USING CROSS-VISITATION TO ELICIT COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY AMONG TEACHERS AND A BUILDING ADMINISTRATOR TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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My journey at Penn GSE started in 2012, when I took Dr. Gerald Campano’s Theories of Reading class as a non-degree student. I remember getting to Philadelphia, parking at the Sheraton and sitting outside the GSE building, not wanting to be too early or at all late. I was welcomed into that class and participated as if I were among the full-time doctoral students sitting beside me. Through that first semester, I met wonderful people who have inspired my work. All of those students have their degrees now, many of them working at Penn or other universities. I want to thank those students for taking me under their wings and helping me along my journey.

The professors at Penn GSE showed me that I could learn on an entirely different level than I ever thought possible. I had the good fortune of taking at least one class with each of the professors in the Reading/Writing/Literacy department, along with other professors in the GSE. Drs. Amy Stornaiuolo, Vivian Gadsden, Ebony Thomas, Diane Waff, and Gerald Campano inspired me to challenge myself to see and try to understand the world in a new way.

Because I had the good fortune to become part of the R/W/L family, I was able to take my principal’s certification at Penn as well. Drs. Earl Ball, Priscilla Dawson, Judy Brody, and Warren Mata taught me so much about school leadership. I continue to look back on that year-long experience, and the students with whom I learned, never forgetting to “step up to the balcony” to truly see what is going on around me.

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I started my career as an English teacher, never thinking that I would get into administration. Many have asked me why I wanted to leave the classroom, the answer to which is simple: I do not consider administration “leaving the classroom;” rather, I see myself as having expanded my classroom so that I can reach more students. I have to thank Drs. Rick Dunlap, Jim Scanlon, Kevin Fagan, and Mrs. Maureen Wallace for their assistance in pushing me toward my leadership role, along with my current superintendent and assistant superintendent. Further, I must thank the team of administrators in the district with whom I work, and most importantly, my colleagues in my school. They make it fun for me to come to work every day and to remember the joy of being an educator when sometimes that becomes difficult.

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going through as a professional and as a person. Mom, thank you for your love of my
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which that home is built. You made it possible for me to have a life that I am proud of.
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Evie, thank you for your understanding of the necessity for me to work on this
project. I am so excited to be able to be present for you—completely present, and to
continue to watch you grow into the beautiful, smart girl that you are becoming. I love you dearly. May you always sparkle and shine.

Leo, you won’t remember much of this process, but I am glad that you will someday understand what it will show you. You can do whatever you want to in this world. I love you little man. May you always remember that.

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And Maggie, my love, my beautiful soulmate…
ABSTRACT

USING CROSS-VISITATION TO ELICIT COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY AMONG TEACHERS AND A BUILDING ADMINISTRATOR TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Richard A. Mitchell Jr.
Diane Waff

The research presented in this study examined what happened when I, as a building administrator, created and supported opportunities for teachers to emerge as leaders with the capacity to support each other, how my engagement with teachers as a building administrator promoted collaborative leadership and learning, and how making the classroom a site for collaborative inquiry influenced the professional learning of four teachers, and myself. These foci were studied through a constructivist framework in which we learned together to collectively improve our practice. Three rounds of collaborative classroom cross-visitations took place through a high school semester in which two math teachers, and two English teachers visited each other’s classrooms with myself, as a building administrator, present. Each round included a pre-conference and a post-conference. Data suggests that the teachers and I benefitted from the process professionally. Additionally, I, as a building administrator, benefitted by learning to observe and evaluate teachers more effectively, while building important professional relationships which enhanced my ability to collaborate in constructing a cohesive community of educators within the research site. Further, logistical records taken from the study illustrate the need for careful and deliberate planning toward the sustainability
of any cross-visitation program. The research illustrates the importance of the
development of teacher-leaders, and of establishing a program through which teachers
can visit each other’s classrooms with a building administrator so that all parties can learn
from each other in a generative and collaborative manner.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The formal-observation system through which teachers and administrators interact equates to the checking of bureaucratic boxes under the direction of higher powers (Zepeda & Ponticell, 2004). Teachers know this, administrators know this. The formal observation system is a dog and pony show through which no real learning can take place in either party’s professional practice. While the routine of formal observations will continue in today’s educational climate, the research embodied in this dissertation attempts to discover and create insight into how the observation system might become more effective, while accentuating teacher and administrator learning practices and creating leadership development in both teachers and building administrators through a detailed cross-visitation process. The study encompassed two tenth grade geometry teachers (Bob and Courtney), two tenth grade English teachers (Hallie and Charles), and a building administrator (myself) collaborating in an inquiry community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) about our educational practices.

The district in which this study took place has experienced nearly insurmountable turmoil through the last decade. The current superintendent has prevented the district’s failure educationally while managing former financial improprieties, racial scandals, and the complete disregard of the district’s facilities by the former central administration. After two years attempting to re-establish the trust of the district’s stakeholders with progressive success, she has now turned her, and thus, administrative and teacher attention to intense, ongoing professional development and pedagogical advancement.
with the aim of improving student achievement. Currently, the district ranks lowest in its county according to the state’s performance rubric. Clearly the district faces an uphill battle as it attempts to compete with its counterparts. District leadership has every intention of fighting that battle on behalf of, and with its students and teachers. Imagining new methods of observing teachers is one way in which this research envisions helping to fight that battle.

The superintendent and assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction are leading six major initiatives in the district: College Preparatory Math (CPM); Literacy Coaching (reading and writing) through the University of Pennsylvania’s Penn Literacy Network (PLN); Units of Study through Teachers College at Columbia University; Word Study through West Chester University; Differentiated Instruction through Kutztown University; and Inclusion through a nationally recognized consultant.

The assistant superintendent states that the district’s vision for professional development can ultimately be described by the five predictors of academic success that have been widely shared with district faculty and staff through its collaboration with the PLN (assistant superintendent, personal communication, November 9, 2016). They are: “How much and how widely students read; the depth and breadth of students’ vocabulary; the amount of writing students do; the amount of student talk in the classroom; and the frequency with which teachers hold students (and themselves) accountable through formative assessments” (PLN instructor, personal communication, October 19, 2016). District administration expects success through attention to these predictors which are deeply intertwined in the six professional development initiatives...
currently taking place. Facets of increased expectations for students and staff, a sharp focus on literacy, and student collaboration and inquiry-based thinking should be gleaned from these predictors in order to continue to understand this introduction to the present study. These are key elements the five teacher participants and myself held in mind as we collaboratively made our way through the semester in order to improve our practice.

Housed at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education, the Penn Literacy Network advances a co-constructionist framework through a long-term process of collaboration amongst educators who, through critical reading, writing, and conversations about practice aim to improve student achievement (“About the Penn Literacy Network,” 2016). Similarly, CPM’s pedagogical framework is one that demands collaboration among students to solve problems together so that they learn to understand the why of mathematics; so that “mathematics truly makes sense” (“CPM Educational Program,” 2016). CPM invites students to deeply understand mathematics through mindful struggle and teamwork in inquiry-based classrooms.

Administrators and content area teachers are currently participating in these professional development programs alongside each other. All six programs aim toward the district’s overall vision. The manner in which teachers are encouraged to learn uses as a framework, the predictors of academic success for students and the CPM and PLN philosophies of pedagogy mentioned above. Whenever possible, the assistant superintendent has paired former content area teachers who have become administrators with professional development opportunities that match their base of content knowledge. For example, as a former English teacher, I am part of the PLN initiative, while one of
the assistant principals who was formerly a math teacher works primarily with CPM. In this manner, both the teachers and the administrators have responsibilities for implementing the professional development initiatives in their schools. Administrators are able to relate to the teachers with whom they work, and more importantly, teachers see that administrators know, and have passion for, their content areas.

Daresh (2007) states that any school should have a coherent program of study. Translating this statement to the district, it is finding its “way to [ensuring] that the sum of all courses and learning experiences in [the district] are greater than individual parts.” There is a “sense of a program offered [within the district], not simply a collection of random and disconnected courses” (p. 281). A cohesive vision exists within the district as illustrated above. In the same way that students are expected to collaborate in their learning, teachers and administrators are expected to learn together through professional development experiences, creating an atmosphere of expected academic achievement and success in the district’s schools.

**Research Questions**

Four teachers and myself as a building administrator established and implemented a cross-visitation (Lytle and Fecho, 1991) program through which the classroom became a site of inquiry. We collaboratively investigated our practices in order to understand and improve the education of our students and to augment our professional development experiences. The research questions examined are as follows:
• What happens when I, as a building administrator, create opportunities for teachers to emerge as leaders with the capacity to support each other in an effort to improve teacher practice and student learning?

• How do I, as a building administrator, engage with teachers to promote collaborative leadership and learning?

• How might making the classroom a site of collaborative inquiry influence the professional learning of teachers and my learning as a building administrator?

The fact that the above initiatives are all taking place at the same time, and that they are ongoing throughout the year, including the summer months, illustrates that the district’s central administration expects a multitude of improvements in what amounts to very little time. Teachers are expected to implement what they are learning in professional development experiences. Building administrators are required to attend professional development programs alongside teachers and then to observe classrooms on a regular basis, sometimes with representatives from the different programs.

The research questions for this study were meant to create inquiry into how a building administrator and four teachers might work together to maintain adherence to district-mandated formal observation protocols, ensure the success of the district’s professional development initiatives, all while increasing teachers’ and a building administrator’s capacity to learn and lead within the building. The cross-visitation process implemented through this study blurred the boundaries between teachers and a building administrator (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) who worked collaboratively so
that teachers might emerge as leaders among the faculty, while working together to build professional relationships among themselves.

**The Story of the Question: “Just Tell Me what to do and I’ll do it”**

“It doesn’t matter what you say. I’m going to do what I’m going to do, and you’re going to do what you’re going to do. I’m not worried about ratings.”

I walked into my colleague’s office after completing my formal post-observation discussion with one of the teachers under my leadership and said, “I don’t know what just happened.” He asked me who I had observed; when I told him, he said, “Yeah. I can see that.”

I had never been so utterly confused about anything in my educational career. As I planned the post-observation conference, one of approximately six cumbersome steps in the formal observation process which is based on the Charlotte Danielson Model, I was nervous because I had never seen as poor a lesson as I was going to have to discuss. I worried over it all day, attempting to figure out a starting point. The teacher had given me a lesson plan, and it made perfect sense to me in our pre-observation discussion, but what I observed in the classroom was utter chaos. There were no discernible elements of a lesson; not from the lesson plan or from general teaching practices. I literally (and I do not use that word often) did not know what was happening around me as I sat in the classroom typing notes in the spaces provided by the web-based observation system.

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1 While my colleague’s response is problematic, there is a history with the teacher that offers clarity to the comment. Readers should know that I understand the implications of this comment.
After leaving the observation, I came back to my office and just sat—I took five minutes to process what I had witnessed—unsuccessfully.

A few days later, as I walked down the hall to the post-observation meeting, I still did not know how I would start. I was greeted by the teacher and we sat down at student desks facing each other. After all the planning toward how to start, I unexpectedly put the onus on the teacher: “So how do you think the lesson went?”

The teacher said, “Well, with the exception of the one student who threw the pencil, I thought it went pretty good.”

As they say in the army, a plan is only good until first contact. I had barely made the first contact before I deviated from what was not even a fully developed plan. When I pressed the teacher, inquiring about certain things that happened during the class period, he explained, for example, that he had moved the students who “wanted to learn” to the corner, so that they could do so. When I asked why they could not have been spread out to help the others understand the lesson, he said that they were not here, meaning in school, to learn. At the same time, I realized that there really was nothing to learn in the class as facilitated by the teacher.

And so we came to the comments above, and I was left with the empty question that comes with a sense of defeat: “What am I doing?”

But the question really is not “What am I doing?” Rather, there are a series of questions that come from this experience, particularly when it comes to the formal observation system, professional development, and classroom inquiry: What is not working in the formal observation system? What is not being implemented by the teacher
from all the professional development he has attended? Has this teacher ever thought to himself, “What could I be doing more effectively?” How might I encourage the teacher to inquire about his practice? After I asked how the teacher thought the lesson went and he essentially said “fine,” I asked him if he had read my comments in the post-observation form, which were extensive and had been quite time consuming. He said, “I don’t read those things. They don’t mean anything to me.”

And while I do not think he’s right—he’s right.

When all is said and done, under the official parameters of the state and district’s observation requirements, that formal observation may be the only educational interaction I have with this teacher during the school year. As a building administrator, I would have to make time to visit that teacher again in order to see whether he has affected the changes I suggested; for at one point during the conference, he said in frustration, “Just tell me what you want me to do, and I’ll do it.”

So I told him: “I want you to greet the kids at the door so that they feel welcome, rather than barking at them about their homework; I want you to strategically plan out which kids sit where, so that they can learn together; I want you to stop giving out worksheets and packets for them to fill out for grades.” I ran off a litany of responses and he just sat there listening, or pretending to listen, as he had already told me that he was going to do what he was going to do.

This leaves me, as a building administrator, to figure out how to manage and fix conferences about observations and lesson plans such as the one described above.

But does it?
CHAPTER 2:
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of literature includes empirical studies in the fields of teacher evaluation systems, teacher learning and leadership, and administrator practitioner inquiry in order to create a base of knowledge for and about the cross-visitation process. I have created synopses of the large- and small-scale research studies, using those synopses to frame and inform the current research. At the end of each section, I provide a summary of the articles reviewed and, at the end of the review, I synthesize the lessons learned across the three main sections in order to further frame the current research.

Teacher Evaluation Systems

Kimball, White, Milanowski, and Borman (2004), studied teacher evaluation in Washoe County, NV as part of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The Washoe County school system used the Charlotte Danielson model for its evaluations, but on a much lower-stakes level than other districts that the Consortium had studied, as only seven of 23 components of the evaluation system were used. The study was intended to provide a data-driven understanding of teacher quality to guide evaluation discussions, feedback, and teacher reflection on their instruction. The authors found mixed results in connecting the effectiveness of the evaluation system to student achievement, offering several factors as to why. The fact that the Danielson model was used incompletely illustrated that important information could be missing from the system’s overall reliability. Additionally, the low-stakes understanding of the evaluation system may have impacted teacher responsiveness to the
process. Finally, the evaluation system as traditionally used in Washoe County, is meant to provide positive feedback and help teachers continue to do the things at which they are succeeding, rather than providing critical feedback from which teachers can improve their practice. Finally, there had been no formal training to promote rater consistency for evaluation in the county schools.

