups that meet together during uninterrupted times, apart from the daily pressures of teaching, to better understand the time context factor. Furthermore, skills education on professional discourse and reflection could be conducted and then research on the performance differences of teachers in a group might add insight into the importance of skills development. Future research might also examine grade-level groups that are mixed-gender, since this grade-level group consisted of all women. Future research might also address the idea that teachers want to be liked and may, in fact, have a fear of not being liked. The research could focus on how that stance influences teachers’ behavior and the effectiveness of group work, which might
illuminate another layer of complexity. Finally, future research might follow a grade-level group for more than one year to see how the individuals and the group develop.

Implications for Educational Settings that Promote Collaborative Cultures

The implications for educational settings that promote collaboration and teacher learning are varied. In line with Supovitz (2002) and Supovitz and Christman (2005), this research concluded that merely providing teachers with the structures and time to "share practice" may not contribute to teacher learning, growth, or student achievement. As such, I propose a Three-Dimensional Approach to implementing any educational initiative put in place to promote collaboration and teacher learning. The three dimensions include provide structures, uncover context and belief factors, and develop critical professional discourse and reflection skills. There is no order in which the dimensions should occur, since each is influenced by the other and ideally should occur simultaneously. Within each dimension are more specific characteristics which are highlighted in Figure 14 and are subsequently described.

The provide structures dimension includes more than setting up the time for teachers to meet. It includes discussions about when the most appropriate times to meet should occur. As evidenced in this study, meeting during teachers' instructional day created some impediments to deep and sustained conversations. This finding parallels Stevens and Kahne (2006) research on improving instructional practice through professional communities. Meeting times apart from the daily pressures might provide more opportunities for deep and sustained discussions about practice.
The provide structures dimension also includes specifics of task and purpose, as well as protocols for reflection: reflection on practice and on a group's work and fulfillment of a group's goals. The uncover context and belief factors dimension includes, uncovering the various factors influencing teachers' behaviors. This dimension also addresses the specifics of teacher buy-in because unwritten rules, underlying assumptions, and mental models may be revealed and acknowledged, providing an important and essential starting place. Further, when underlying assumptions and mental models are made public, although sometimes difficult, groups are able to work from a common ground. The develop critical professional discourse and reflection skills dimension is about education and implementation.
This dimension would include the learning of, the implementation of, and the reflection on the different communication skills teachers exercise within the group and in their jobs in general. A conscious awareness for each person provides a valuable launching pad for critical discussion and reflection. It is one thing to know the skills, it is entirely different to implement the skills and incorporate them into everyday conversations.

The three dimensions, when working together, create an environment in which “structured, sustained, and supported discussions” will have a better opportunity to occur, since many of the complexities of group work are addressed within this Three-Dimensional Approach. However, it is important to realize that too much focus on one dimension will lead to imbalance and the desired results might be compromised. For example, Wood (2007) found that some learning community groups focused primarily on specific protocols and not on the issues. Therefore, groups did not develop, change, or grow and teachers' practice remained stagnant. The Three-Dimensional Approach incorporates both individual and collaborative elements. The uncover context and belief factors and develop professional discourse and reflections skills dimensions begin with individuals willing to take a risk and put themselves “out there.” Ultimately, if learning, development, and change are to occur, it will be because of the collaboration involved and embedded within the implementation of the three dimensions.

Setting up structures for teachers to “share practice,” in the hopes that the mere structures will provide teachers with professional learning experiences is a bit naïve and clearly not sufficient. Understanding the complexities of educational
settings like grade-level meetings, and addressing the various dimensions suggested in the Three-Dimensional Approach, teachers and schools will be more likely to reap the potential benefits of teacher collaboration and job-embedded professional development. While the Three-Dimensional Approach on paper seems neat and simple, the journey will not be. Uncovering context and belief factors, internalizing a new skill set for professional discourse and reflection, as well as developing the structures and protocols are difficult to achieve. They require desire, patience, and trust. However, the journey is worth it, as many schools and teachers know who have taken the journey and seen the benefits, not only in their learning but in their students’ learning as well.
REFERENCES


Putnam, R. T., & Borko, H. (2000). What do new views of knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning?. In B. Moon, J. Butcher, & E. Bird (Eds.), Leading professional development in education (pp. 11-29). New York: Routledge Falmer and The Open University.


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview 1: Grade-Level Meeting Interview

1. Could you talk a little about the GLM?
   *For teachers who have been at the school for a long time:*
   Were there always GLMs? When did they begin? Why? Who initiated them?

2. I know each grade puts the minutes from their GLMs in the staff room – do you ever read the minutes from the other GLMs? Have you ever seen anyone reading them? Why do you think they are there?

3. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about the GLM?

The following questions were asked if not addressed within the context of answering the above:

   What do you see as its’ purpose? Goals? Do you think they are all realized? How do you know?
   Has the GLM influenced your attitudes and behaviors towards your colleagues? If so how?
   How does your group deal with differences of opinions?

Interview 2: Teachers Work Culture and School Inputs Interview

1. How would you characterize this school?

2. How would you describe the faculty’s norms and expectations about what a teacher should and should not do?

3. How would you describe the faculty’s norms and expectations about teachers working together?

4. How do you decide what to teach? How do you decide how to teach?

5. In what ways does the school support or not support teachers work together?

6. How are new teachers introduced to the school?
APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
(BASED ON LITTLE, 2002A AND OCHS, 1979)
APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

// Interruption
• If it is a self-interruption it is represented in the text as follows:

  L: One other adult. [2 sec. pause] What do you guys think of this idea? Because we’re doing the Holocaust. I was thinking about//and all the novels kind of are like//

• If it is an interruption of another person it is represented in the text as follows. (The interruption marks before after “like” in line 118 signify that the initial speaker has been interrupted. The interruption marks before “find” in line 120 show that the initial speaker finished her thought after the interruption. If the interruption marks are not present, as in line 122, the speaker either responded to the interruption or lost her train of thought.)

  118 M: ... or wherever they want to gather their information, like//
  119 L: That’s a very good idea.
  120 M: //find things about their particular country and put them in the box and then present it to the class. So they can have pretty much anything that they researched about/
  121 D: Like actual things or//?
  122 M: Well, it//I mean, that might be hard//

. Fall in intonation
?

Rise in intonation

Italics Marks stress

CAPITALS Increased volume

(inaudible) Unclear reading

(() Marks other voice qualities, such as ((WHS)) whisper, ((LGF)) laugh,

Based on Little (2002a) and Ochs (1979)
APPENDIX C

PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN OUTLINE AND FORM
PIP Outline

In working to plan and implement differentiated instruction activities for students during the school year, I have attended a workshop entitled "Differentiating Instruction." I am currently a member of the Social Studies Committee and I am focused on purchasing educational supplies that support differentiation in the classroom. I am talking with other professionals in an effort to learn more about differentiation and how to use it in the classroom. Outside of school, I am researching differentiation in the classroom on the internet and I have also read the book, Differentiation in Practice.