Mangin (2016) produced a case study of a teacher leader in order to trouble the use of teacher leadership as a capacity building tool, while also implementing high stakes teacher evaluation, the opposite of the Washoe, NV study. In this study site, the evaluation system is seen as an authoritarian tool which could carry sanctions for low performance on the part of teachers. The teacher-leader was employed full-time with the sole purpose of supporting other teachers’ professional learning. Through a school year-long study, Mangin observed and interviewed the teacher leader extensively, collecting documents which would inform her questions about context conditions, engagement of other teachers by the teacher leader, and how the high-stakes evaluations influenced the teacher leader’s efforts. The teacher leader in the study used a sociocultural framework in which, for example, learners (teachers) must be part of the inquiry process, engaging and reflecting upon what they are learning. They must do so with other teachers in order to “deprivatize practice” (Mangin, 2016, p. 942) and generate dialog about their own and student learning. After the school year, Mangin found that the teacher leader received tremendous support from the district administration, due in part because they had employed her, but rather than motivating teachers to seek and embrace professional development learning opportunities provided by the district and teacher leader, teachers
held tight to the top-down mandates traditional in school systems, a phenomenon which weakened the teacher leader’s ability to help teachers to change their practice for the good of student achievement. Mangin indicates a need for understanding the two approaches to school improvement (teacher leadership and the evaluation system), as well as a need for research in order to understand whether teacher leadership can co-exist with high-stakes teacher evaluation systems. In this case study, the high-stakes evaluation system impeded improvements to teaching and learning.

What transpired in these two studies is illustrative of the factors that catalyzed research by major consortia in Chicago, Philadelphia and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Many of the difficulties found in Washoe County and in the teacher leader case study have been attended to, but not necessarily fixed. The literature that follows in this section speaks to elements discussed in both of the studies above.

The Measure of Effective Teaching (MET) Project produced the most comprehensive examination of the relationship between teacher practice and student success to date. Published by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the report illustrates positive findings gleaned using five instruments including observation models and content area strategies in over 3000 teachers’ classrooms across the country (Kane & Staiger, 2012). Findings include that teachers must be observed multiple times in order for building administrators or teachers themselves to truly understand their level of expertise in practice. Additionally, researchers found that the combination of observation scores with student achievement data and student feedback about perceptions of teacher performance improved the quality and validity of a teacher’s overall rating. Finally,
ratings, as they are completed in this evaluation system, account for better student achievement than either years of teacher experience or teacher’s educational attainment. The report offers important “take-aways” which illustrate that MET work is a continuing process: Clear standards and rater certifications are important; three approaches (multiple classroom observations, feedback from students, and value-added measures) help teachers become more effective; and new approaches to evaluation are better than traditional methods.

The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UCCCSR) and the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) found that new teacher evaluation systems which include evidence-based rubrics and formal feedback were more effective than previous systems in which untrained evaluators, using vague standards, rated most teachers highly without a requirement for providing feedback (Sporte, Stevens, Healey, Jiang & Hart, 2013). Both teachers and administrators believe that the new systems support teacher growth by identifying strengths and weaknesses on which teachers can focus. Further, administrators reported that teachers are incorporating feedback, and that data collected helps identify areas for specific professional development. The new systems have also improved communication between teachers and administrators, which helps build relationships and enhance professional community.

That said, the CPRE found that school administrators struggled with the new responsibilities, in part because they lacked the training with which to perform their duties. Additionally, evaluation systems for building administrators were lacking. As a result, administrators did not have the training or receive feedback from any source who
might help to ensure that they are implementing evaluation with fidelity (McGuinn, 2015). Sporte et al., 2013 reported that administrators find the new systems time consuming and cumbersome, making the frequency of observations and the timeliness of feedback to teachers difficult. Ultimately, however, building administrators were found to be the key force in the success of evaluation systems, because through them, communication and community within the building can be effectively supported.

The state of Virginia implemented a new evaluation system through a federal school improvement grant during the 2011-2012 academic year. Researchers Xu, Grant & Ward (2016) systematically evaluated the validity of the new system at 16 “at-risk” schools. As a base for the study, the researchers defined an effective teacher evaluation system as one that would evaluate teachers’ classroom behaviors and their direct impact on student achievement, improve the quality of instruction, and provide data-driven feedback to teachers by observers. In all, they said, a valid system should connect teaching and student learning.

Virginia’s new system incorporates six performance standards: Professional knowledge; instructional planning; instructional delivery; assessment of and for student learning; learning environment; and professionalism. The researchers found that principal’s ratings could moderately explain student achievement gains, suggesting that insufficient training for principals and value-added measures are possible areas of concern. However, when taken together, the six factors examined were found to be a valid and helpful “holistic” account of teacher effectiveness, which ultimately helped
principals make effective decisions about how to help their teachers in their professional responsibility toward student achievement.

In Arizona, researchers examined new teacher evaluation methods that aligned with the Arizona Framework for Measuring Educator Effectiveness during the 2012-2013 school year. Four school districts and one charter school participated in a study in which teachers and principals shared feedback regarding the new system (Ruffini, Makkonen, Tejwani, & Diaz, 2014). The study was concerned with questions regarding the challenges of implementing the new system, its effectiveness as perceived by teachers and administrators, and what changes in instructional practice, knowledge sharing, and collaboration came about upon the system’s implementation. Teachers and administrators found the Danielson-based system useful, especially when it included the prescribed post-conferences between the teacher and observing administrator. Respondents reported that classroom observations were the most credible evidence of teacher effectiveness and that those observations, along with feedback, was essential to improving teacher practice. Teachers felt that they were more reflective about their practice, particularly their professional development, and principals reported improvements in their own instructional leadership abilities. Finally, researchers found concerns regarding inter-rater reliability illustrating a need for more training and calibration among instructional leaders. Additionally, questions were raised about whether formal observations were more beneficial to teachers than several informal observations which would offer a more holistic understanding of a teacher’s work.
The six large studies discussed above offer insight toward the research that will be presented below on teacher evaluation systems and techniques, particularly with regard to teacher feedback.

If school and teacher improvement are the reason teachers are supervised, feedback to teachers following observations is of utmost importance in any supervision model. Tang and Chow (2006) studied 21 pairs of supervisors and participants to understand the effectiveness of Learning-Oriented Field Experience Assessment (LOFEA). LOFEA was conceptualized to improve teacher development and meet teachers’ individual developmental needs. The LOFEA framework encourages teachers to construct their own professional knowledge through self-assessment as part of the negotiation of feedback. The process therefore caters to the individual and the individual’s needs, promoting a growth orientation to help teachers continue in their professional journey. Tang and Chow’s (2006) findings call for supervisory practices to be re-framed so that teachers fully understand how the assessment process is organized. This would empower teachers to take an active role in their own improvement of practice. The construction of understanding between the supervisor and teacher is essential to the teachers’ overall professional growth.

In an additional study regarding the importance of feedback to teachers from supervisory observations, Tuytens and Devos (2017) examined the work of eight school leaders who each observed approximately four teachers. The authors were interested in the relationship between the feedback from school leaders and the larger school organization. They used four organizational characteristics to understand this
relationship, finding that the juxtaposition of all four, under the direction of the school leader made the observation system most successful. Teacher participation in the school’s community was extremely important to the success of the rating system. Teachers were expected to participate in the culture of the school, rather than merely teaching classes. They were also expected to share in the creation and carrying out of the school’s vision, the second facet discussed. Teacher collaboration in the schools examined was part of the school’s culture. Collaboration is motivated by the school leader, and is found in schools to work in both formal and informal settings. Finally, all of the observation and feedback was aimed at the professional learning of the teachers which was both individual and collaborative in nature.

Importantly, the role of the school leader cannot be underemphasized. In this particular study, Tuytens and Devos (2017) point out that in post-observation feedback sessions, discussion about the teacher’s individual teaching practices was combined with discussions about the larger organization of the school and the school’s vision. In other words, the teacher’s practices were discussed in relationship with how all of the school’s educators were expected to facilitate learning. Because teachers were involved in the creation of the school’s vision, this was an important element of the feedback offered.

Dubinski, Waxman, Brown, and Kelly (2016) argue for observation systems that incorporate various instruments to understand quality of instruction. They studied a group of 18 novice teachers from a master’s program and a comparison group of the same number with an average of eight years’ experience using modifications of several established instruments. Specifically, the researchers looked at observed classrooms in 30
second increments, noting such things as instructional interactions with students, instructional orientations (whole class or individual attention), purposes for interaction with students, activity types, and the use of instructional technology. At the end of each observation, the researchers used an overall observation summary which illustrated whether the teacher was observed or not observed in completing certain actions.

The researchers found that the novice teachers were focused on classroom management and illustrated a “banking model” of education. They imply that unconfident young teachers revert to this model in order to maintain order in their classrooms. The teachers in the comparison group were able to use a more varied approach with their classes, including small group and discussion oriented approaches, and were more comfortable in managing disciplinary issues. The researchers use this evidence to support varied observation systems in order to improve the confidence of the novice teacher as they move into the profession. As in the research above, the scholars noted that school leadership and the feedback they offer can influence growth in order for novice teachers to reach their potential.

In an exploration of the theory of action that assumes current methods of supervision and evaluation will improve educational achievement, Marshall (2005) questions whether a new theory of action should be considered in light of troubling vignettes regarding teacher and administrator interactions in the context of supervision. Among other problems with the current system, Marshall cites the insufficient number of observations per teacher, the dog and pony show phenomenon of the formal observation, isolation of lessons and of teachers, the discomfort created around adult learning, and the
simple insufficiency of time for principals to evaluate teachers effectively. Marshall agrees with major theorists of school improvement who say that teachers drive student achievement through collaboration and formative assessment, but he adds the caveat that principals must ensure procedures and logistical requirements are in place in order for both teachers and administrators to have time to initiate constructive change; in his opinion, building administrators alone, have the power to create such opportunities. A shift away from principal ownership of evaluation to that which incorporates a mutuality between teacher and administrator includes changes like the continuous analysis of teaching, working in collaborative teacher teams, frequent unannounced classroom visits that are discussed with teachers, and authenticity and timeliness of formative feedback with the ultimate goal of managing school-wide improvement. After listing the elements of ineffective school practices, the author offers suggestions as to how to make changes to each practice with the goal of more effective school management and improvement across schools and districts.

**Summary**

Perhaps the most important question asked in the studies above is Mangin’s (2016): Can teacher leadership co-exist with high-stakes teacher evaluation systems? In other words, Mangin’s question is a reexamination of the possibility of blurring the boundaries between teachers and administrators (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Through this summary, I will illustrate ways in which those boundaries might be blurred through the teacher evaluation systems.
These studies most definitely promote a varied evaluation system. Kane and Stager (2012) mentioned that evaluations were successful when teachers were observed multiple times throughout the school year. Xu et al. (2016) illustrated that a holistic model of teacher evaluation was beneficial to teacher learning. In their model, the teacher’s professional knowledge, instructional planning and delivery, assessment of students and their learning environment, and overall professionalism, were considered and discussed between evaluator and teacher, so that the teacher might improve his or her practice. Tang and Chow (2006) illustrated that the evaluation process was more effective when teachers took an active role in their evaluations supporting a constructivist approach to evaluations. Finally, Kimball et al. (2004) discussed how guided evaluation discussions were important to teacher evaluation and improvement.

For enhanced effectiveness, teacher evaluations and observations must come with guided feedback (Ruffini et al., 2014; Kimball et al., 2004), which is authentic and timely (Marshall, 2005) in order to be supportive to teachers. Tutyens & Devos (2017) discussed the importance of feedback discussions between evaluators and teachers through the lens of a school’s overall vision, a sentiment set forth by Daresh (2007, see p. 4). McGuinn (2015), and Sporte et al., (2013) support a system of feedback that identifies strengths and areas of improvement for teachers through evidence based on rubrics. The authors illustrated further that such a system of feedback improves communication between teachers and administrators.

Juxtaposed with feedback about evaluations, research indicates that collaboration between teacher and evaluator must be fostered. Collaborative inquiry regarding the
results of evaluations requires reflection on the part of the teachers and administrators who are carrying it out (Mangin, 2016; Ruffini et al., 2014; Marshall, 2005). Additionally, research suggests that teacher participation in the inquiry process enhances the professional community because collaboration becomes part of the school’s culture as a result.

The building administrator is the key to the success of evaluations according to McGuinn (2015). Not only must the administrator ensure that the logistical requirements are met in order to build collaborative practice (Marshall, 2005), he or she must ensure improved communication within the school community (Sporte et al., 2013). New thinking about evaluation systems helped principals make decisions about the types of professional development necessary (Xu et al., 2016), while also helping to improve the principal’s own leadership abilities (Ruffini et al., 2014). In all, teachers, must take an active role in their own learning (Tang & Chow, 2006), so that they can improve their own practice through their collaborative efforts with other teachers and building administrators (Tutyens & Devos, 2017).

Research shows that there are many difficulties in implementing the types of evaluation processes described above. Researchers note that a gap remains between what could be and what should be, in terms of teacher evaluations. Traditional evaluation systems that are used in schools and the more holistic and effective systems supported by the research have yet to be widely implemented.
Teacher Professional Development for Learning and Leadership

Teacher observation and evaluation systems can act as a powerful tool to promote teacher development and learning. Kraft and Gilmour (2016) performed a case study in a large urban school district of 24 building administrators which focused on principals’ perspectives of the observation system as a mechanism intended to promote teacher development. As seen in the literature review section above, examining instructional practices through the use of rubrics and data-driven systems has become an established feature in the evaluation and teacher development process (Kane & Staiger, 2012). Several ideas were discovered during Kraft and Gilmour’s case study. Observation rubrics provided a common tool for feedback towards the discussion of classroom instruction. The observation process also helped teachers develop their own habits of reflection upon their strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, building administrators can serve as sounding-boards for teachers attempting to improve their practice, which can lead to a cohesive school community.

Using themes gleaned from observations, principals can guide opportunities for teachers to learn collaboratively through common planning time, targeted professional development, and peer observations (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Notably, teachers were more involved in the evaluation process through the use of the new system and were found to work with other teachers to improve everyone’s practice.

Peer observations (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016) were the focus of Lytle and Fecho’s (1991) research on “cross-visitations,” which formally studied the impact of teacher to teacher visits by interviewing fifteen Teacher Consultants (TCs) from the Philadelphia
Writing Project. Lytle and Fecho (1991) created and worked with a program called “cross-visitation” in which teachers systematically collaborated with other teachers about their classroom experiences. The cross-visitation program pushed up against many long-established norms of teaching, including the privacy and isolation of teaching and the manner in which professional development is conceived—traditionally professional development was something that teachers “go to” so that they can “bring back” something to their classrooms. Lytle and Fecho analyzed data which included teacher logs of their participation in the cross-visitation programs, teacher journals which recorded changes in teaching habits, interviews, surveys, and teacher writings. Interviews conducted revealed three main themes that spoke to the process. First, teachers understand teaching as an isolated practice, one which involves only students and the teacher inside the classroom; second, teachers had to re-envision the nature of collaboration to be one which required them to build new relationships; third, the teachers had to think about collaboration as it works toward the improvement of teaching (emphasis added). While it took some time in practice, teachers found the process to be invigorating. In fact, the cross-visitation process has been used in other places as seen below.