In the classroom, my students are offered the opportunity to select their responses to literature. They are in reading groups according to their interests as well as their reading levels. Each student has a To Do List that they may select educational activities from when they are finished with their class work. In Math, the students take pretests, therefore allowing me to assess their prior knowledge.

Although I have begun to take steps towards using differentiation in the classroom, there is a great deal more for me to learn and put to use. Attached is a Professional Improvement Plan outlining the steps I plan to take in the upcoming school year in an effort to effectively use differentiation in the classroom.
### PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

**Name:**

**Subject/Grade:** 5

**School:**

An individual Professional Improvement Plan is a written statement developed cooperatively by the Supervisor and the teaching staff member to correct deficiencies or to continue professional growth.

**AREA(S) FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OR IMPROVEMENT:** Plan and implement differentiated instruction activities for students for a minimum of six units of study during the school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL(S)</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES/STRATEGIES</th>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>TIME LINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide for individual instruction and activity needs of a heterogeneous classroom.</td>
<td>Research and explore techniques for the differentiation of instruction.</td>
<td>Completion of review with a portfolio of ideas for implementation.</td>
<td>September - June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To offer enrichment/extension activities.</td>
<td>Fire six units of study that have differentiated activities for students of varying levels of achievement.</td>
<td>Development of lesson plans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read and discuss at assigned meetings content presented in <em>The Differentiated Classroom</em>.</td>
<td>Student projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My approved continuing education experiences shall include, but not be limited to, in-service programs, approved local professional development experiences and other state approved professional development experiences. All professional development experiences that meet the 100 hour criteria shall be counted toward my continuing education progress.</td>
<td>Unit plans and examples of various differentiated activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harcourt Theme 4 Holistic Assessment and Everyday Math End of Year Review quiz.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

- Completion of review with a portfolio of ideas for implementation.
- Development of lesson plans.
- Student projects.
- Unit plans and examples of various differentiated activities.
- Harcourt Theme 4 Holistic Assessment and Everyday Math End of Year Review quiz.

**TIME LINE**

- September - June

1. Completion of Unit 1 by October 30, second by December 30, third by January 30, fourth by February 28 and fifth by April 30.
2. Submitted outlines to supervisor in lesson plan attachment.

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**Teacher's Signature**

**Date**

**Supervisor's Signature**

**Date**
APPENDIX D

SAMPLES OF THE LANGUAGE ARTS FRAMEWORK
APPENDIX D: SAMPLES OF THE LANGUAGE ARTS FRAMEWORK

Teachers used the Language Arts Framework to develop objectives for their lesson plans. Some of the teachers used the corresponding letters and numbers instead of writing out the words. For example, if a teacher wanted to use “Apply sophisticated understanding of phonetics to unfamiliar and complex words” in her lesson plan she might write B1. The “B” signifies the Strand and the “1” signifies the Progress Indicator.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Standard 3.1 (Reading)</th>
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A. **Concepts about Print:**

(T) 1* Use a text index and glossary appropriately.

(T) 2* Survey and explain text features that contribute to comprehension (e.g., headings, introductory and concluding paragraphs).

(C) 3. Recognize purposes and uses for print conventions such as paragraphs, end-sentence punctuation, and bold print.

(T) 4. Recognize and use common print formats to obtain information, e.g. newspapers, magazines.

**TEST SPECIFICATIONS**

(C) Interpret textual conventions

B. **Phonological Awareness**

(C) 1. Apply sophisticated understanding of phonetics to unfamiliar and complex words.

C. **Decoding and Word Recognition**

(M) 1* Adjust reading speed appropriately for
APPENDIX E

COMMON SCIENCE TRANSCRIPT
APPENDIX F: COMMON SCIENCE TRANSCRIPT

Episode 1: Question and Response

810  L: Yeah. Now do we want to switch for common science?
811  C: No.
812  E: Yeah.
813  L: Ever? Do we ever want to switch for common science?
814  C: No.
815  D: No.
816  ((Collective LGH))

Episode 2: Rationale

817  C: No, because you know what, no ones checking it right now, and no
one/
818  D: I say it’s the biggest waste of time.
819  E: And we’re teaching the landforms through social studies, right?
820  C: Uhhuuuh
821  (3 sec. pause)
822  D: We’re not teaching anything having to do with ours, but we don’t know
what/we don’t know what the hell we’re doing.
823  E: Yeah and then we asked them in the last day and we said, ‘Ok so what’s
the difference?’/

Episode 3: Are you done?

824  L: Are you almost done/
825  E: //’And they were still like, what are you talking about?’
826  L: //with common science, are you guys done?
827  E: Yeah.
828  D: We are now. ((D LGH))
829  C: Us too.

Episode 4: What now?

830  L: So what should we do?
831  M: Are you guys done? Why don’t we just use that time for ASK practice.
832  C: Yeeeah. ((Clapping))
833  E: Okay.
834  D: ((WHS)) Don’t tell Arthur I (inaudible).
835  C: But make sure you are doing that in case he does walk in, you can say
we agreed to do ASK practice during/
836  M: This week?
837  C: You could do your tests.
Episode 5: Should we ask?

838  L: Do you think we should ask?
839  D: No.
840  C: No.
841  B: Never ask
842  M: No, because he’s the one that recommended that I teach ASK when//
843  C: Lisa, no.
844  D: Yep. No, we’re not asking. We’re not telling. If you tell, I’ll break your
legs.
845  ((Collective LGH))
846  L: What I’m going to go and say, I just want to tell you something.
847  C: I’m the rat of the fifth Grade. ((LGH))
848  L: I know right. ((LGH))
849  B: Write a note. It’s a secret note.
850  L: Yeah. Okay.
851  D: An anonymous letter.

Episode 6: Let’s move on

852  E: Oh, it’s almost time.
853  C: I know but we have to talk about Ancestor Feast so that I’m still in line//
854  L: So then I’m scribbling this out.[Referring to what she had written on the
Meeting Plan/Agenda]
(GLM 10, 1/26/06)
APPENDIX F

TOPICS OF INQUIRY TRANSCRIPT
APPENDIX F: TOPICS OF INQUIRY TRANSCRIPT

Episode 1: Lisa’s Idea

44 L: ...I have something else I want to talk about next too, if that’s okay?
45 B: You’re just a busy little person.
46 L: Well, I was trying to think of things this morning so we could just talk the whole time. [5 sec. pause] Topics.
47 D: Is this a different point?
48 L: Mm-hmm.
49 D: Are we discussing three points?
50 L: Can we talk about what to do if parents don’t sign up? How we can scale down topic projects?
51 B: Do you have any assistants in your room?
52 L: Mm-hmm.
53 B: So there’s another adult in the room.
54 L: One other adult. [2 sec. pause] What do you guys think of this idea? Because we’re doing the Holocaust. I was thinking about//and all the novels kind of are like//they’re not personal narratives//one of them is but like, how about a main character who goes through events. I think it’d be cool to have each group to make like a photo album? Or is that dull?
55 B: How about family trees? Do you do the family trees, at all?
56 L: With my kids?
57 B: Oh, I don’t know about you, your//
58 D: I need ideas.
59 B: //international feast or something. Do the family trees with that?
60 L: I’m not big on family trees, being that I don’t want to put anyone in an uncomfortable situation. And I just can’t//I just don’t want to.
61 D: Yeah.
62 M: Do you mean like a photo album or like scrapbook, like other stuff too or/
63 L: Mm-hmm.
64 M: Okay.
65 L: Like as the character like, keeping a photo album, scrapbook, diary.
66 D: I can’t spell.
67 E: Yeah. No, I think that’s//Carrie gave me//
68 D: How do you spell// [pointing to word for Marianne to see]
69 B: Of the character or the person in your class?
70 M: Yeah. [referring to Delia’s question]
71 E: The characters in the book, right?
72 B: Oh, Okay.
73 L: Like, as they go through the narrative.
74 D: Where are you getting the pictures from?
75 L: They could go to the Internet.
76 D: Internet. Okay.
L: Because they are real concentration camps like the one, one person’s at Auschwitz or like, ya know.

D: Yes.

L: Am I saying it right? Auschwitz?

B: Auschwitz

L: Um ya know, so I think that if they go down to the [computer] lab and get books and stuff, they could actually get pictures and say like, “This is me with” // and it’d have to be factual. So it would be research-based and also be book research-based because they have to know from their book. Do you think that’s Okay?

Episode 2: The Response

D: I’m going to tell you something and not to discourage you from/

L: No, I want/

D: //because I think it’s great idea but

[3 sec pause]

M: You’re going to have to be really careful with pictures if you Google that.

L: I know.

D: That’s the first thing and the second thing is that I already had a call from a parent saying that last year in Library, Mrs. Murphy did a unit on the study of the Holocaust/

L: mmhm

D: //And her child had nightmares.

E: Yeah, I heard about that. Thought that people were going to come and get her out of her house.

D: Soooo

E: Yeah

L: I talked to the parents that I was concerned about/

D: Oh, you did? Okay.

L: But um. But I still do have to be careful.

D: Yeah. Because, you know, it’s//I think uum/

M: You could bookmark pages.

E: I’ve got a great packet.

L: That’s a good idea.

E: I’ve done a great packet for you too in that.

L: Okay.

M: Okay?

D: But/

E: That’s very kid-like.

D: //I’m not sure//well, I think that some kids um have the maturity level or, I guess, sympathy or empathy. Sympathy or empathy?

B: Empathy?

D: I think it’s more empathy.

L: Yeah.
D: Where I think they’re [some students] super, super sensitive. And for a 10-year-old to deal with the fact that people are like snatched out of their homes and killed for no reason//I don’t know. Because I actually, a couple of years ago, I wanted to do a project about this. And I got a couple of parents who were like, “No way.” So, I mean, you just have to be careful. That’s it.

M: mmhmm

Episode 3: Other Ideas, Country in a Box

L: Do you guys have any other ideas//

M: I was thinking, what about//

L: //for like a project that would be an on-going thing?

[C joins the meeting she was talking with other people in the background. The meetings are held in her room]

M: “A Country in a Box” I started asking Robin to start collecting the Xerox paper boxes//

L: The what?

M: //and then make a country in a box. Like in pairs, I was going to maybe have//for Europe, do//like on the Internet, or wherever they want to gather their information, like//

L: That’s a very good idea.

M: //find things about their particular country and put them in the box and then present it to the class. So they can have pretty much anything that they researched about//

D: Like actual things or//?

M: Well, it//I mean, that might be hard//

L: That’s a good idea.

M: //because it might be like//

C: Can they draw it or make it up what you might find there?

M: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So they might make, you know, a water bottle if it’s, ya know, Poland or whatever. You know what I’m saying? Like, it doesn’t necessarily need to be things that//

C: Yeah.

M: Because, you know, the ones that’s going to have like//My grandmother went to Canada and//

C: You know the scrapbook, probably do the//

((ELGH))

M: Yeah, here’s a whole bottle of Gucci perfume, and there you have it.

L: No, no, that’s safer than my idea.

C: What’s safer? [Carrie asked what was safer because she joined the meeting late. She had been meeting with the school psychologist about a student in her class so she was not at the meeting when Lisa’s original idea was discussed]

D: I think your idea is a great idea.
135  C: What are these for?
136  L: But you have a good point.
137  D: Topics. Topics of Inquiry
138  L: I'm glad you brought it up but I just wasn't sure.

Episode 4: Reiteration of Lisa's Idea

139  C: What was your idea? Hey there, what's your idea?
140  L: Well, I was going to//I'm doing novels about the Holocaust. //
141  C: Okay.
142  L: //And because I know it's a sketchy thing to study, but I did it last year. And some of my lowest kids were so interested//
143  C: Sure.
144  L: //So why not try it again. I was like, you know, 'Why not try it again?'
So, I picked books, like I have two that are more on the descriptive side and I
have two that are on the safe side, like Lily's Crossing, has to kind of do with
that, but not really. And I thought the sense like, who I thought maybe
wouldn't be able to handle. And when I did my book talks at the same time, I
said like, 'I need you to be honest now because I don't want you to be, you
know//'
145  C: Sure, upset later.
146  L: //upset about it.' So, I was thinking of having them do like a photo album
or scrapbook as their topic of inquiry.

Episode 5: Food

147  C: Of what? Can I have one of these, whose ever they are? Can I?
148  R: Yeah.
149  L: Either//
150  C: They're not good?
151  ((D and B and E LGH while C tries cracker))
152  C: They're kind of like rabbit food.
153  D: I know.
154  C: Ga ahead
155  L: Like a scrapbook of like, their//of the events in the story. Photo album,
like, you know, if you go on a trip, you keep one. It would be like//of their//
156  [C makes a face while eating the cracker]
157  ((LGH))
158  B: Get a drink.
159  L: //of their experiences.
160  C: Yeah, you might get used to it.
161  ((E LGH))
162  C: Or maybe a herb-flavored.
163  ((E LGH))
164  C: Did you ever see the scrapbooks?
165  L: Yeah, I have one.
C: We would like them a little seasoned next time.
L: Yeah, definitely. This cream cheese is so good.
C: What’s that?
L: It’s cream cheese/chive and onion cream cheese.
C: Oh see it could go with the cracker.
L: Yeah it is really good.