One of the findings recorded by Lytle and Fecho (1991) was that while the initial cross-visitation process was one which teachers built themselves, it became evident that administrative support would be necessary for it to continue. Such support required administrators to reconceive their understanding of professional development, both in terms of their participation and in logistical and budgetary supports.
A large-scale use of the cross-visitation process occurred in New York City’s District #2, which created a program for its students called Balanced Literacy. The program incorporated professional development and student learning into one entity, in which the teachers were expected to learn in the same way that the students learned (Stein & D’Amico, 2002). Teachers created lessons and made decisions with the direction of their efforts always aimed at student achievement. The professional development program was implemented through many forms and strategies, “including district workshops, classroom-based assistance, intervisitations between schools and classrooms, and ongoing interactions among colleagues” (Stein & D’Amico, 2002, p. 1316). Systematic opportunities were created by the district to ensure that these professional learning opportunities were happening, illustrating a persistent focus on the Balanced Literacy Program.

Stein and D’Amico (2002) found that Balanced Literacy classrooms illustrated a uniformity of appearance that supported the importance of the initiative as part of the school and district community. Teachers were supported in the program, in a similar manner to which students were taught through the Balanced Literacy Program. Intervisitation was an essential element of the success of the Balanced Literacy Program, as it explicitly utilized the expertise of teachers within individual schools and within the district to model instruction. District members “treated all 45 schools as their learning laboratory” (Stein & D’Amico, 2002, p. 1333). The implementation of the Balanced Literacy Program was successful because of the many unique factors which created a critical sense of motivation toward expertise for teachers and leaders in the district.
These larger studies inform practices that have taken hold in other instances. A case study of three middle school teachers examined the manner in which collaboration occurred given a structured time. Hindin, Morroco, Mott, and Aguilar (2007) found that three teachers shared their work and professional understanding at different levels of completeness. Of the two language arts teachers, the least-experienced shared the least, while the more experienced shared little more. The special education teacher, who had the least experience in Language Arts (LA) curriculum shared and attempted to learn the most. Many implications are noted by the authors regarding these findings. There is a possibility that educator norms dictate that less expertise is not to be laid out before other professionals. In the case of the LA teacher with the least experience, this makes sense. The special education teacher, a 30 year veteran in the school, who attempted to learn and share the most, had the least to lose; she did not know and was not required to know the LA curriculum, so her lack of knowledge did not impact other’s views of her as a professional. Her level of sharing also indicated that there was a comfort that had been established within the group of teachers.

One of the troublesome factors in the study was that the two LA teachers had a belief that the students could not learn from what they were doing as collaborators in their professional practice. This was particularly true in the case of the more seasoned LA teacher and is an attitude that must change if such groups are to move forward in the educational climate. Additional elements of collaborative work that must be improved were also identified. First, more and intentional opportunities for peer observation of classrooms is essential to maximizing the potential of this type of work. Second, because
the teachers did not share or learn at similar levels, the establishment of a more distinct protocol for facilitation of collaborative meetings is necessary for future success.

When it comes to expertise, the expert blind spot hypothesis forwarded by Nathan, Koedinger, and Alibali (2001) surfaces a difficulty in teacher professional development and teacher learning. In studying the processes through which mathematics (K-12) and language arts (Secondary) teachers teach, researchers highlight some troubling effects of expertise when it comes to teaching novice algebra students in particular. Secondary math teacher participants in the study assumed students learned concepts symbolically, rather than through language. As such, the teachers organized their classes in such a way that they would understand as experts in the field, rather than how the novice learners in their classrooms might understand. Because they did not possess the pedagogical awareness of how students of differing abilities learned, their novice students were less successful when learning algebra than the teachers expected them to be. This expert blind spot effect impacts other teachers in the same way, causing the possibility that a majority of students might be unable to learn from the very teachers who are attempting to teach them.

Of note is the “New Math” program developed in the 1970s by academic experts in mathematics. Because New Math was created by those in the “Ivory Tower,” the pedagogical ideas did not translate to the classroom and thus failed. The “Expert Blind Spot,” did not allow those creating the program to see or understand the algebraic concepts from a students’ perspective, as illustrated above. In order to combat this
problem, teacher training programs must demonstrate pedagogical techniques differentiated to all learners, so that teachers and their students can be successful.

Citing Grossman (1990), Nathan et al. (2001) additionally found that three language arts teachers who had strong content knowledge but were lacking in their pedagogical understanding of how to facilitate the learning of students were less successful than teachers who had a strong foundation in pedagogy and content. Surely content knowledge is essential, but in this case, an understanding of how to relate that knowledge to students was found to be more important. In terms of teacher development, understanding and combating this problem is essential to any teachers’ success. Again, differentiated pedagogical techniques aimed at all types of learners must be taught through teacher preparation programs.

In a larger study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in conjunction with the Teaching American History (TAH) grant program, 40 teachers from all grade levels were interviewed about how professional development impacted their teaching practices (Ragland, 2017). Notably, ongoing professional development played a prominent role in the successful learning of teachers. Increasing collaboration amongst the history teachers resulted in better communication and the creation of a “community of scholars dedicated to historical literacy” (Ragland, 2017, p. 134). Called “Active Learning Teachers,” participants had opportunities to experience teaching that was grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation. Further, the learning was participant driven, but supported by coaches and modeling which bolstered inquiry-based strategies. The findings illustrated that successful professional development involved collaboration
and had a sense of purpose toward a larger organizational vision. Professional development also must be completed over enough time through which a development of attitudes, beliefs, concerns, and a comfort level with new techniques can be achieved.

In their study on professional development for designing and conducting formative assessments in science classes over three years, Furtak et al. (2016) developed a “formative assessment design cycle” (p. 271) through which they expected teachers to collaborate with their colleagues in order to better elicit and respond to student thinking. Over the span of three years, the authors studied nine teachers from three different high schools who taught at least one tenth grade biology course and the effects of their participation in the professional development. The researchers present their findings through their research questions which related to teacher interpretation of student ideas, the quality of the formative assessment task design, the quality of questions eliciting student thinking, and the quality of responses to student ideas. They found positive outcomes in three of the four presented domains, task quality being the exception, determining the professional development to be successful overall. The researchers interpret their findings to have important implications for how professional development is created and conducted. Specifically, they mention the connection between teacher collaboration in professional development and in this specific study, its impact on cycles of teacher planning, teaching, and reflecting.

The Problem Based Learning (PBL) Project for Teachers provides a method for professional development which is based in constructivist learning theory. In a study of PBL professional development for science teachers, McConnell, Parker and Eberhardt
(2013) illustrated a need for science teachers to strengthen knowledge of their content area so that they could apply new pedagogical strategies set forth by the Framework for K-12 Science Education and the Next Generation Science Standards. One of the problems identified specifically in the area of professional development for science teachers is the diversity of content and the level of skill required to teach that content. In other words, biology teachers cannot learn content alongside chemistry teachers in the same professional development environment, whereas all English Language Arts teachers can. Further, science teacher participants from all grade levels entered the study with widely varying understandings of their content, how to teach it, and how it related to other concepts within itself. The PBL professional development included teachers participating in summer learning sessions along with “Monthly Focus on Practice” meetings to monitor the progress of the PBL groups. Teachers learned collaboratively, resulting in 80% of teachers showing gains in their content knowledge. The researchers noted that when teachers use reason and inquiry to solve the messy problems of their practice, they bolster their skills in facilitating their classrooms, which ideally should look similar to their professional development experiences.

Sjoer and Meirink (2016) examined professional development in science and technology, finding that teachers desired supplemental support for the new practices which were to be used in their every-day classroom experiences. The teachers’ expressed need catalyzed the research which aims to add to the knowledge of collaborative teacher learning. By observing and videotaping the meetings of a Montessori team of elementary teachers, along with interviews of each of the six participants, data was collected which
illustrated that the teachers were able to create abstractions from concrete experiences in teaching science and technology through which they attempted to develop a shared vision and curriculum. The authors characterized collaboration between teachers as important to the program’s success and identified supporting and constraining factors for such collaboration. They examined how teachers discussed their teaching experiences in science and technology, how they synthesized their ideas and practices, and explored tensions and formulated dilemmas through their process of decision-making. Given more time than a year-long study, the authors point out that they would examine the reflective practice of teachers as part of their development and learning. Findings indicated that the teachers could highlight their approach to teaching science and technology and all could relate to or work towards a common vision; however, there were difficulties that surrounded the one year study. Teachers had a difficult time asking each other questions about their practice, which made their work less transparent and resulted in much of their collaborative discussions consisting of “safe talk,” an uncritical manner through which to problematize practice. Additionally, the teachers had difficulty figuring out what they wanted from their work together. For example, some teachers wanted teaching guides for specific elements of the science and technology content, while others wanted to work on general target areas across the curriculum. A more specifically stated goal from the start of the study, along with the ability for the teachers to continue this work would alleviate some of the problems found.

The above studies illustrate teachers working collaboratively. Ultimately, it might be said that they are moving toward providing informal leadership and becoming teacher-
leaders in their schools. In 2004, the Ontario Minister of Education stated that all teachers should be treated as professionals. A study by the Ontario Teachers’ Federation and the Ontario Ministry of Education (OTFOME) discussed the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) which was sparked by the Minister’s statement. The study was designed to juxtapose teaching with leadership in professional development. Proposals for professional development that would positively impact student learning were written by teachers; their topics of interest including differentiated instruction, literacy, technology, and professional learning communities (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashinka, 2013).

While the professional development topics were directed toward students, the research conducted by the OTFOME concerned how teacher learning and leadership were connected. The goals of the TLLP were the support of teachers creating professional development programs, helping develop teacher leadership skills and to facilitating the exchange of “innovative and effective practices” (Campbell et al., 2013, p. 3). A most inventive element to this research was the collaboration and genuine support of the participating practitioners by OTFOME. One of the difficulties for the practitioners was ensuring they could balance their teaching loads and the necessity of completing the programs they had proposed. Because the TLLP was a cohort program that had been running since 2007, members of previous cohorts could help present members complete their projects, which helped to develop their learning and leadership capacity. The OTFOME were receptive to suggested improvements, acting on them immediately as necessary. The groundbreaking aspect of this study was that it recognized how teachers
learn to lead when they are in charge of all facets of professional development, including finances, organization, and the materials created. Researchers found that a focus on organically building capacity in teachers, supporting their development through self-directed learning rather than focusing on evaluation and helping teachers position themselves as leaders among their faculties had a positive impact on teacher learning and improvement.

**Summary**

In order to connect the literature in the Teacher Evaluation Systems section above, I want to highlight the importance of teacher and administrator collaboration about teacher evaluations along with the logistical aspects that administrators must manage when implementing improvements in the evaluation process. The literature on Teacher Professional Development for Learning and Leadership focused on administrative support for teachers and their learning toward leadership. A majority of the studies found that systematic structures for support must be present (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Lytle & Fecho, 1991; Stein & D’Amico, 2002). According to Ragland (2017) professional development must have a sense of purpose that aligns with the mission of the school and district (see Daresh, 2007, p. 4). In everyday school life, administrators must support teachers in their own self-directed learning (Campbell, et al., 2013). Lytle and Fecho (1991) identify the fact that administrators must have an understanding of professional development and how it works best for teachers.
Researchers note that professional development must be carefully planned and implemented. It must be targeted (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016), and perhaps most importantly, supported across time so that teachers may check and re-check their progress (Ragland, 2017). Furtak et al., (2016) illustrates the strong need for teacher collaboration in and during professional development, and Campbell, et al., (2013) argue in favor of helping teachers create their own professional development programs, which serve their own and their students’ needs, for their own practice, in their own schools. Stein and D’Amico (2002) encourage in-house professional development, because the expertise within the building can be used amongst the teachers, helping teachers to become leaders within their faculties.

The expert blind spot research by Nathan, et al., (2001) expressed that teachers, who are experts in their content areas, struggle to relate their knowledge to their students. The blind spot can be made visible when teachers are given the opportunity to construct meaning with colleagues, combating the problem. The ideas presented by McConnell et al., (2013) regarding problem based learning in professional development can help teachers find their own expert blind spots, allowing them to learn to elicit and respond to student thinking (Furtak et al., 2017) because they have learned to think as students through collaboration in professional development. Administrators and teacher leaders must step in and create a community of scholars within their faculties by increasing collaboration (Ragland, 2017), so that the cloistered nature of teaching might be dismantled; so that the classroom might be turned inside out for all to learn.
Cross-visitation (Lytle & Fecho, 1991), peer observation (Kraft & Gilmour (2016), and intervisitation (Stein & D’Amico, 2002), represent systematic implementation of programs through which the problems above might be addressed. Further, Hindin, et al., (2017) call for more and intentional peer visits, and McConnell et al., (2013) illustrate the need for monthly “focus on practice meetings” which help to keep teachers grounded and heartened in their new endeavors. Increased collaboration (Ragland, 2017) and teacher collaboration in professional development improve the cycle of teacher planning, teaching, and reflecting (Furtak, et al., 2016). Finally, Campbell et al., (2013) point out that part of the system must be a distinct effort to help teacher leaders balance the professional development programs they are attempting to implement with their fellow teachers and their everyday teaching duties.

Sjoer and Meirink (2016) found downfalls in their study, in which teachers engaged in “safe-talk” and seemed afraid to offer critical feedback to their colleagues. Additionally, their results showed that teachers struggled to narrow an area of inquiry without a structured process through which to do so, especially with the short amount of time they were given. In the next section, research about and using administrator practitioner inquiry will illuminate ways in which further research regarding teacher evaluation systems and teacher professional development for learning and leadership can be executed.
**Administrator Practitioner Inquiry**

Qualitative administrative practitioner research is difficult to find within the larger body of research by and for administrators. Anderson and Jones’ (2000) study of administrator research offers insight into this gap of research and literature, illustrating the necessity of future studies.