Episode 6: Another Scrapbook Idea

C: You know what? Did you see the scrapbook last year, like, when I didn’t have enough parents for topics of inquiry did I show you the scrapbook?
E: Yeah, I have/I have a couple in my room that you gave me.
C: The samples?
E: The samples. They’re great.
C: It goes along with the story and they have to make a scrapbook like it’s their diary of/and ya know, it was a plane crash and they put like a piece of cardboard cutout. They did it all black, like it went on fire. And they taped it into, ‘This is the plane I was on. That’s the only part left to it.’ That, you know, was/is there. And, ‘I was in the mountains and, you know, I had to use my compass to find my way.’ There’s going to be like a compass and they had to write about why that was important in the book. So, that would be really good for those books.
L: That’s//keep my idea but it’s safer as well.
C: Oh, definitely. Because you don’t want your scrapbook of like horrible things of the Holocaust.
L: Yeah.
C: Like you know, this is whatever a book might mention. Hey, and they can send in the main character, keeping the journal of what’s going on through the book and what they’re doing.
L: What do you guys think of that? Do you think//like a compromise almost.
E: Yeah.
C: You know what, do you have//do you have samples of it?
E: Yup, I have samples also. I’ll bring them to you.
C: I saved//my kids//some really good samples.
L: Yeah, cause because I wouldn’t/I can I have them for Thursday? I want to introduce it.
C: Oh, definitely. And you know what, (inaudible) left here.
D: What was Carrie’s idea now?
L: Similar to mine, but it would be so true to the story, that they would say like, you know that’s the piece of the shirt that I chose. Rather than here is the picture of me being/
D: Oh, good.
... [Carrie got up to get a sample of the scrapbook and began to go through it. While she was going through it she realized that the scrapbook she chose to share was more like a journal. The scrapbook journal was based on the book,
Behind Enemy Lines by Barbara A. Somervill. The book was about a pilot, Scott O’Grady, whose plane crashes in Bosnia and how he survives.

C: My Days in Bosnia. Now, this was about Scott O’Grady, his plane crashing. And he [the student] kept a journal. He says, [the student writes] ‘While I was lying on the ground a herd of cows came along,’ and they did that for the cows. This was the plane he [Scott O’Grady] was on, that’s the burnt piece of the plane wing. And he’d [the student] write, ‘While I was flying with the, with Wilbur, I was caught by the Bosnia Serbs. A missile hit me. This is all that’s left of the plane. This is a parachute. And this//each child can do for every single book. And this would be like, ya know, either once a week or twice a week. Marjorie used to do it, our fourth grade teacher [who is no longer at the school]. After the book was done, they would brainstorm 15 scenes and 15 objects they would write about and the last week when you had no more reading to do, every day during reading for one hour a day, they made this. So it only took five one hour//

B: She never had parents come.

C: //She never had parents, this was //and last year when I couldn’t get some parents. I did this for topics of inquiry because it’s still a project. And this is like the bag that you save things, you know, wrap themselves in a bag. They did all different pictures. Like look at it. It’s cute. Because Oh and they//they have these. You have the picture? They would make a scene if there was nothing else. And then they would add some things. These are the leaves. Here’s his necklace that he remembers his wife by or his girlfriend by. They kept them safe. Pictures of him and the President, that’s really him. So//Oh yeah, there’s some - it’s him in his division. And this is for Twice Taken which is one of our mystery books that the kids did last year and they just wrote everything out. She kept the journal, she didn’t scrapbook it, she journalled it. And this is her diary, ‘School started today. This is, you know, what I did.’ So they could do one of the other. I know what this is. I think it’s just empty. This is the scrapbook that going to be finish. It’s about Amy had a dream she was in a glass cage. This is low level I can tell. This is about Amy noticed her mom was acting unusual. And this is if you can’t - they don’t have the ideas to collect things. I have these things just photocopied//

L: Um hum

C: //and they would do it this way. For your lower level students who maybe are not as creative. So you photocopy this and then we draw like 15 scenes. Write about, see how they did it? What are the 15 scenes? Amy’s dream; Amy’s mom acting funny. Doing (inaudible) gymnastics. So it’s the first step. So you could do this towards the end or you could do this all throughout.

L: I want to do it every week.

C: Yeah, eve//so you could do it Tuesday and Wednesday, discussions circles. Thursday, every Thursday, for reading for one hour is this. I told you when Laura was in the class? But this you could hear a pin drop. They don’t act up, they don’t talk, they love doing it. So, it works really well. So this is if you don’t want parents to come in your first year or if//
202  
C: Yeah, what if you don’t have parents because you’re still doing the project.

203  
L: Okay. I like both ideas. My only question on what you just said is can you do it in groups?

204  
C: This? I never did. The kids take a lot of pride in doing it themselves.

205  
B: Well, maybe they can come up with the 15 pictures as a group.

Episode 7: A Creative Catalogue, Idea 4

206  
C: For 15, yeah. Come up with your 15 ideas as a group, then go do your own. They can also do the creative catalog, which is a small book, you know, the half of white one? They come up with 15 objects they wanted to sell from their book. Do you have those too?

207  
E: Mm-hmm.

208  
C: Okay. It’s 15 items they want to sell, like the plane and you’d put//this was important it would//it actually comes with a catalog page like you’re reading a magazine and you would glue it in. You draw a picture of the plane. You put like the price like $2 million. This was important in the book but this is the plane Scott O’Grady was driving when//flying when he got shot down. The next page, this is the parachute. This is the parachute he flew down in and I would sell it for $29.95. And that becomes a creative catalog. They can also do that.

209  
L: OK

210  
M: That’s cute too.

The teachers began to discuss the location of some books. Towards the end of the meeting Lisa brought up the Topics of Inquiry project ideas again.

Episode 8: Lisa Decides on a Country in a Box

780  
L: Should I do the Country in a Box or the scrapbook for my//?

781  
C: Can you do both?

782  
L: Oh, for that? [referring to bringing the ideas to the SS committee]

783  
C: Give them a choice.

784  
M: You could do scrapbook for like, anything. But Europe is//has so many countries, you know.

785  
L: Well, the books are like, there//one is Poland, one is Holland.

786  
D: I think I like the country in a box, but//

787  
B: Whatever it is.

788  
D: I was going to do Greek Olympics, but that’s too involved.

789  
L: One and two are Hungary. Should I do that, do you think?
M: It's fun. I did it for New Jersey.
C: What did you do it for?
M: I did County in a Box. They get so into it. And they collect things then put it in the box. Or they draw things or research things.
L: I'm going to do that. Right. Okay, that's cute. I'll do that. I just don't know, this morning I was like, thought I had the best idea in the world, but you guys are right.
D: It is a great idea. It is a great idea.
L: For like, eighth grade.
C: What idea?
D: I think you can still do it, but you just have to limit, kind of//
APPENDIX G

MY HAIR IS FALLING OUT TRANSCRIPT
Episode 1: My hair is falling out

241  C: Spandex, afro, pick in the hair, tight pants.
242  D: I have no hair. I went to the dermatologist last week//
243  B: //oh, what did he say?
244  D: He said, yeah, you're definitely losing your hair.
245  B: Really? Why? Nutritional?//
246  D: He's running//
247  C: Is there anything you can take?
248  M: Stress?
249  D: //I've got to get a blood test.
250  E: Oh, yeah.

Episode 2: Have You Tried?

251  B: Biotin is a vitamin for hair and it can't hurt.
252  D: I've been taking it. It's in that Hair, Skin and Nails from GNC, right?
253  B: Yeah
254  D: I've been taking it for two months.
255  B: Biotin?
256  D: umhum
257  C: What if you started taking//I know this sounds so funny//prenatal vitamins?
   Prenatal vitamins grow the world's like thickest hair and nails.
258  R: Oh, yeah, that's right.
259  C: When I'm pregnant my hair is like crazy. Wild woman [12:58]
260  E: ((LGH))
261  R: Well, it's the hormones that make your hair like that.
262  C: But the prenates also/the prenatas have the folic acid that make your hair
   really thick and strong and grow.

Episode 3: I'm Very Upset

263  D: I don't know. But I'm very upset about it.
264  C: And what did he say?
265  B: He said go get a blood test.
266  C: Did he say you could use Rogaine?
267  D: He said to/`
268     C: [Propecia]
269     D: //There's a physiological reason why your hair is falling out, so
   there's something wrong.
Episode 4: What About Your Mom?

270  C: Does your mom have thinning hair?
271  D: My mom went to the dermatologist for it. So the dermatologist told her that her hair is not falling out.
272  B: Oh.
273  D: But he//
274  C: So, obviously, you both went to the dermatologist so there is//
275  D: //It may just be a hormonal thing.
276  C: Oh, really?

Episode 5: The Blood Test

277  D: //He pulled the top of my hair//
278  M: My gosh.
279  C: And it came right out//yeah, you should go get a blood test just to make sure.
280  R: So when are you getting the blood test?
281  D: Today.
282  C: You are? Oh, good.
283  Multiple: Good.
284  B: It could just be a hormonal imbalance.

Episode 6: It's Very Upsetting

285  D: I can't//I mean, I used to//two months ago I had thick//
286  C: //It's only in like two months it's coming out?
287  D: Yes. I cut two inches off my hair because I thought maybe it was unhealthy.
288  C: Yes.
289  D: It just keeps falling out.
290  E: Oh.
291  D: But it is really upsetting.
292  C: It is.
293  E: Yes. Oh, absolutely.
294  C: It is. It's horrifying. And when you can grab handfuls in the shower it's disgusting.
295  D: I went home and cried.
296  C: Yeah.
297  ((Sigh)) [5 sec. pause]

Episode 7: But Anyway

298  D: But anyway//what are we on.... So point being, I won't be having any//[2 sec. pause] //We, I won't be having any sort of afro. (GLM 2)
APPENDIX H

THE HUMPING SANTA CLAUS TRANSCRIPT
APPENDIX H: THE HUMPING SANTA CLAUS TRANSCRIPT

Episode 1: The Humping Santa Claus

621  C: There's a humping Santa Claus//Mr. and Mrs. Claus in the bathtub singing, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town?"
622  L: Can I tell you what I did with that? That was mine.
623  B: Who got that one?
624  L: Me.
625  C: That was great. I was going to get that. You took that home.
626  L: Oh yeah.
627  B: Oh, okay.
628  L: I re-wrapped it, and I wrote//my brother's girlfriend is coming for the first Christmas this year, huge family thing. So I wrote, "To Amanda, Welcome to the family. Love, Gram." My grandma!
629  C: Love, Gram! Oh no! That's great!
630  M: That is funny.
631  L: So now she's going to think she's getting something from my grandma, in front of everyone. She's going to open it//
632  C: //open it and be like, "Thanks, grandma!"
633  E: Oh yeah.
634  L: My grandma's going to//my grandma's going to freak out.
635  C: That's good. You have to admit. That's a good idea. I love stuff like that.
636  E: That is really funny.
637  C: That's good.
638  D: That poor girl.
639  E: Oh my gosh.
640  D: Oh my god.
641  L: It's going to be funny.

Episode 2: Carrie's Family Holiday Story

642  C: My sister brought her boyfriend who's a little nuts//they're not together anymore//last Thanksgiving//a year ago Thanksgiving, to my family who's loud and obnoxious. And he bought a fart machine//
643  E: Huh?!?
644  C: //and put it under the dining room table, and the remote in his pocket. So my Aunt Helen who we all can't stand//my mother's sister who's as obnoxious as they come, and um very proper. she'll just sit all properly. We're all like, 'Whaaa!' Every time she moved he'd like, 'Prrrrrt!' ((GRP LGH)) And she'd like, 'That wasn't me!' 'And we're like yeah right.' Through the entire dinner and dessert, he had this thing drop bombs. We were dying. And this is the first time//
645  E: That's so//That is funny.
646  C: //meeting the entire family.
B: No wonder he doesn’t come around anymore.
C: Well he was fun but he got a little nutty. He’s a little too much/

Episode 3: And I Thought My Family was Psychotic

D: And I thought that my family was psychotic.
L: Oh geez. My family is right up there.
D: I feel so much better.
C: Spend the holiday at our house.
D: I feel so much better. Lisa’s giving humping Santa Clauss to people. I don’t know what’s going on.
L: From my grandma/
C: That’s the best part.
E: Yeah.
M: That’s hysterical.
L: She’ll like it, she’s//my grandma’s got a real good sense of humor.
C: Yeah, that’s the best part.
L: I hope.
C: Oh yeah.
L: She will. She’s//she likes stuff like that.
C: And it’s grandparents, looks like, having sex so it’s even funnier.
L: Well I thought that it would just be funny. She’d be like, ‘Oh thanks gram,’ because you know she’s like, the head of the family//
C: Yeah.
L: This new girl’s coming to Christmas//
C: Yes. The matriarch of the family.
L: Oh yes. Everyone will be watching.
C: Yeah.
M: It’s a good initiation.
C: It’s a great initiation.
M: Yeah.
L: She’s a cool girl. She can handle it. My brother will love it. Everyone will love it.
C: Who brought that?
L: Lara.
D: Thank god my boyfriend’s family//I don’t understand a damn word they’re saying. They could be laughing hysterically at me but I don’t understand a word they’re saying.
APPENDIX I

LESSON PLAN AND DAILY BULLETIN ANNOTATED EPISODES
APPENDIX I: LESSON PLAN AND DAILY BULLETIN ANNOTATED

EPISODES

Episode 1: Talk about Bulletin
Delia brought up that the teachers were supposed to be talking about the Language Arts framework because it was written on the bulletin.

Episode 2: You’re on the Committee
Betty, somewhat sarcastically, said that Carrie was on the language arts committee so she should tell the grade-group what they were supposed to talk about.

Episode 3: What the bulletin says. How are you assessing.
Carrie explains what she thinks is meant by “how are you assessing if students have a conflict?”