Anderson and Jones (2000) discuss the idea of a general knowledge base for administrators and how it might continue to be constructed in part through what they lament as a dearth of insider research by educational leaders. Analyzing research studies that included six dissertations, 50 dissertation abstracts, eight administrator research studies, along with interviews of ten administrators who completed their research in their work sites, the authors argue for alternative thinking toward how knowledge for and created by administrators might be disseminated and used by other practitioners. While ultimately a small body of literature, Anderson and Jones (2000) chose the types of work above due to their “explicit intention of producing… local and public knowledge” (p. 431). One of the biggest problems found with administrator research was the lack of acknowledgement and possibly even understanding of insider- vs. outsider- research. For example, researcher variance in positionality, or the lack of acknowledgement of positionalities may systematically impact research methods and validity. However, when positionalities are understood, accounted for, and made known, studies allowed for scrutiny and critique, all of which was passed back into the research study itself through a cyclical model of “plan-act-observe-reflect” (Anderson & Jones, 2000, p. 444). That said, the increase in Ed. D. programs in educational administration, have caused researchers to
consider convenience (using their own site) and purpose (using their research to impact their school environment) in order to complete the capstone dissertation process.

Anderson and Jones (2000) believe that research about one’s practice possesses great potential for addition to the body of knowledge for educational administrators. They call for research regarding how administrators modify traditional methods of inquiry in order to study their own sites of practice. Additionally, they call for research which includes teachers, teacher leaders, and administrator-teacher collaborations, as they are “concerned about the… false separation between administrator and teacher research that contributes to the reification of teaching and administrating as separate domains” (Anderson & Jones, 2000, p. 434).

As teachers learn and become leaders through their professional development experiences, they may also take on an inquiry stance toward that learning. Working as an insider-researcher is a complex process that practitioner researchers must negotiate carefully as discussed by Anderson and Jones (2000). Studies of programs or teachers in schools, such as Ravitch and Wirth’s (2007) research illustrate these complexities. Under the direction and with the support of Ravitch, Wirth examined a collaborative professional development program that included the entire staff of Wirth’s school. Ravitch and Wirth (2007) then completed a “study of the study” using in-depth discussions through which they articulate themes that came to light through Wirth’s insider-research. Three themes were discovered as part of their effort to further understand insider-research and practitioner inquiry: Negotiation of practitioner roles as a
colleague, researcher, and school leader; facilitating change while not imposing beliefs and values; and reflexivity regarding power and authority.

Wirth had to make many decisions and negotiations, through realizations about the process of what she was attempting to implement in the school as collaborative professional development. She had to ensure that her coworkers knew that she had the students’ best interests in mind, and that the research was not simply for her own professional gains. Because she was a well-respected teacher with 25 years of service to her school, most teachers knew that she had no hidden agenda. However, the school culture was not one which fostered collaboration among the faculty. This made the implementation of the professional development more difficult. In her own learning, Wirth realized that she needed to actively hear the teachers with whom she was working, so that she could help them more effectively. The researchers assert that practitioner inquiry and insider action research is about strengthening teacher voices. Learnings from Wirth and Ravitch’s 2007 study illustrate that this strengthening must come as part of a constant negotiation, re-negotiation and reflexivity of positionality of the practitioner researcher.

Through their years of work in the educational improvement field, Bryk, Gomez, Grunow and LeMauieu (2016) used the concept of improvement science to help school leaders foster improvement in their buildings. A more quantitative approach than much of what is discussed in practitioner inquiry, Bryk et al., (2016) use research on teaching and learning, communities of practice, and other collaborative research areas, to create Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) to establish structures through which
educational personnel can lead schools to change. In order to improve the change efforts being made by schools, they suggested a sharp focus on what it is that needs to be improved, and then making the improvement work specific to that problem and centered on the very people who are tasked with improving it, and for whom they are making the improvements. This specificity enables those who are doing the work of change to focus on specific areas of difficulty, rather than inadvertently attempting to make changes where they are not needed so desperately, a problem that was noted by Sjoer & Meirink (2016) above, in which teachers needed structures in place to help them choose their areas of inquiry. The NICs attempt to see the system that produces the undesired results within the larger school system and then focuses on making improvements at a scale that can be managed and measured. One way they are able to do this in a system that must continue working while changes are made, is through what they call the “learning loop” through which reflexivity occurs between the working theory, the practical measurement, and the standard work process. The NIC then works collaboratively to create a specifically designed inquiry that can be monitored and measured continuously to drive the improvement.

Establishing inquiry into practice, whether it is through teachers or through administrators is difficult work. The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) conducted a five year study of leadership in 86 different schools, 16 of which became the ultimate focus of the research. Using a Theory of Action for Leadership and a Cycle of Inquiry (Copland, 2003) which includes several tenets, the BASRC studied the use of inquiry in school leadership and distributed leadership. The tenets included ideas about
how improving schools is a collective act which requires re-thinking the roles of school leaders and how those roles might be distributed about the school community and the community in which the school operates. Additionally, inquiry into practice focusing on student learning, setting standards, equity, and best practices must be sustained across time. Continuous inquiry allows for the identification of deeper issues and the development of solutions for those issues, which are made by the school community in a distributed leadership capacity.

Schools were rated as novice, intermediate, and advanced in terms of their ability to establish inquiry practices; those schools who had been doing similar work prior to the study were found to be more advanced in that process, making them more open to ideas about changing leadership philosophies. Shared leadership was supported by the cycle of inquiry, which allowed for decentering the vision, planning, decision-making, and accountability toward the broader school community. Some novel concepts about ways in which leadership might be distributed included rotating a lead teacher, using co-principals and establishing a reform coordinator who might either be released from teaching duties, or maintain them during the process of reform. A “Design Studio” through which schools could host other schools in order to learn with visitors was established as well. Ultimately, BASRC found that principals who were engaged in inquiry practices were successful in moving their schools forward, toward a more shared leadership approach. Additionally, successful principals established dependable time for shared leadership to be enacted, practiced, and improved upon.
The desire and need for more qualitative approaches to inquiry is seen outside of education as well. Many of the complex problems faced in other professions necessitate a newer understanding of how to attack those problems. Such studies can inform research in education, particularly in the area of administration. In a case study of three managers in both the public and private sectors, Skinner, Tagg and Holloway (2000), found that practicing managers, as opposed to academic researchers of management, made use of quantitative methods when attempting to solve problems. The researchers implemented three case studies of Ann, a community health manager, Alan, a marketing manager and Jane, an internal consultant at a government agency. Each practicing manager had a particular element of their work which they were attempting to improve as part of their daily managerial tasks. The researchers’ primary goal was to help the practicing managers by cultivating their awareness of more formal methodologies for qualitative research. Indeed, the managers themselves expressed the need for “more” than just quantitative data to make the changes they wanted to make in their practice, but they were untrained in the acquisition and use of qualitative data to do so.

The case studies began with interviews in which researchers attempted to learn more about each manager’s goals, enabling them to tailor more structured qualitative methods to their particular areas of inquiry. When analyzing the data from their study, the researchers looked at interview transcripts, informal conversations, and observational notes in order to illustrate practical applications for what they had taught the managers in the study. For their own study, the researchers gleaned themes from the data which included managers’ observations of connections and complexities through the qualitative
data which could not have been brought to light through quantitative analysis. Yet, the practicing managers felt ill-at-ease regarding the subjectivity of the qualitative data illustrating the deeply rooted scientific methodologies through which they learned their professions. Additionally, participants felt that the time and resources necessary to carry out qualitative research was impractical and subject to scrutiny. Skinner et al., (2000) illustrated that the body of academic literature about qualitative data and management is not widely available to practicing managers, and called for management developers to create a wider base of knowledge in the use of qualitative methodologies for practicing managers.

Qualitative approaches also include ethnography, which is an academic arena in and of itself. While practicing managers such as those mentioned in Skinner et al. (2000) above, are not likely to utilize ethnography for their needs, an important similarity must be discussed between ethnographer and administrator/practitioner/researcher. Wagner (1990) demonstrates these similarities and differences through studies he conducted over several years of 195 school leaders. Through his research, he creates definitions of both, then juxtaposes them to illustrate the possibilities of school leaders thinking and acting as ethnographers. In other words, school administrators, through ethnographic practices such as developing “clear, communicable understandings and interpretations of human behavior as a social and cultural activity” (Wagner, 1990, p. 196), can create inquiry into how their schools truly work. Rather than relying on quantitative data (enrollment, budgetary concerns, employee numbers) to understand their schools, Wagner illustrates that leaders must know how to investigate and understand the patterns and characteristics
of school employees as individuals and as a collective entity in order to do their jobs effectively. Wagner’s most salient point discovered through his research is that separating ethnographers from administrators—theory-builders from managing actors—reifies researchers into research and practitioners into practice. Thus, administrators would never be able to thoroughly inquire into their practice or into what drives their schools. The juxtaposition of these two fields, ethnography and educational administration, opens opportunities for new understandings by extending inquiry practice beyond ethnography and into school leadership.

Smith-Maddox (1999) examined the role of inquiry in the “reculturing and restructuring” (p. 284) of educational practices in a large urban school district. The examined inquiry process took place in a middle school with nine teachers, the building principal, and one “critical friend.” Calling the inquiry process a “formidable” way of transforming teaching, reform discourse became possible when district administrators and teachers decided to examine student achievement within the district. Specifically, participants discussed assessment, through which they discovered that necessary changes to the assessment process in the middle school could have significant impacts on the skills and knowledge students needed to bring with them to the high school. The participants also discussed school community, racial and ethnic identity, and literacy. The discourse allowed the building administrator and specifically teachers to reduce feelings of isolation (Campano, 2009) and guilt about losing class-time with their students. Comments from the teachers included that they felt more like professionals, and that they saw the process of working together as a luxury which they had never experienced.
In order for the inquiry process to function properly over time, administrators had to secure release-time which, in this case, was paid for by grant money and professional development funds. Understanding the role of the critical friend became problematic, as participants wanted the critical friend and the principal to facilitate the reforms that would derive from inquiry discourse. However, through the course of the research, teachers realized that they were becoming leaders through the inquiry work in which they were engaged.

Drawing upon another comparison to educational administration and inquiry, Puvirajah, Verma and Webb (2012) examined the relationships and power structures developed between students and their mentors in a robotics competition. The robotics competition provided the context for researchers to examine changes in power structures through experiences outside the classroom for both parties. Researchers found important differences between in-class and extracurricular experiences for both students and mentors through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In the extracurricular robotics competition, students felt more agency, and teachers/mentors acted more like students, creating a more equitable distribution of power, which is similar to scientific practice as it occurs outside of the classroom. Because of power structures that naturally exist in the classroom, the authors note that students do not have the agency necessary to truly be empowered by their experiences, which makes their learning less meaningful. Outside the classroom, where the student and teacher/mentor identity becomes more horizontal in nature, agency and ownership for students is much more powerful. Data collected in the study included video and audio recordings, researchers’ reflective journals, and
interviews of participants in the robotics competition. Researchers describe the study as purposeful and convenient due to the fact that one of the researchers was a science teacher at the research site. CDA revealed that language used by the teachers and mentors both pushed students’ thinking, while allowing the students to maintain ownership and accountability to their team, which included their mentors. Such use of discourse mimicked true scientific work, for example, by allowing the team to both “co-construct, and critique each other’s knowledge claims” (Puvirajah et al., 2012, p. 405). The authors concluded their study by necessitating more informal, yet meaningful, learning experiences in which teachers and students could participate in the co-construction of knowledge.

One specific methodology created by Spillane and Zuberi (2009) are Leadership Daily Practice (LDP) logs which are intended as an alternative, supplementary empirical data form for understanding both formal and informal leadership practices in schools which could help with the expense of quantitative studies about school leadership. The authors envision LDPs helping to examine the practice of leadership as it occurs on a daily basis. Participants included school principals, assistant principals and math and literacy leaders, an illustration of distributed leadership. Informal leaders were those teachers whose colleagues identified as leaders in their school through an “indegree” (Spillane & Zuberi, 2009, p. 384) measure, even though they held no official designation as a leader. Mathematics teachers were randomly selected to maintain LDPs as well. The study took place over a ten day period in four schools in which participants were asked to
log one interaction per hour that was “intended to influence their knowledge, practice, or motivation” (Spillane & Zuberi, 2009, p. 384) as a leader or with a leader.

Results of the study illustrated a necessity for attention toward the practice of leadership as a separate entity than the foci which are usually associated with leadership, such as structures, roles, and styles. Data analysis found several possible improvements for implementation. For example, instead of having logs take place once an hour, Spillane and Zuberi (2009) proposed that selecting interactions to log, with the parameters above in mind, might be more beneficial for both practical and empirical use. They suggest that LDPs might better be combined with interviews of participants, grounding the logs in practice more effectively.

Summary

The most important information that came to light through the studies in this section, in relation to the first two sections, is the necessity that administrator practitioner research be beneficial to the institution in which it takes place. Anderson and Jones (2000) pointed out the importance of practicality in their research, stating that because of the demands placed upon administrators and their time, most administrators want their work to contribute to public knowledge, but also the local knowledge of their school. Ravitch and Wirth (2007) discuss this as “insider research” and point out that the school culture must be one which allows for and welcomes collaboration. Copland (2003) noted that the collaborative culture of a research site allows for the sustainment of the inquiry process, so that issues can be raised and studied in more depth. Additionally, Puviar
al., (2012) discuss the importance of the co-construction of knowledge between students and their mentors through collaborative inquiry and practice.

In order to facilitate the collaborative process, Anderson and Jones (2000) discussed how researchers must openly account for their positionalities, especially when considering the danger of reifying the divide between teacher and administrator. Ravitch and Wirth (2007) discussed the reflexivity of power and authority that must be understood in order to perform a practitioner inquiry study, especially when the research site is one in which the researcher is employed.

Because managers use data to gauge performance, Spillane and Zuberi (2009) argue that the use of qualitative measures to explore leadership practices is difficult. Bryk et al., (2016) help to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative research in that they use data to inform inquiry studies posed and created by Networked Improvement Communities (NICs). Skinner et al., (2000) point to the need for practicing school leaders to have training in the use of qualitative measures to understand their schools and how they operate, while Wagner (1990) discusses how school leaders must create improvements in their buildings by thinking and acting as ethnographers so that inquiry practice might extend into school leadership.

Shared and distributed leadership was discussed in many of the studies noted above, including Copland’s (2003) research. Spillane and Zuberi’s (2009) study utilized several different types of school employees who were seen as leaders in their building, while in Puvijarah et al., (2012) the students and mentors shared the responsibilities of their team according to their talents, rather than their positions. Bryk et al., (2016)
illustrated that all parties involved in the work of schools should be a part of changes that occur.

Some studies found that, in order for distributed leadership to work, the administrator must be responsible for establishing dependable and secure release time (Copland, 2003; Smith-Maddox, 1999) for those attempting to work in a leadership capacity while maintaining their work as teachers. Smith-Maddox (1999) also noted that teacher participants in their study eventually came to see themselves as leaders in their building, which strengthened their confidence amongst their colleagues. Spillane and Zuberi (2009) discussed the importance of distributed leadership in the continuing efforts of practitioner researchers to improve upon their work.