Episode 4: What were the questions?
Delia asks about the questions that were listed on the bulletin.

Episode 5: I read the bulletin
Lisa offers to pull the bulletin off the computer but Carrie says it is not necessary because she has read it.

Episode 6: What does he want?
Teachers try to figure out what Arthur wants and in what context they are supposed to be asking students the questions.

Episode 7: Teachers’ observations
Betty suggests that it is observations he wants. Lisa says, “Oh great, I can’t wait for mine.”

Episode 8: Carrie tells a story
Carrie tells a story about when a special education supervisor came into her class to observe Paula (the special education teacher who works in Carrie’s room) and how rude the supervisor was because she kept looking through Carrie’s desk.

Episode 9: Getting back to the task
Betty nudges the group to get back on task.

Episode 10: Using the Language Arts Framework to get your lesson plan objectives
Lisa suggests using the Language Arts Framework indicators as your objectives

Episode 11: Give me an example
Delia wants an example of an objective. Lisa goes to her room to get her lesson plans.
Episode 12: How Ellen and Lisa do it
Ellen and Lisa show how they write all of their objectives for the week up front.

Episode 13: How Betty does it
Betty puts all of her objectives for the week at the end and does not write the objective out. She just puts the indicator letter and number. (see Language Arts Framework, Appendix D).

Episode 14: What letters?
Marianne asks where Betty got the letters and numbers.

Episode 15: Where are your objectives?
Clarification of where the objectives are in the lesson plan and that Ellen, Lisa, and Betty get the objectives right off the framework.

Episode 16: In case Archie asks
Ellen reports to the group that Arthur told her he wanted the objective to come straight from the Language Arts framework incase Archie (the district’s Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction) comes in.

Episode 17: That’s okay with him?
Carrie questions how just writing down the indicator makes it an objective.

Episode 18: Arthur’s comments
Ellen says that Arthur’s comments are that he loves her plans. Carrie says that she writes so much more than Ellen and she gets Post-Its that say “how are you assessing?” and then she throws the Post-Its in the garbage. Then, she hands in the same thing the next month and gets no post-it comments or just “thank you, great plans”

Episode 19: What are your procedures?
Carrie asks Ellen where she puts her procedures or by what means she is going to meet the objectives.

Episode 20: Let me show you
Ellen tries to show Carrie where the “how” is in her lesson plans.

Episode 21: He puts “how” on mine. Never on mine.
Carrie says she is asking because Arthur’s post-it comments include “how will that be done?” Ellen says that he never puts that comment on hers.

Episode 22: What objective are you doing?
Betty asks where in the plans does it show what activity is meeting what objective.
Ellen says it is next to her objective. Marianne asks if these are Language Arts and reading. Lisa says they are Language Arts, grammar and writing.
Episode 23: But where’s the how?
Carrie asks again. But where is the how?

Episode 24: But he says, “how”
Carrie says Arthur puts a post-it comment on her plans that says, “how.” Lisa confirms that yes he sometimes does.

Episode 25: Or he says your “how” shouldn’t be in your objective
Marianne offers another comment she gets from Arthur is that the “how” should not be in the objective. Lisa agrees and says she used to get that comment too but now since she does it this way, using the language arts indicators, her procedures are separate.

Episode 26: But look Carrie
Ellen is still trying to show Carrie where her procedures are in the lesson plans.

Episode 27: Just kidding.
Carrie tells Marianne to stop reading her post-it notes and then says I’m only kidding. I could care less.

Episode 28: But look Carrie again.
Ellen continues to show Carrie where her procedures are in the lesson plans.

Episode 29: That’s exactly what I do.
Carrie says “That’s exactly what I do.”

Episode 30: Why so many objectives?
Delia asks Lisa why she has so many objectives. Lisa says because they are for the week.

Episode 31: That’s exactly what I do
Carrie continues to explain how what Ellen does is just what she does. But she hates it when she gets the “how.”

Episode 32: So do these help you?
Marianne asks Lisa if writing the objectives from the framework helps. Ellen answered that is makes it easier for her because she gets much fewer post-it notes.

Episode 33: Crosstalk, paper work.
Betty and Delia talk about how Arthur loves paper work.

Episode 34: What to write on the Minutes
Lisa asks the group what to write the minutes. She and Carrie craft what to write.

Episode 35: I did too much in my observation
Ellen tells the group that she did too much for her observation.
Episode 36: I’m not questioning to be mean
Carrie apologizes for challenging Ellen, and says she was not questioning Ellen to be mean. She was questioning it for her own understanding.

Episode 37: Delia you’re under arrest
Delia’s boyfriend is outside of Carrie’s room and Carrie tells Delia in mid-sentence. Delia’s boyfriend is a police officer.

Episode 38: Let’s see your lesson plans Carrie.
Betty asks to see Carrie’s lesson plans.

Episode 39: Remember at the Christmas party
Marianne tells the group about the Christmas party Delia answered her boyfriend, when asked if she could sleep with anyone who would it be?

Episode 40: Carrie, yours are so long because yours are six week units
Ellen notices that Carrie’s plans are for six week long units. And Lisa and her plans are for one week. That is why Carrie’s are so much longer.

Episode 41: Carrie goes through how she does her lesson plans
Carrie goes through how she does her lesson plans and winds up stating that she was wondering during the entire discussion why her plans were so much longer than everyone else. Even though Ellen informed her in line 571 that hers were six week units and theirs were one week, Carrie continued going over her lesson plans and saying “that is why mine are so long, now I get it.”
APPENDIX J

LESSON PLAN AND DAILY BULLETIN TRANSCRIPT
APPENDIX J: LESSON PLAN AND DAILY BULLETIN TRANSCRIPT

Episode 1: Talk about bulletin

358 D: Um. I hate to rain um, on everybody’s parade and everything but we’re supposed to be talking about Language Arts. I saw it in the bulletin.
359 C: What about it?
360 D: I don’t know.
361 B: We’re supposed to talk about the language arts framework.
362 L: All right.
363 C: Okay.

Episode 2: You’re on that committee

364 B: You’re on that committee.
365 C: Yeah.
366 B: Talk about it//
367 C: Go.
368 B: //in notes, in bullets//
369 C: 30 seconds.
370 B: //I want bullets. One bullet, two,
371 C: Bullet one, we should be//

Episode 3: What the bulletin says

372 B: How are you assessing? Isn’t that//what would that//how are you assessing that the children have a conflict?
373 C: By our assessment in the lesson. The lesson assessment is to grasp meaning from the context clues. Then my assessment would be do they understand the vocabulary through the questions at the end of the story. I mean, I don’t think we need to make a separate assessment to see if they’re gaining knowledge of things that we already know, just because in the language arts assessment under what they should know at the end of fifth grade, should be context clues. Ya know, they’re gaining meaning from context clues. I’m not going to make a separate assessment for that. After you read, your Harcourt story, it asks you vocabulary words. You should know them from the context clues in the story. So, don’t make a separate assessment.

Episode 4: What were the questions?

374 D: What were those questions like, did they//does the learner understand the purpose of a lesson? Um [2 sec pause]
375 L: Right.
B: Those questions on does the learner understand the purpose of the lesson? Why are they learning this?
C: Why are they learning? What is the purpose of the lesson?
B: What challenged him?
C: Who’s answering it, them or us?
L: The kids are/
D: Kids are supposed to be able to answer.
C: Okay.

Episode 5: I read the bulletin

L: Hold on, Carrie. I’ll pull off the bulletin.
C: No I saw it.
L: Oh, you did?
C: I actually read it. Look at that.
B: It was yesterday’s/
C: Yesterday is//30 days. I actually read yesterday’s. Answer the questions. What is the purpose and lesson? What am I gaining from it? What challenge//what was I challenged in?

Episode 6: What does that mean?

B: Self-assessment?
C: Yeah, what can we do, can’t we just ask them that? I mean does he want to see that written down somewhere. Should I type those questions out and give it out after a lesson that I taught to see what they’ve gotten? [1 sec. pause] In what context do they want that given?
B: I don’t know, you read the bulletin.
D: Apparently, he asked someone that.

Episode 7: Teachers Observations

B: Evidently, it’s observations he’s asking.
L: Oh Great. I can’t wait for mine.

Episode 8: Carrie tells a story
[12:56 – 15:05]
Carrie tells the group about Carol, a district representative from Special Education, who came into her room to observe Paula (a special education teacher who worked with Carrie). Carol sat at Carrie’s desk during the observation and went through the drawers and read papers on Carrie’s desk. Carrie had been friends with the women when she was in the classroom but was appalled at her disrespectful behavior. The anecdote was told in a good natured way and people laughed. It definitely relieved some tension.
Episode 9: Getting back to the task

427  B: Anyway, back to//
428     C: Are those spicy?
429  L: Yeah.
430  C: Okay.

Episode 10: Using the Language Arts Framework to get your lesson plan objectives

431  L: So, the language arts framework. If you use them in the objectives, you can assess it that way.
432  E: I mean, I use//all my objectives are right from that page?
433  L: Yeah, so, if you say//
434     E: And then I put next to it like where I’m doing it.
435  L: //If you say the students will be able toooo, whatever.

Episode 11: Give me an example

436  D: Give me an example of an objective.
437  E: All right, do you want me to get them?
438  D: Oh, okay.
439  L: I have//yeah my plans are right next door.
440  M: Yeah, I would like to see your plans, how you’re writing it.
441  L: Sure.
442  C: I write it next to it. I write the objectives and I hardly think//

Episode 12: How Ellen and Lisa do it.

443  B: She writes all//Ellen writes all the objectives for the entire week first//

444  C: That’s wonderful.
445  B: And then her reading is, you know, they will read chapter two of 20 and 10, answer questions, but she will list 15 objectives first//

446     M: And that’s for the whole week?

447  L: That’s what I do. I do the same thing.
448  C: So, she knows what she wants to cover for the week.
449  B: Right.
450  C: Okay.
451  L: So, he says that your objective should be, you know, connected to your, your evaluation. So, if the framework is your objective then, however, you evaluate it//

452 B: And I do my objectives after my lesson.
453 C: Yeah.
454 L: You're evaluating it.
455 B: I do the student will learn and will read Chapter two in 20 and 10,
    Comprehension questions G12, H17 and A4. I figure if he wants to know
    what the objectives are, he can look back and I wasn't writing out all the
    objectives. I just do the letters.

Episode 14: What letters?

456 M: Yeah, okay, what letters are they? G12 is?
457 B: Well, I don't know// [when I write the plans] I have the form in front of
    me.
458 C: The forms from the language arts. Remember I did a//
459 B: I have those. I'm not sure it's in front of me/
460 L: The long paper?
461 C: //I typed it up in fifth grade/
462 M: Right.
463 C: //which I don’t have anywhere.

Episode 15: Where are your objectives?

464 B: So she lists all her objectives first.
465 M: So, these are all your//?
466 L: Those are all my objectives.
467 L: These are//these are right off of the framework?
468 B: Right. Right off the framework.

Episode 16: In case Archie asks

469 E: That's wha//he [Arthur] he just, ya know, because I was asking him and
    he said just in case Archie comes in, just make sure that you have those and
    what you're doing next and//
Episode 17: That's okay with him?

470 C: What? Just because you type that up means it's an objective? You put it in on a piece of paper? I'm not questioning that. That's okay with him?

Episode 18: Arthur's comments

471 E: I mean, he says, 'Thank you. I love your lesson plans,' like every week. Like that's what he writes on mine.
472 C: I write so much more than that.
473 C: And then I get the post it like 'how are you assessing?'
474 L: Yeeees.
475 C: //and then I throw it in the garbage.
476 E: But see, this is what like/
477 C: But then I give him the same thing next month and it [the post-it] says nothing. No, no// just thank you, thank you, great plans. Make up your mind.

Episode 19: What are your procedures?

478 E: But there are//they are objectives. I mean, that's/
479 C: But do you say by what means you are going to do that?
480 E: Yeah, like look//this is//these are my objectives for the week and this is exactly//this is what I'm doing everyday.
481 C: But you're not saying by what means you're going to do that. I'm going to stand in front of the class//
482 E: What do you mean?
483 C: //and do a mini-lesson.
484 E: Yeah, well// No//yeah, my first//those are my objectives//
485 C: Well what's your procedure?

Episode 20: Let me show you

486 B: Let's see yours. [referring to Carrie's lesson plans]

487 E: My procedure// Can I show you? Here. Look. Carrie, here look. This is my//
488 M: Is this yours? [Asking Lisa]
489 C: I'm just saying because you won't tell me about how you're going to do it//
490  [Inaudible Cross Talk]
491  B: And the Chapter 2 in the novel answers the questions.

Episode 21: He puts "how" on mine. Never on mine.

492  C: Because he puts 'how' on mine. 'How will that be done?' I don't mind what//
493  E: Well, he never does that//

Episode 22: What objective are you doing?

494  B: What I question about yours [referring to Ellen's], her lesson is 'read Chapter two, answer comprehension – comprehension questions//
495  E: I hand in my comprehension questions.

496  M: So, these are your language arts and is this slash reading? Like do you combine them?
497  C: Me, too.
498  B: Oh but//so, I don’t know what objective you’re doing here//
499  L: No, this is language arts and grammar and writing.
500  E: Next to my objectives, I say what I’m doing.

501  M: I do mine day by day
502  E: That is my objective.
503  L: Carrie, the framework is bold, other objectives aren’t.
504  B: Where are your objectives?

Episode 23: But where’s the how?