Conclusion

As Lytle and Fecho (1991) point out, there is an established norm of privacy and isolation among teachers which has an impact on the way teachers are evaluated, as well as the way they participate in professional development and become leaders. The research reviewed herein offered many ways through which that norm might be disrupted. Highlights regarding what that disruption might look like within this literature review include 1) increased collaboration among teachers and building administrators (McGuinn, 2015; Sporte, et al., 2013; Tutyens & Devos, 2017; Ragland, 2017; Bryk et al., 2016), 2) teachers taking an active role in their own learning, both through professional development and establishing areas of inquiry for themselves (Lytle & Fecho, 1991; Ragland, 2017; Campbell et al., 2013), and 3), the cross-visitation process
(Lytle & Fecho, 1991; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Stein & D’Amico, 2002). These highlights illustrate the importance of teachers and administrators participating in collaborative inquiry and problem solving. Becoming part of an inquiry community aimed at building educators’ generative knowledge of practice can help to disrupt such phenomena as the expert blind spot, allowing them to prevent such blind spots through alternative ways of sense making.
CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Three main theories informed my study: 1) Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978); 2) the Gradual Release Model (Cambourne, 1995); and 3) the Knowledge/Practice Framework (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). In Chapter 3, I discuss each theory and how it interacts with the others to provide a framework for my study. Figure 3.1 provides a visual understanding of how the theories interact.

Figure 3.1. Conceptual Framework

Social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) binds the creation of knowledge within a framework that incorporates discussion, social interaction, and collective thought. In a social constructivist classroom, students in any age-group build their knowledge base through discussion with a facilitator or teacher, as well as with their peers. Social constructivist pedagogies utilize Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development.
(1978) which helps to discover students’ readiness to understand a particular concept and scaffold instruction to push student learning toward higher levels of achievement.

Constructivist pedagogies lie in direct disagreement with what Freire (2000) called the “banking model” of education, in which students (who do not possess knowledge) are filled with knowledge by those who do possess knowledge (their teachers). The typical isolation of teachers in classrooms (Campano, 2009) who have little opportunity to collaborate with peers, discover pedagogical techniques together, and co-construct knowledge, may lead teachers to use the banking model in their classrooms and in their own professional learning because they do not have the opportunity to see other pedagogical possibilities through visiting other teachers. Freire and Vygotsky agree that constructivist education, with the understanding that students bring their own knowledge to the classroom, can push student and teacher thought toward the creation of new ideas (Waff, 2009), establishing a path for students and their teachers to become life-long learners.

My research was predicated upon the co-construction of knowledge by the participating teachers and myself as a building administrator. Teachers were brought together in order to better understand their own, and each other’s practices. As a participant in the learning process, I too, came to better understand my practice as a building administrator, along with the practice of the participating teachers. The social constructivist framework enabled the teachers and me to learn collaboratively, contributing to each other’s practices in an inquiry community by breaking their disconnection from one another, and from myself. Further, the social constructivist
framework allowed the teachers and myself to open windows into our practices in supportive and generative conditions which allowed us to further understand our work with students and ourselves. Combined with the gradual release model and the knowledge/practice framework, social constructivism provided the base upon which my study stands.

**Figure 3.2. Cambourne’s (1995) Gradual Release Model**

Cambourne’s (1995) gradual release model of classroom instruction is a distinct pedagogical method which is grounded in social constructivism. Through this model, teachers introduce a concept to a group of students and then gradually release the students to create knowledge and understanding for themselves and their peers about the concept using an “I do, we do, you do” format. As students work together, they are guided by their teacher toward an understanding of the concept they are expected to learn. Cambourne’s (1995) gradual release model is similar to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal
development (1978) in that they both incorporate scaffolding for learners to ensure all students are pushed to grow further in their learning at a personally sustainable pace.

It is important to note that while the teacher knows and understands the concepts he or she is teaching, through the gradual release model and the social constructivist framework, the teacher can and should learn from the students while teaching them, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. Teachers might learn new ways to explain concepts to students, or new questions to ask students in order to push their own thinking from a students’ perspective. The expert blind spot, as described by Nathan et al. (2001), illustrates that a teacher’s ability to understand how their students can learn a concept which they, as teachers, already know, is essential to student success. Teachers who make their classrooms sites of collaborative inquiry make those blind spots visible which stand in the way of student learning. Through the gradual release model, teachers must attend to each student in the local learning environment; they must be able to help the student learn concepts through the student’s learning style. Additionally, the gradual release model and the social constructivist framework encourage students who understand classroom concepts to help their counterparts who might be having difficulty. Every person in the gradual release classroom builds upon the knowledge created through collaborative work within that classroom.

The gradual release model illustrates how teachers can learn from their students within the classroom. It is the process which teachers in the research site are expected to frame their lessons on a daily basis. Additionally, it provides a base of understanding with regards to teacher practice as it exists in the research site. The gradual release model
serves as an applied illustration of what happens in a social constructivist classroom. Finally, the gradual release model, when transferred onto teaching practices, frames the way teachers and a building administrator can learn from each other. Using their classrooms as sites of inquiry, study participants grew together towards an understanding of how they learn, how their students learn, and how to teach one another.

Social constructivism, the zone of proximal development, and the gradual release model are all consistent with Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) “Knowledge/ Practice Framework.” Three knowledge relationships, or images of knowledge, are delineated in this model: knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice, and knowledge of practice.

Knowledge for practice is knowledge disseminated by university-based researchers who provide information to teachers in an effort to help them improve their practice. This type of knowledge might be closely aligned with the “banking model,” in that teachers are informed about what to do in their classrooms by those who might be unaware of the local contexts in which they teach. Understanding knowledge for practice, I leave that image aside in the present study, to provide focus on knowledge in and of practice and how these images of knowledge encourage the types of interactions that take place during cross-visititation lessons and discussions.

Knowledge in practice is generated by teachers themselves through personal experiences, sometimes alongside expert peers. Knowledge in practice might best be illustrated by teacher learning and professional development which is driven by the local context, and even facilitated by expert peers within the school building. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) look to Schon who says that there is a sense of artistry and design in
teaching within a local context, in that the teacher must be able to react appropriately to unexpected situations that arise in their school’s context. I make this point because it is part of and leads to the knowledge of practice image of knowledge which is demonstrated in the present study by the participants.

Five key points in the knowledge of practice frame are illustrated in the present study. I have harnessed these points from Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) article in order to help frame the research. As such, I have replaced what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) delineate as “teacher” to “educator,” so as to include myself in the discussion and the overall theoretical framework. The five key points are: 1) Inquiry communities construct knowledge by conjoining their understandings of their own, and others, knowledge through face-to-face interactions. 2) Active learning by educators and students require opportunities for them to link prior knowledge to new understandings. 3) Educators must practice deliberative reflection about inquiry into their practice and experience. 4) Educator learning takes place over time; active learning is an on-going process. 5) Educators theorize their own practice through intentional investigation of their classrooms and schools. They treat knowledge as generative material for interrogation, interpretation and theorization, connecting it to their school communities. They understand that basic questions about knowledge are always open for discussion, examination, and debate.

The image of knowledge of practice is one in which educators make their own practice and that of others problematic throughout their professional life span. Such educators take what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) call an “inquiry stance” toward
their practice. In inquiry as stance, “teacher learning is associated more with uncertainty than certainty, more with posing problems and dilemmas than with solving them, and also with the recognition that inquiry both stems from and generates questions” (p. 294). In the knowledge of practice image, the idea is not to become an “expert” teacher, as expertise implies that learning is somehow complete; rather, in an inquiry stance, novice and veteran teachers become lifelong learners who constantly interrogate their practice in the manner which is illustrated by the five points above.

Because my study involves an in depth exploration of my own and teachers’ understanding of their practice as we engage in activities related to both our own professional development and the systems used to evaluate practice, Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) knowledge/practice framework provided an important way of thinking about the quality of teachers’ reflective and collaborative practice. The framework, which articulates different ways educators develop knowledge about and enhance their practices, provided me with a mechanism for critically examining how the teachers and I came to better understand our own professional learning.

**Conclusion**

Combined with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, each element of the conceptual framework provides insight into teacher and administrator learning and growth as it occurs in practice through collaboration in an inquiry community. The social constructivist framework serves as a conceptual base for the study, while the gradual release model offers a practical application in order to better visualize the social
constructivist model of teaching and learning as it exists in practice. The knowledge/practice model completes the conceptual framework by offering a lens through which to examine the interactions and learning that occurred in the inquiry community created by the cross-visitation process undertaken in the study.
CHAPTER 4:  
STUDY CONTEXT, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY, VALIDITY, 
AND DATA SELECTION

I will now describe the context of the study in more local detail. Much of this study’s broad context was discussed in the introduction, linking facets of the district’s overall vision for professional development with my research questions. The districts’ professional development initiatives, along with the cohesiveness with which each has been organized to drive the district forward academically has been explained. A short discussion of the changes to the structure of the high school in which the study took place prior to the 2016-2017 school year is necessary in order for a full understanding of the study’s context.

School Context

Much of the difficulties discussed in the introduction coincided with media attention and community feelings about the school in which the study took place. Upon my arrival in February of 2016, discipline and behavioral problems and the students and teachers who created them took up the majority of my school day. I had no time through which to learn my job due to the fast-paced and unpredictable nature of the building and its occupants. Our mission as administrators became an effort to simply try to get to the end of the school year attempting to improve the important elements of the school (i.e. academics, safety, discipline) as much as possible, in order to establish larger improvements for its students and teachers over the summer of 2016.
During the summer months our administrative team (a veteran principal and assistant principal, and two new assistant principals, including myself) made extreme and difficult changes, putting the 2015-2016 school year behind us while using what we had learned to guide us through those changes. We created the entire master schedule from scratch, a task for which we were both unprepared and untrained. Many nights our administrative team could be found at school, papers strewn about the conference table, running numbers and classes, until we finally created a manageable schedule prior to the start of the 2016-2017 school year. The students came one early morning in late August, and were given their schedules, hot off the printer.

The results of our summer efforts were extremely positive. The tenor of the school had changed drastically. With a largely different teaching core due to the summer’s strategic and deliberate internal changes and new hires who were specifically selected for their ability to participate in carrying out the vision and mission of the district, we met the students with the care and enthusiasm that all school employees should. It was an exciting time for which we had worked very hard. The beginning of the year went very smoothly, and throughout the year, while there were discouraging times, our administrative team maintained that what we were experiencing was “nothing like last year.” As a result, I was able to turn my attention to the topic of this research: The observation and evaluation process and its effectiveness for teachers.

Administrators, teachers, researchers and other educational personnel all recommend cross-visitation (Lytle & Fecho, 1991; Stein & D’Amico, 2002; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016), but rarely are such programs funded or supported, the few exceptions
being research studies, which eventually come to an end. The research study presented in this dissertation not only required implementation of cross-visitation, but it illustrated the importance of administrative support through logistical measures, along with the importance of a building administrator’s presence in the classroom during cross-visitations. Because I am an “insider-researcher” (Ravitch & Wirth, 2007), the study has practical uses for my research site (Anderson & Jones, 2000; Perez, et al., 2011; Stein & D’Amico, 2002; Bryk et al., 2016). I plan to use what I learned about cross-visitation in order to continue it on a larger scale, using Bryk, et al.’s (2016) concept of “Improvement Science” which depends upon bringing “educators into regular interaction” forming “a colleagueship of expertise—academic, technical, and clinical—deliberately assembled to address specific problems. All involved are… improvers seeking to generate strong evidence about how to achieve better outcomes more reliably” (p. 9). An implementation plan for subsequent school years is included in Appendix B of this dissertation.

**Participant Context**

As an administrator at the research site, I was responsible for observing and evaluating approximately 18 teachers. From among these 18 teachers, I selected four to participate in this study.

Because all four participants fell under my supervision, I had formally observed each at least once prior to the study as part of my work as a building administrator. After selecting and discussing my research with the participants and successfully soliciting
their participation, we used cross-visitation practices through the spring semester of the 2016-2017 school year.

In order to offer more context for the present study regarding its participants, it is necessary to understand both my professional history as an educator as well as the participants’ professional and life situations prior to and throughout the study. This necessity comes from the fact that all involved in the research process were working as full-time teachers and administrator throughout. The difficulties experienced, particularly by me, were often nearly insurmountable (McGuinn, 2015; Sporte, et al., 2013). Ultimately, the study was a sort of second full-time job for me, and an additional burden for the teachers who were already taxed with attempting to incorporate the district’s new and myriad expectations, all while working to the rule of the contract, as theirs had ended prior to the start of the 2016-2017 school year. Albeit fruitful and extremely beneficial for all of us, the study’s difficulties are part of what was learned.

Much of the literature reviewed above, illustrated the difficulties that I had felt during my eleven years as a classroom teacher. I had been observed by administrators at most once a year, and rarely if ever, did those observations help me. At the opposite end of the spectrum, I had a lot of experience working with other teachers through my work with the National Writing Project and its local affiliate. My understanding of the value of collaborative teaching and reflection did not overlap at all with my observational experience from administrators. Further, as a teacher there was no time allotted to work with other teachers. As an English teacher especially, if there was time, I spent it grading papers and reading in an attempt to help my students develop a love of reading, unless I
was told to do otherwise by the administrative team. All of this (and a lot more) led me to this study and the selection of the participants whom I will now discuss in order to offer a better understanding of the personal context.

The teacher participants in this study were chosen for several reasons. Two (Charles and Bob) were new to the district, and therefore, new to its professional development initiatives. I felt that they might benefit from the structure and collaboration of the study. The other two teachers (Hallie and Courtney) were more seasoned and paired effectively with Bob and Charles, as they taught the same subjects (Academic Tenth Grade Geometry, and Academic Tenth Grade English). I chose the academic level in part because I was interested in the disciplinary difficulties of the school as experienced by myself and expressed by participants; in the academic classes, disciplinary referrals were more prevalent. Finally, for logistical purposes, I asked these specific teachers to participate because they were part of my evaluation caseload so I had already completed formal observations with them as part of my duties as an administrator (Anderson & Jones, 2000). Additionally, their schedules aligned with each other, allowing me to run the study without the school having to pay for a litany of substitutes for their classes. I also did not want the teachers to miss more time with their students, as they were already missing several classes per semester due to the demands placed upon them by the district’s professional development schedule.

I will now briefly describe the teacher participants in order to finalize the overall context of the study:
Charles (10th Grade Academic English) – Arriving on October 14th, 2016, there had been two long-term substitute teachers in place for his classes prior to his entrance. While he was a contracted teacher, his students had come to believe that he would not be with them for longer than a month which made earning their trust and respect very difficult. Charles had high expectations for his students and did a wonderful job creating an environment for his students which was both welcoming and courteous. He has two children in the high school who take honors and AP classes.