505  C: The framework, the things that we’re doing today, we’d do in a minute. Yeah, but where’s the how?
506  E: Here. Okay. That’s all.
507  C: Yeah. //So, ‘students will able to evaluate the importance of literary elements in stories.’
508  L: Pretty much every lesson. But then I have the evaluation. I mean, I’m not saying this is the right way but I’m just saying this is what I do.

Episode 24: But he says, "how"

509  C: Well, that’s what I do too, but then sometimes he says 'how?'
510  L: Yeah, sometimes he does, but//
511  C: And I’m like, well, that’s what I think.
512  B: Because she does it in a totally different way.
Episode 25: Or he says your “how” shouldn’t be in your objective

513  **M:** Or, he says, your ‘how’ shouldn’t be in your objective.
514  **L:** Exactly.
515  **E:** It should be a separate procedure.
516  **L:** This isn’t. It’s not. No. It used to be.
517  **C:** I do my objectives. Then what I’m going to do and how I’m going to assess it.
518  **B:** I do the same thing with that. Do you have tenure?

Episode 26: But look Carrie

519  **E:** But see//Carrie, look. Like next to each one//

Episode 27: Just kidding.
520  **C:** Don’t read my Post-Its [Chuckle]. I’m only kidding. I could care less.

Episode 28: But look Carrie again.

521  **E:** //I’m putting next to each objective I’m putting in parenthesis, where I’m doing it, so that when you look at my procedure and you see it//You know where it’s going to be taught.
522  **C:** Okay.
523  **D:** Marchetta [Lisa’s last name], where are//where did yours go?
524  **L:** And so, go to the reading part, the bold is the framework.
525  **E:** So, that’s just like a side note. This is going to be taught in this. So, when we look at my procedure and you see re-check to answer comprehension questions and, you know, the comprehension questions correspond//

Episode 29: That’s exactly what I do.

526  **C:** Through the class novel. That’s exactly what I do. Read some papers, increase in speed accuracy. How are you going to do that and I put through the class novel/

Episode 30: Why so many objectives?

527  **D:** Why do you have so many objectives?
528  **L:** They’re for the week.

Episode 31: That’s exactly what I do

529  //C: Through their group novel, they will//set goals for reading by using their novel to do the da da da. That’s what I did.
530  **E:** Right.
531  C: I hate it when I get the 'how.' I'm like it's right there. Social Studies, text and class novel.

Episode 32: So do these help you?

532  M: So, do you use these Lis? Like that // are you pretty good about using them or do you just write them like that for him?
533  E: Oh no. This is easier for me. I mean, I just//Because I was like, because I thought I was getting a million little sticky notes when I first started. And I was like, 'Oh my God. What am I doing wrong? What am I doing wrong?' And then I talked to a bunch of people and they're like just keep it simple. Just simple, simple, simple, and that's what I did.

Episode 33: Crosstalk, paper work.

534  [inaudible cross talk]: This is like//would blow on some part.
535  C: I think so, too but he's the one, you know. Give him those, he knows.
536  D: They love paper, loves little post its.
537  B: Big on paper work.

Episode 34: What to write on the Minutes

538  L: Maybe we should put on that we compared how we incorporate the the framework//[referring to the Meeting Plan/Agenda]
539  C: Yeah. We each compared our lesson plans, just how we incorporate the language arts framework.

Episode 35: I did too much in my observation

540  B: But don't you notice you get an article in your box at least once a week?
541  D: Yeah.
542  B: You know, I'm his [inaudible].
543  E: In my lesson I did way too much in one period. And I just, you know, looking back I would've cut some things out, you know.
544  C: Yeah.
545  E: Um, and done a much better job. I mean, I felt like he was in there. It was like one of my weakest lessons. And it's worse than when I'm/
546  C: And how was his review? What did he say? Was it okay?
547  E: Yeah. No, it was fine. But it was just, you know, you did cover a lot of information.
548  C: Um-hum.
549  E: Here. And these are the comprehension questions that I used.
550  C: Yeah. I have that.
Episode 36: I'm not questioning to be mean

C: Yeah. This is a//these are nice questions to go along with each one. [2 sec. pause] I'm not questioning it to be mean. I'm actually just questioning it for my own.

E: Oh my God. No. I so don't think that you're// C: //to see how I can shorten mine. Because I feel like I give him a book.
L: Mine is a week.
C: Okay then. Now, this is my six weeks that I hand to him. Okay, here’s my reading objectives.

Carrie goes through how she does her lesson plans and winds up stating that she was wondering during the entire discussion why her plans were so much longer than everyone else. Even though Ellen informed her in line 571 that hers were six week and theirs were one week, Carrie continued going over her lesson plans and saying “that is why mine are so long, now I get it.”
A STUDY OF FIFTH-GRADE TEACHERS’ GRADE-LEVEL MEETINGS:
THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHERS’ GROUP WORK

Rosanne L. Kurstedt, PhD
Fordham University, New York, 2007
Mentor: Rita S. Brause, EdD

As the collaborative work of teachers continues to increase through job-embedded professional development, such as grade-level meetings, the need to understand the complexities of educational settings that promote teachers’ joint work is critical. Therefore, this study investigated the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings of a group of fifth-grade teachers. Analysis of multiple data sources including audiotaped grade-level meetings and teacher interviews, field notes, transcriptions of the grade-level meetings and interviews, and written documents revealed four findings: In the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings, unwritten rules were evident and left unexplored; the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings’ professional discussions were superficial; the informal and casual tone of the institutionally mandated grade-level meetings provided an opportunity for teachers to get to know their grade-level colleagues; and as represented in the institutionally mandated grade-level meeting, teachers avoided conflict. This
conflict-avoidance stance was realized in the grade-level teachers' curriculum
choices and interactions with the principal.

Based on the four findings, four hypotheses were developed with regard to
grade-level meetings specifically, and teachers' group work in general. The first
hypothesis was, if grade-level meetings are to achieve their desired results of
improving and informing professional practice, context and belief factors must be
addressed and reflected upon before, during, and after implementation. The second
hypothesis was that, while educational settings such as grade-level meetings are
established to elicit and support change, they may in fact perpetuate the status quo
when unwritten rules go unchallenged. The third hypothesis was that, if grade-level
meetings are to support the development of professional learning communities,
teachers need to know, internalize, and use critical professional discourse and
reflection skills, both in the grade-level meetings and as part of their daily interactions
and decision making. The fourth hypothesis was that educational settings, such as
grade-level meetings, help build trust among colleagues.

A Three-Dimensional Approach to successful group work was developed
addressing the complexities that became evident throughout the analysis. This
study's import is that enhanced understanding of the activities established to promote
the collaborative work of teachers will increase the likelihood that school reform
efforts that embrace teachers' collaborative work will succeed.
VITA
VITA

ROSANNE L. KURSTEDT

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<th>Date of Birth</th>
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<td>Place of Birth</td>
<td>New York, New York</td>
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<td>High School</td>
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<td>Bachelor of Science</td>
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