Hallie (10th Grade Academic English) – Hallie has been at the high school longer than anyone in the study. While she did not serve as an official mentor to Charles, she was very much at his side as he made his way into the school setting. Hallie participated in the Penn Literacy Network class alongside myself, two other teachers, and the Assistant Superintendent.

Hallie had several personal difficulties throughout the study. Both her husband and son were diagnosed with serious illnesses. With great difficulty and perseverance, she stuck with the study while completing her tasks as a cooperating teacher for a student teacher and working in the PLN class, along with her daily teaching requirements.

Courtney (10th Grade Academic Geometry) – Courtney completed her third year teaching math and her second year teaching CPM geometry during the 2016-2017 school year. Upon completion of this year, she earned tenure in the district. She runs an important extra-curricular activity and has established tremendous relationships with the
students in her classes and the members of her after school program. She is willing to help anyone with CPM, even though she has only taught using its pedagogical techniques a year longer than anyone else in the building. She has been recommended to be a CPM trainer; as such, she would visit other districts in order to teach their teachers how to use CPM’s pedagogical techniques.

Bob (10th Grade Academic Geometry) – Bob joined the school’s faculty in August for the beginning of the school year. While he was present in the school from the start, he missed the summer training for CPM Geometry, an essential element to a teacher’s success in teaching with the CPM methods. Unbeknownst to me, he had been visiting Courtney, his counterpart in the study, in an effort to understand CPM itself and CPM geometry so that he could better help his students. In other words, he had already been “doing” cross-visitation of his own accord.

Bob came to the high school from a university setting where he was a head coach at the varsity level. He had taught at the high school level in the 1980s, so the CPM method was extremely different from any teaching or learning he had experienced. Finally, in his personal life, he and his wife were attempting to adopt a child throughout the time of the study. In that time, they were informed that a baby was ready to be adopted, only to be told at the last minute that they would be unable due to the invocation of parental rights in the state in which the baby was born.

An important note about all of the teachers is that their union representatives decided to “work-to-contract” in early February 2017, just as this study was gaining
traction. Never once did it come up that the teachers couldn’t participate in the study due to the union’s decision. I respected the union’s work action, as I had experienced it in my previous district. I will discuss what I learned through both the work action and my empathy for the teachers in the findings of this study.

Richard Mitchell (Building Administrator) – With nearly eleven years of experience teaching English in a moderately affluent school district, I became an assistant principal at the research site in February, 2016. I had come to education following two short careers—one in the US Army as an officer in the Field Artillery and Signal Corps, and one with Cycle America as a cross-country bicycle tour director. I say this because I am ten years older than my administrative counterparts and am therefore more settled in my life. At the time of writing I am married, and with my wife, have three children. We live in the municipality in which I work. I do not live in the city in which my school is set, but in the outskirts; a more rural area that is developing rapidly. My children do not attend the schools in the district in which this research took place.

Having left teaching less than a year prior to the beginning of this study, I had (and have) a strong connection to teaching—a connection which I plan to maintain throughout my administrative career. “I am a teacher first, and always” resonated both prior to the study when I first started out in this new school, and during the study, as I attempted to build relationships with the entire teaching staff, and especially with the participants of the study. I feel very strongly that my deliberate tethering to teaching is a
vital resource in helping to lead the building in which I work, and the district at large, through the process of change that is being enacted by the superintendent.

As a facilitator of and participant in the cross-visitation process, but also an assistant principal in the research site, I had begun to develop deep collegial relationships with teachers throughout the building from day one. As the research process began, I could not help but focus on the four main participants, creating a platform on which they could develop their own relationships further. Once the study started, the blurring of boundaries (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) between us occurred in a more structured fashion as described below. With a social constructivist mindset (Vygotsky, 1978), using the methodologies of practitioner inquiry and research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), I attempted to maintain the positionalities of assistant principal, observer, evaluator, and researcher amongst others, openly.

I will now describe the study in detail, linking facets of the district’s overall vision for professional development with my research questions and the data collected. As with any practitioner research and inquiry, the plan was fluid to allow myself to collaborate critically with the participants in order to most effectively complete the study. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

**Data Collection**

After selecting research participants, we met as two groups (English and Math) to discuss a close-reading of Lytle & Fecho’s (1991) article “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation.” The discussion of this article was
meant to acclimate teachers to what cross-visitation looks like, along with opening them to the understanding of social constructionism, the constructivist framework, and the idea of practitioner inquiry. We discussed the article using “The Final Word,” a National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) protocol. Teachers were asked to maintain journals throughout the study starting with their thoughts on this article.

From there, the teachers and I began our cross-visitation schedule in earnest, completing three rounds for each pair of teacher participants, for a total of six rounds spread throughout the semester. In each (and in the perfect scenario as laid out in the plan in Appendix A), we gathered for a pre-observation discussion during the teacher’s planning/duty period on Monday; on Tuesday, one teacher and myself would visit the partner teacher during his or her class. This occurred during the visiting teacher’s planning or duty period in the case of the math teachers, but required a class substitute in the case of the English teachers. Wednesday, found us visiting the partner teacher’s classroom under the same parameters before finalizing the cross-visitation round on Thursday with a post-observation discussion during the same period in which we had started on Monday. On a few occasions we had to deviate from this plan due to logistical concerns such as inclement weather. Those situations will be discussed in the findings and accounted for in the implementation plan.

**Types of Data Collected**

While working with the teachers throughout the study, I collected the following data from January through May, 2017 in order to provide findings toward the research
questions. Table 4.1 illustrates the data that was collected and how it coincided with the research questions. I provide this chart to create an ease of understanding as to the connection between the data and the research questions.

Table 4.1: Research Questions and Matching Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Associated with Findings</th>
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| **Research Question 1:** What happens when I, as a building administrator, create opportunities for teachers to emerge as leaders with the capacity to support each other in an effort to improve teacher practice and student learning? | • Recordings of collaborative discussion about Lytle & Fecho’s (1991) article “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation”  
• Recordings of collaborative pre- and post-observation discussions  
• Teacher and Administrator Reflective Journals  
• Researcher Field Notes |
| **Research Question 2:** How do I, as a building administrator, engage with teachers to promote collaborative leadership and learning? | • Recordings of collaborative discussion about Lytle & Fecho’s (1991) article “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation”  
• Recordings of collaborative pre- and post-observation discussions  
• Teacher and Administrator Reflective Journals  
• Researcher Field Notes |
| **Research Question 3:** How might making the classroom a site of collaborative inquiry influence the professional learning of teachers and my learning as a building administrator? | • Recordings of collaborative discussion about Lytle & Fecho’s (1991) article “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation”  
• Recordings of collaborative pre- and post-observation discussions  
• Teacher and Administrator Reflective Journals  
• Researcher Field Notes  
• Formal Observation Documentation |
Reading and recorded discussions of Lytle & Fecho’s (1991) article “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation”

Discussions of this article acclimated teachers to the cross-visitation process. The process of close-reading and discussion opened teachers to an understanding of social constructionism, the constructivist framework, and the idea of practitioner inquiry. Upon listening to and analyzing the discussions, which were recorded, I made adjustments to subsequent discussions in an attempt to ensure that everyone understood the process. For example, I tried to make sure that teachers understood social constructionism as something that was already happening in their classrooms, and how they might capitalize upon that learning for their students and themselves, rather than something they had to “implement” as part of the study.

Recordings of collaborative pre- and post-observation discussions

Before and after each cross-visitation round, the math teacher and English teacher participants and I held pre- and post-observation discussions. These discussions were recorded and served as a record of our continued progress during the study. During the pre-observation discussion, we discussed the lesson each teacher would be teaching during our visit. We asked questions about the lesson and ensured we knew what we expected to see while visiting the classroom. The pre-observation discussion also gave the teachers an opportunity to ask his or her counterparts to look for particular things about their practice that manifested during the lesson. During the post-observation discussions, we discussed what we saw in the lesson and how we might improve the lesson and each other’s practices as part of an inquiry community. As the researcher, I
listened to the recordings during the study to help me direct future observation discussions and to make improvements to the cross-visitation study as it was happening.

**Teacher Reflective Journals**

Teachers were provided with and maintained a reflective journal throughout the study. The journal was used to help teachers record their practice in order to see changes they might not realize were happening to them, or in their classroom, throughout the semester. As the semester progressed I read and provided commentary in response to their reflections, helping to create a written dialogue about their teaching practice which enhanced the dialog we had in our pre- and post-observation discussions.

**Administrative Reflective Journal**

As an administrator, I kept a reflective journal regarding my activities through voice commentary on my smartphone. Every Saturday throughout the study (and even before the study began) I listened to the comments, analyzing what I heard myself say in the throes of the workweek. These voice memos were essential to helping me discover how I might go about becoming more efficient in supporting the cross-visitation process along with becoming an effective administrator. Logistical elements and unpredictable events that impeded my plans were recorded as well, which will be reflected in the Implementation Plan in Appendix B of this dissertation.


**Researcher Field Notes**

During each observed lesson and each pre- and post-observation discussion, I kept field notes which helped me maintain proper records of what was happening during the study. Field notes during the cross-visitation lessons, for example, consisted of what was happening during the lesson and what I might say to the teacher during the post-observation discussion as part of my contribution to the inquiry community. Field notes taken during the pre- and post-observation discussions helped me synthesize what was being said by both teachers, along with recording questions about comments being made during the discussions.

**Formal Observation Documentation**

As an assistant principal I formally observed and evaluated 18 teachers throughout the year. For each of the four teachers in the study, I made two observations in order to make comparisons between what practices had changed for the teachers and myself before and after the study. Additionally, for the purposes of this study, I used the formal observation records of two teachers in order to make comparisons between the administrator/ teacher interactions during a formal observation conference versus the collaborative discussions that took place between the teacher participants and myself in our inquiry communities.

**Data Analysis**

Data was examined throughout the study in a cyclical fashion in order to refine the results at the end of the study and provide my findings according the research
questions in this dissertation. The data collected was used, as illustrated in Table 4.1, to answer the research questions.

Four Stage Data Analysis Process (Creswell, 2005)

I used the following four stages of data analysis (Creswell, 2005) to glean themes about the data I was collecting. These stages enabled me to begin (Preliminary Analysis) and continue (Initial, Core, Confirmatory Analysis) the data analysis process systematically, and resulted in the final themes which are included in Chapters 5 (Collaborative Practice) and 6 (The Quality of Interaction in Formal Observation vs. Cross-Visitation) of this dissertation.

- **Preliminary analysis** – This stage helped me to be and stay organized throughout the study and at the end of the study. Additionally, through preliminary analysis, I examined the data as I conducted the study. This allowed me to make changes throughout the semester as I saw fit, in order to ensure that the cross-visititation was as beneficial to the teachers, myself, and the school district, as possible. The preliminary analysis took place as part of the data collection, in a cyclical fashion. As examples, I listened to my administrative reflections on a weekly basis to inform myself of how I was growing and how I might change things in the cross-visititation process in order to continue the research effectively and efficiently. Additionally, I listened to the recordings of each meeting, juxtaposing that information with what I had seen in the classroom, so that I could analyze each
cross-visitation set as one piece of data, again, in order to make the research as effective as possible.

- **Initial analysis** – The aim for the initial analysis of the data was to help me find themes with which I could work to complete a more detailed analysis for this dissertation. At the end of the study, I re-examined all of the data I had collected, coding it toward four themes which were gleaned through discussions with my dissertation committee and the teachers in the study. Those themes were “The Power of the Personal,” “Windows into Practice,” “Administrator and Teacher Learning,” and “Formative vs. Summative Teacher Evaluations.” This initial analysis enabled me to envision the four themes and see best how they could be described and used to create the best information to set forth in the dissertation.

- **Core analysis** – Upon another review of the data with the four themes in mind, I organized the findings into sections which would relate to my initial research questions. I selected exemplars of texts (i.e. transcripts of recorded discussions, journal entries, reflective journals) which could be organized into three chapters which eventually became the outline through which the chapters of this dissertation are written. Those chapters, listed below, are “Collaborative Practice,” “Inquiry and Teacher Learning,” and “Formal Evaluation and Administrator Learning.”
• **Confirmatory analysis** – Throughout, and at the end of the study, I shared my findings with the teacher participants and members of my dissertation committee to ensure that I had navigated the research process with fidelity and had maintained my understanding of the themes and of my positionalities as I completed the writing process.

It should be noted that the first three steps in the process above ensured I was exploring the research data systematically while the fourth stage served as a way through which I could check the reliability and validity of my findings and conclusions.

**Using a Narrative Approach to Discuss the Study’s Findings**

Chapters 5 and 6 were written using anecdotal narratives to illustrate the themes found regarding the cross-visitation process (Chapter 5) and the differences between what occurred in formal observation conferences and the cross-visitation discussions (Chapter 6). As reported this way, the findings of this study are aligned with social-constructivism and the knowledge/practice framework in which they are based; the narrative approach lent itself to the spirit of the study and the data collected and was the most effective way to report the findings of the study.

In support of this narrative approach to the reporting of the study’s findings, I referred to Richmond, Juzwik, and Steele (2011) who created narrative interpretations of qualitative data including face-to-face meetings and teacher candidate journals. They
categorized their narratives into three types, two of which are relevant to this study: 1) first-person narratives, or stories teacher candidates told about themselves to others and to themselves, and 2) second-person narratives, or stories others (university mentors or cooperating teachers) told about teacher candidates to the teacher candidates. In the study, the teacher candidates “highlight[ed] interactions and reflections at landmark moments” in their paths toward becoming educators (Richmond, Juzwik & Steele, 2011, p. 1867).

Molding Richmond, Juzwik, and Steele’s (2011) study to the present study, I replaced “university mentors or cooperating teachers” with “participating teachers and myself, as a building administrator,” so that the narratives I crafted, represented in the best way possible, the findings of the study.

**Moving Forward…**

The remainder of this dissertation encompasses what was learned in this study. Chapters 5 and 6, serve as the “results” chapters, in which I discuss learnings about collaborative practice, and the difference between interactions in formal observations versus the cross-visitation process. In Chapter 7, I offer a discussion of my findings, including the study’s importance to my learning as an administrator, and the contribution this study makes to the body of Administrator Practitioner Inquiry. Appendix A contains the plan which was carried out for this study and Appendix B provides an implementation plan for those who wish to utilize the cross-visitation process within their own school
communities. Taking what I learned through the process of this research, I have written a plan that incorporates the improvements necessary for this work to move forward.
CHAPTER 5:
COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

In Chapter 5, I report on the results of the analysis of data collected during the cross-visitation process. I relate the data to the lenses of knowledge in and of practice, and the five tenets of those frames that occur in the data as laid out in Chapter 3. I discuss my findings according to the initial research questions, particularly questions one and two, which relate to the manner in which teachers support each other collaboratively, and how I engaged with the teachers to promote our collective learning. I use data from the collaborative discussion about Lytle and Fecho’s (1991) article, inquiry community pre- and post- cross-visitation discussions, teacher and administrator reflective journals, and my field notes from the cross-visitation process to support my findings.

From the analysis of the data, three themes emerged. First, the importance of strong professional relationships stood out as significant in fostering the teachers’ professional learning, as well as my own. Second, the reflective practice which primarily emerged through the pre- and post- cross-visitation discussions helped the teachers and myself learn about each other and our practices. Finally, both the strong professional relationships and the reflective practice fell under the umbrella of what I call the “Window into Practice” created by the cross-visitation process. Were it not for the teachers opening their classrooms to each other and to me, as a building administrator, and thus, opening a window into their practice, our professional relationships and reflective practice would not have been developed as it was. I discuss the theme of windows into practice first because it serves to envelop the themes of professional
relationships and reflective practice. Both themes are illustrated in the two examples I offer of the windows into practice created by the cross-visitation process.

**Opening a Window into Practice**

Making practice public means that teachers have the ability to watch their colleagues teach and to learn from their collegial experiences. In this section, I use reflective discussions, the teachers’ and my own reflective journals, and my field notes to discuss the ways in which teachers opened a window into their practice through the cross-visitation process. While there are many windows into practice, for the purposes of this dissertation, the window into practice I discuss is the cross-visitation process. This process is illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.

**Figure 5.1: The Effect of Cross-Visitation as the Window into Practice**

![Diagram of Cross-Visitation — Window into Practice](image_url)
It is important to note that the window into practice serves as an umbrella to the examples in this chapter. As stated in the introduction, the strong professional relationships and the reflective practices generated through the study are the result of the cross-visitation process and the windows into practice it opened. In “Teachers Learning through Visitation and Critique,” English teachers Hallie and Charles improve upon their practice of teaching thesis statements and quoting. In “Heightening Expectations for Students,” Math teacher Courtney realizes, through opening her classroom doors, that she should have higher expectations for her students. Through the inquiry communities created by the cross-visitation process, each teacher, and I, as a building administrator, built upon our understanding of our practices and their importance to student achievement.

**Teachers learning through visitation and critique**

At the end of our opening discussion about Lytle and Fecho’s (1991) article, English teachers Hallie and Charles made an important statement about “going public” with their practice. Hallie pointed out that the English department had decided to use a common quoting format for literature called CSQT (Claim, Set-up, Quote, Tie-in), yet some teachers within the department had decided not to use it. The effect of the other teacher’s decision was that their students might arrive in subsequent classes (junior and senior years) never having learned CSQT, all because they did not like the format, or refused to change their practice. This is a problem pointed out in Lytle and Fecho’s (1991) article:

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2 The CSQT format is to be used for quoting literature in research and analytical essays and in the state exams.
One by-product of going public was that teachers saw how their own work with students depended directly on the work of others. The network of classrooms - the teachers the students had last year, the others they encounter each day, and even the ones whom they will meet subsequently - all are in a sense participants in one’s own classroom. (p. 12)

Hallie understood that decisions to go against a departmental adoptions had further ramifications stating that “going public makes it so that as a teacher you would feel like I better do this. I better get on the program.” Charles backed her by saying, “It’s in public!” Both disagreed with their colleagues’ decision to disregard the department’s use of CSQT as the standard quoting format.

Because Charles was new to the district, the CSQT format was new for him. By the second cross-visitation cycle, Charles had not only begun to teach the CSQT format as part of his teaching literature, he had begun to adapt it toward teaching thesis statements. In my field notes about the class period in which I witnessed Charles’ adaptation, I wrote down the equation which Charles had written on the whiteboard: “Subject + Claim + Three points of support = Thesis Statement.” Charles was teaching his students how to write a thesis statement for a five paragraph essay. His students were going to use that thesis statement format for the research process that he had begun to teach. However, his students could use this formula to create as many points of support as they wanted. The important part, Charles had stated, was that they articulated the subject and the claim clearly.

Alongside me, Hallie witnessed the new strategy being used by Charles. She reflected in our post cross-visitation discussion that she had struggled in the past when teaching thesis statements, particularly with the research process. She said she had not
thought to combine the five-paragraph essay thesis statement with the research process because the research paper was always more than five paragraphs. In her reflective journal entry about her visit to Charles’ classroom, she stated that the strategy was a “good tool to help students understand [the concept of the thesis statement]. Also, it is a hands-on tool for students.” In our discussion, Hallie said that she planned to adapt Charles’ method for her own classroom, to fit her teaching style. Had she not been in Charles’ classroom, she would not have had the opportunity to learn this method of teaching the thesis statement. Because she was part of our inquiry community she was able to add to her understanding of the uses of a strategy through our face-to-face interactions. She had linked her prior knowledge to new understandings of how to use that knowledge, because Charles had done the same thing after participating in our opening discussion about cross-visitation and listening to Hallie’s comments.

Additionally, Hallie offered constructive feedback for Charles about his lesson. Toward the end of the lesson, Charles had asked one student to read her thesis statement to the entire class. Hallie pointed out that while that student got to offer an example, practicing and listening to her own thesis statement, it was not relevant to all of the students, and thus was disengaging to others in the room. Hallie suggested that a think-pair-share activity in their learning pods of three to four students might have helped the students gain needed practice and understanding of the thesis statement process. I added that if the students all got to share their thesis statements with their table-mates, they could have built upon their understanding of how different students write their thesis statements. Further, I stated that “if the students are able to hear what they are
researching, they have the opportunity to take an interest in each other’s research.” I went on to say that while the students are explaining their research to each other, they can come up with further ideas about their research through that explanation and the conversation that might arise.

In this instance, Hallie gave a specific example of how Charles could improve his lesson, and I added to her suggestion. At the end of the cross-visitation round, both English teachers had a new or improved method through which to teach the thesis statement for a research paper. By making their practice public to one another through the cross-visitation process (Lytle & Fecho, 1991) and through reflective conversation, both teachers, along with myself, influenced and improved each other’s practice. The teachers interrogated their pedagogical techniques, while I learned how to offer suggestions in a coaching manner, rather than as an evaluator. Together, we generated new understandings through our interpretations of what we had seen in the classroom, theorizing how we might utilize the practices and improve upon them at the same time.

**Heightening expectations for students**

A window into Math teacher Courtney’s practice allowed both Bob and I to witness her growth toward higher expectations for her students. In the beginning of the year, and the study, Courtney had low expectations for her students because she was teaching academic level students and she expected them to achieve at that level. Courtney tended to slow lessons to a point she thought her students could manage, but her students
were able to do more. In a comment about her first cross-visitation lesson, I asked Courtney how she thought the lesson went. She responded,

For that particular class, I think it went fairly well. I think that they got as far as I wanted them to, um, I actually wasn’t expecting all of the groups to get to the point where they made the double tetrahedron. Especially since it was more on them—that part was more on them—instead of me leading them through it.

Courtney’s comments illustrated lower expectations for her students. She articulated “that particular class,” meaning the lower achieving class, before stating that they surpassed her expectations, “especially since it was more on them.” In other words, she assumed that her students would not get to that point in the lesson without her guidance and step-by-step instructions.

In our reflective discussion, Bob listened intently, agreeing with Courtney through his body language and affirming utterances (“yeah, yeah,” etc.) that he was surprised that the students had made the progress they had made. Meanwhile, I was thinking that if Courtney had planned a lesson in which her students were supposed to get to a certain point of understanding, then the expectation should be that they would understand the concepts by the end of the lesson. As an inquiry community, we disagreed with each other, in terms of the success of the lesson and Courtney’s expectations of her students.

Courtney went on to discuss other difficulties she had with her lower level students. She made remarks illustrating similarly low expectations of her students, this time regarding assessments. She told Bob and me about how she leads test review sessions for her students. Courtney stated:

When I give the test, for academic—I would never do this for honors, I would never do this. We do a practice test the day before. I [use the test] with different numbers. So the process is the exact same. And on that day, it’s the only day that I
teach from start to finish—because they need it. And I do every single problem with them, and some of them choose to write it down and pay attention, and some don’t, um, but it works well for them.

Again, Bob, new to CPM methods, struggling with his students both academically and behaviorally, took vigilant notes on Courtney’s strategies. However, Courtney’s comments further troubled me on many levels. First, Courtney had pointed out that she would only do this for “academic” and never for honors illustrating lower expectations for her academic students. Further, she stated that her students needed the review sessions to be led in such a way because that process worked for them. However, when all was said and done, the students had essentially taken the test twice, but only on the second turn did it count for a grade. Courtney continued,

Overall, they need to see that practice test done. Not honors, but academic—the lower academic. Um, they need to see it, so I’ve had good success, I mean the scores overall, are successful for the most part.

Here, Courtney went as far as to differentiate between the academic and the “lower academic.” She stated that she had good success using this method of test preparation. She also mentioned the “scores” illustrating success. In this case, any score a student earned could not possibly demonstrate mastery to Courtney as their teacher because of the way that she had reviewed.

Before I was able to step in and say something regarding my disagreement with her comments, Courtney had an epiphany; she realized the problem with her review technique:

But then I would say that it’s not successful when a student is not keeping up with the entire chapter, and they’re just paying attention for one day out of the unit, and they’re doing okay on the test. So that’s something that I struggle with.
Through our reflective cross-visitation conversation, Courtney realized that her students had figured out that they need not pay attention through their class time. So long as they paid attention during the review, in which Courtney spoon-fed the information to them, they would pass the test. She mentioned that she struggled with her methods, but this was the first time she had articulated that struggle. Because she felt comfortable speaking about her difficulties within our inquiry community, Courtney’s reflection illustrated to herself, Bob and me, that new practices must take place in order for students to truly learn the concepts in CPM math.

While we did not discuss it in the moment, Courtney’s comment served to push our thinking through the remaining cross-visitations. Both teachers had figured out the problem with this method of review and assessment. By interrogating their practices and techniques through further face-to-face conversations and personal reflective practice, Courtney and Bob re-interpreted what they thought was good practice, and used that new understanding to create better practice in subsequent lessons and assessments.

**Conclusion**

Math teachers Courtney and Bob’s discoveries, along with English teachers Hallie and Charles’ discussion above, illustrate what happened when a window into their practice was opened during the cross-visitation study. The opportunity was created for them to build the capacity to support each other through commenting on each other’s teaching practice. Our collective engagement in each other’s learning helped to develop
the strong professional relationships and reflective practices, which are the two themes discussed below.

**Strong Professional Relationships**

Through my analysis of our cross-visitation discussions, teacher journals, and my administrator journal, one of the key themes that emerged was the central role of strong professional relationships as developed throughout the cross-visitation process. In this section, I respond primarily to research questions one and two. I also touch upon research question three. In response to question one, I present data on how the use of the cross-visitation process helped the participating teachers support each other collaboratively in “The Desire to Collaborate,” in which the teachers improved their practice and strengthened their professional relationships. Referring to question two, “Opening the Classroom for Others to Learn” illustrates how data collected about how the participating teachers and I engaged in our work collaboratively to promote professional learning was effective. Finally, in “Bob’s Improved Questioning throughout the School Year,” because Math teacher Courtney made her classroom a site of inquiry, she influenced Bob’s learning, her own learning, and my learning, which speaks to research question number three.

*The desire to collaborate*

The participating teachers and I began this research study by discussing Lytle and Fecho’s (1991) article, “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by
Cross-Visitation.” As discussed in the literature review, participants in Lytle and Fecho’s (1991) research had to build new professional relationships with other teachers in order to collaborate effectively. In the example below, English teacher Hallie described her consternation about the lack of collegial sharing within the English department. Her comment illustrated that she wanted to collaborate with other teachers, to be open with them, so that they might be open with her, but many of her colleagues did not want to do so:

Some people are very generous with giving their stuff and then you have people who are just takers and never reciprocate, and never have anything to offer you because they’re just taking what you have and making their new folders…

Hallie’s dismay about teachers not sharing amongst each other speaks to the privacy in which teachers practice. A teacher may not “share” for any number of reasons. They may feel uncomfortable placing their work in the public eye of other teachers or they may not want to feel vulnerable to the scrutiny that might come with such sharing. Hallie described her department in such a way that some teachers are willing to support each other, while others are not.

In response to Hallie’s comment, Charles offered a more specific example which separates what he sees as collegial sharing as part of a professional relationship vs. the taking of materials or strategies to fill holes in a unit or lesson. In Charles’ description, collegial sharing is part of the professional relationship that one teacher has with another, whereas, the taking of materials acts counter to the creation of a professional relationship. The lack of give and take reifies the isolation of teachers and prevents the creation of a collegial relationship.
The Lytle and Fecho (1991) article permeated Charles’ criticism of non-collaborative teaching practices that occur. In the conversation, Charles demonstrated that he is someone who genuinely wants to learn how to be a better teacher. He is willing to make himself vulnerable and open to others, so that he might learn together with other teachers.

By being willing to participate in this research study, Charles and Hallie demonstrated that they wanted to build a collaborative professional relationship in which they could support and learn from one another. The cross-visitation process did just that. They were able to create knowledge through their face-to-face interactions, learning actively by creating new understandings of their prior knowledge. They also understood, through participating in the study that what they would learn together would take place over time; not just in the study, but beyond. Given the article that informs Hallie and Charles’ conversation, they illustrated a genuine concern about the lack of collaboration among teachers, all of whom are impacted by a need for professional relationships.

*Opening the classroom for others to learn*

In our discussion of the Lytle and Fecho (1991) article, Math teacher Bob stated, “I have sat in Courtney’s class once or twice on free period already.” This offered an immediate understanding of the professional relationship that these colleagues had developed prior to the start of the study. At Bob’s request, Courtney had opened her classroom so that he might learn how to be a successful CPM math teacher, both of them
demonstrating a willingness to be open, vulnerable, and to show trust in one another. In talking about his experiences, Bob said,

I’m new to the CPM and she’s been involved in the program before so I wanted to kinda see what type of—how she was delivering it, how much she was speaking, how much free reign she was giving to the students, and how well the students handled that free reign. Um, and, you know she was pretty good!

Bob was looking for help with his classroom pedagogy. In Courtney and other members of the Math department, Bob saw opportunities to improve his practice and his colleagues reciprocated. If not for the strong professional relationships they had developed by being active and collaborative department-mates, Bob might not have felt comfortable to ask for such visitations to Courtney’s classroom.

Later in the discussion, Courtney and Bob spoke about the difference between the CPM professional development trainings, and physically witnessing CPM implemented in the classroom. Courtney stated,

I think seeing another teacher might be even more beneficial than the trainings, because the trainings are a bunch of ‘what if’ and ‘you can do this, you can do that,’ but if you actually go into a classroom and see it being implemented, I think that’s more beneficial in a way, than the trainings.

Courtney’s comment alludes to the local knowledge necessary to take what is learned in the CPM professional development trainings back to her own students. She clearly links the value of the knowledge for practice provided by the CPM trainers, but understands that she must treat that knowledge as generative material for interrogation, interpretation, and theorization, so that she can connect it to her own school community. Because the CPM trainers do not know the dynamics of her classroom, she must fill that gap with her personal understanding of her students and their learning styles. Allowing Bob to visit her
classroom to display her implementation of the CPM methods offered a more personal, collaborative, and local experience, which she herself desires, as illustrated by her comment above.

Knowing that Bob was not present for the summer CPM training, Courtney opened her classroom doors, opened a window into her practice, so that Bob could see CPM in action, particularly in the local context of the research site. She knew that Bob was vulnerable to failure because he was not present for the CPM professional development. If he did not get it right, or did not see or believe in the philosophy behind the system, he would not have been able to facilitate it with his students. Bob’s request for help, and Courtney’s willingness to offer it suggests that they both understand the importance that all students be offered the same opportunities to learn. Further, their experiences together emphasize that a strong professional relationship can help one colleague come to another for help when it is needed.

The opportunity created by the cross-visitation program for Math teachers Bob and Courtney, helped them to improve each other’s practice collaboratively through an inquiry community. Bob and Courtney engaged with each other prior to the start of the study, so as their administrator and the researcher, I joined them as they were already learning together. I was able to support them further by becoming a part of the process myself. By opening their classrooms as sites of inquiry, we all influenced each other’s professional learning.
Bob’s improved questioning throughout the school year

The initial discussion about Lytle and Fecho’s (1991) article set the tone for the Math teachers and how they would work together as colleagues during the study. One of the areas in which Bob grew throughout the study was in his ability to question students in an effort to help them learn geometry concepts in depth. At the beginning of the study, Bob struggled with offering too much information to his students, disallowing them the discovery learning encouraged by CPM. By the end of the study, he was able to avoid giving his students too much information; instead, he was able to draw the information from students, eliciting questions from them, rather than following the traditional approach of conveying information.

At the beginning of the school year, essentially new to teaching and without the benefit of the preliminary CPM training, Bob struggled to stay afloat. Courtney’s presence for Bob, both as a leader and co-worker, was critical to Bob’s learning about questioning within the CPM model. In our first cross-visitation round, Bob discussed what he saw in Courtney’s lesson that he thought would be helpful to him:

Some of the things that I really liked, that were helpful to me, that I saw, um, Courtney does a very good job of—I think I do too much, um, I give too much information to [the kids]. She kind of—I think she does a good job of drawing the information out of them.

Discovery and collaborative learning are central to Bob’s affirmation of Courtney’s questioning methods. Instead of “giving too much information to the kids,” which presents as a banking model of education, Bob wants his questions to “draw information out of his students,” which would help his students understand math through his facilitation of the class. While he did not have the formal training from the CPM trainer,
he created a professional relationship with Courtney to help him garner the appropriate
skills in part because he took the initiative at the beginning of the year to visit and
collaborate with Courtney in a trusting, open, collegial relationship.

It became clear to me as the semester went on, that Math teacher Bob was making
great strides in his questioning techniques. During the third cross-visitation lesson, I
wrote in my field notes:

Student is pushed to come up with what makes a 3D object. Nice job pushing her
to get to the answer. You worked with different questions for that to make sure
she was successful. You are doing a good job to get the kids to recall former
information. That’s very helpful.

My field notes speak to the idea of “drawing information out” of students, which moves
toward discovery learning and helping students to learn to think critically about problems
they are trying to solve. Bob had not simply figured out how to answer questions by only
giving hints; he had learned to push the students to solve the problems on their own,
through his questioning, helping to ensure that students truly understand the mathematics
embedded within the tasks given. At one point during the same cross-visitation, Bob said
to a student that he could “pick up and rotate, turn and flip the shapes to better understand
the surface area definition.” In this comment Bob offers almost no information about the
concept, but he helps the student realize that he is allowed to manipulate the shape in
order to find out more information for himself. I wrote in my comments that “any transfer
of knowledge is important, but making it your practice, takes a lot of, well, practice.
Great job with that.” In sharing my comments with Bob, I pushed him further toward a
feeling of success while also creating a professional bond with him as a colleague.
In data collected from both the cross-visitation discussions and reflective journals, Math teachers Bob and Courtney affirmed each other’s questioning techniques often. From the start, Bob had nothing but positive things to say about Courtney’s practice. Courtney complimented Bob’s improved ability to question students in a way that pushed the students toward deeper thinking about geometry concepts. Courtney pointed out Bob’s growth in her reflective journal, writing, “Great question prompting for James’ and Seth’s group when they were stuck with finding the triangles in the square.” This comment was written in early February, at the beginning of the study.

Interviews with Courtney revealed several ways in which Bob’s inquiry into and interrogation of his questioning techniques helped him improve. In separate conversations with Courtney during and at the end of the study, she was supportive and encouraging of Bob’s progress. In a later journal entry, Courtney commented more generally: “Great questioning to have students activate their prior knowledge on volume,” and “Great questioning to guide each group.” Courtney’s shift from specific students to the class in general illustrates that in the first example with James and Seth, she was looking for examples of good questioning to help Bob understand how to question more effectively. Once Bob grew into that particular skill, she moved to affirmation of his progress with the techniques they had been working on together through their professional relationship. This is reinforced by a cross-visitation discussion in which Courtney compliments Bob, saying,

Your questioning throughout this lesson, I think, improved a lot since the last lesson. Um, your focusing question, [inaudible] that they told us at the training, um, the way you questioned, it didn’t give too much information, but it was leading the kids towards the answer. It gave them the little push that they need.
Um, it was, like, for example, when you pointed out, or you questioned if the triangles were congruent or similar—that was good because it brought in some previous knowledge. Um, and then you questioned the kids to determine that the central angles added up to 360 because you were doing a circular motion, and they know from Chapter 1 or 2 that a circular angle is 360 degrees. So they were able to figure out, since there were three angles that they could take the 360, divide it by 120 and they got there on their own with just a little push from you, which was great.

This comment came during our second post-observation discussion and shows Courtney’s strong affirmation of Bob’s improvement through empathy and critical friendship. Her willingness to look for difficulties and improvements in Bob’s questioning techniques exhibit trust and openness toward Bob, all in an effort to increase student achievement. Further, Courtney’s understanding of how much Bob has learned through the semester and the study, and how to further support him illustrates the importance of the strong professional relationship that they formed at the beginning of the year.

**Conclusion**

Strong professional relationships are necessary for teachers to help themselves and their students succeed. English teachers Hallie and Charles illustrated their interest in collegial sharing that comes with strong professional relationships. Courtney’s willingness to open her classroom door to Bob in effort to help him succeed also illustrated a strong professional relationship. Finally, Bob and Courtney built a strong capacity to support each other’s learning and practice by working together to help Bob with his questioning techniques. I was able to engage all of the teachers collaboratively, further promoting our
collective learning. Finally, as sites of collaborative inquiry, each teacher’s classroom became a space in which our professional learning was influenced.

Strong professional relationships and the influence they can have on teaching practices were illuminated in the three examples above. In the next section, I will discuss how the cross-visitation process helped develop our ability to reflect on our practice through the pre- and post-cross-visitation discussions.

**Reflections on Practice**

Reflective practice is a cornerstone of the cross-visitation process as it was envisioned in this research study. While the original idea was to use reflective journals as the medium through which reflection would occur, I soon discovered that the journals were only one place in which reflection was happening. In terms of reflective practice, the discussions conducted before and after the cross-visitation lessons proved most important to our collaborative learning and reflective practice. New ideas came from the cross-visitation process and the discussions that accompanied the lessons experienced. In this section of the chapter, I discuss several examples in which reflective practice manifested itself in the pre- and post-cross-visitation discussions that took place between myself and the teachers, including breaking the norm of monotony in Courtney’s Geometry class (“Fun and Engaging Lessons as a Break from the Norm”), understanding new possibilities for Charles’ English class (“Offering an Understanding of the Possibilities”), and thinking and learning like students with Math teacher Bob.
In terms of the research questions, I again respond primarily to research questions one and two. In response to question one, I present data on how the use of the cross-visitation process strengthened the inquiry community for the teachers and myself. Data for question two illustrated the engagement for both inquiry communities (English and Math) and how each of our practices could be improved through our participation in the cross-visitation process (“Thinking and Learning like Students in the Classroom”).

**Fun and engaging lessons as a break from the norm**

In the following example, Math teacher Courtney critically analyzes her practice through a reflective discussion between her, Bob, and myself. Courtney described the lesson that we would see during our first cross-visitation, which included the recent distribution of the second CPM textbook. She told Bob and me that the students would be transitioning from 2D geometrical shapes, which were largely featured in the first half of the year, to 3D figures. She stated that the first chapter was “very hands-on” which we had established was a good motivating factor for students. She then said,

So this lesson, it’s not um, I wouldn’t tell [the students] this, but it’s not so much a lesson that they’re gonna be tested on content-wise, but it’s a foundation, basic lesson—it’s a nice break for them because they get to build this little figure that they’re gonna be making, and um, and it’s a nice little break for them after the rough chapter that they just had.

Courtney’s comment puzzled me. As I listened, I picked apart the fact that it was a nice break for the students because it was a hands-on lesson in which the students would build something. As broken down on the spot, I equated this lesson as non-tested and fun.
I was not at all concerned with the fact that it would not be tested; I was focused on the *fun* part. I said,

> There were a couple of times where you referred to this foundational lesson as ‘a nice break from what you’ve been doing.’ And then, um, the engaging activity, the engaging lessons are sort of special and you know, like it’s a nice break from the normal grind that you do.

What I was attempting to uncover as a collaborative participant in the discussion, was that Courtney was saying that the fun lessons were special, while the grinding lessons were common-place. With engagement being such an urgent matter in the research site, I pushed Courtney’s thinking about her comments and what they truly meant; that math can only be fun every once in a while, rather than being the norm in a CPM math classroom.

Courtney said, “With the last thing that you mentioned, with the lesson being like a break, um, yeah, I didn’t realize the way that I was saying it, but now that you mention it, I agree.” She went on to reference another part of the conversation in which we had discussed Bob’s body language and tone when going into a lesson, or part of a lesson, which he believed the students were not going to like. We had commented on the fact that when Bob feels that his students were not going to willingly engage in a lesson, he might enter the classroom with a different facial expression, portray different mannerisms, or simply change his demeanor, all subconsciously. Referring to that part of the conversation, Courtney added,

> We were talking about body language with Bob. I’m wondering if maybe I have a certain body language or a certain tone when I’m teaching cosine, sine, tangent, as opposed to when we are building the tetrahedron that we’re gonna build tomorrow. So I’m wondering if part of it is in, you know, the tone of my voice, or you know, my body language, and I’m wondering if that has an effect on them as
well. And, and I’m assuming that it does. And I could have been doing it without even realizing it.

This part of the conversation illustrates Courtney’s assumption that some lessons are innately fun (building a tetrahedron), while others cannot be fun (learning cosine, sine, and tangent). The lesson that we were to witness would be enjoyable for the students, and by this conversation, Courtney’s mannerisms might express excitement about the day’s plans, therefore increasing engagement. On the other hand, when she planned to teach cosine, sine, and tangent, she realized that she might bring a less excited attitude to the classroom because she does not believe that those concepts can be fun for her students. As a result of this realization between the two teachers, the conversation turned to how Bob and Courtney might make each lesson fun, and therefore engaging, for their students. The question that came from the conversation was “How might we engage our students, and expect them to be engaged by every lesson we teach, rather than just the lessons that are hands-on?” As an inquiry community, we were constructing knowledge in a face-to-face interaction, interrogating and theorizing our practice in order to increase student engagement, and thus, student achievement. These two elements of the conversation—the fact that the lesson was going to be a break, and the issue of body language—would not have surfaced but for the collaborative pre-observation discussion.

Offering an understanding of the possibilities

Being a first-year teacher at the school, English teacher Charles benefitted from working closely with Hallie through the cross-visitation process and the reflective practices included. At the beginning of the study, Charles was very concerned about his
students’ motivation to read. In particular, he discussed Steinbeck’s *The Pearl*, and how some students had finished the book within a few days, while others refused to keep his purposefully slow pace. Even when he sped the pace of reading, something he thought to do through reflective writing, and which he shared with Hallie and me during a cross-visititation discussion, students were not reading. During our first round of cross-visitations, Hallie explained to Charles what she does to get her students interested in reading Elie Wiesel’s Holocaust memoir, *Night*:

> We even did some pieces from *Black Boy* to show racism before we started reading *Night*, so like, they know it’s just not isolated to the Holocaust, it’s, you know, it happens world-wide, you know, we talk about different things that are happening currently in the world, that are very similar to the things that are happening in *Night*, you know, and so they’re really amazed.

These are the types of strategies that not only illustrated that Hallie knows her students; they also illustrated that she is able to share those strategies and is proud of them. She continued, offering a specific example from her class, and how her students reacted to part of the book:

> I mean even today, you know, Kiara was saying, she said ‘I’m so mad, nobody’s standin’ up, you know like all these people are there and the kid got hung’ you know, and she’s like ‘all these Holocaust victims were there, and they could have just jumped in’ and we were like, ‘all the machine guns were around them,’ you know, like, we tried to show them that fear sometimes is greater than even horror.

Hallie’s comments served to guide Charles through the second semester and the start of his career in the school and district. As a new teacher getting his feet wet, he now realized that he can discuss racism in school; he can excerpt from *Black Boy* by Richard Wright, for example.
As an active learner of his own practice, Charles’ examination of his practice, and the face-to-face reflective discussion enabled him to form a much more engaging lesson later in the year, illustrating further that educator learning takes place over time. In his second formal observation, Charles’ lesson was much more nuanced and differentiated. It showed tremendous growth and learning. His lesson consisted of a discussion of scars and emotional and physical damage in the novel *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston using a collection of photographs of Japanese internment camps by Ansel Adams as commissioned by the United States government. In his observation document, Charles states:

> I have the self-assessment rubrics along with my participation records of each student. The follow up lesson indicated varied degrees of understanding and interest regarding the theme of scars and emotional and physical damage. Students continue to infuse these ideas into subsequent lessons. I am confident that the idea of developing scars based on varied trauma was fairly easily established. The concept of coping was understood, but not consistently applied across the class.

Moving from his struggles with his students reading *The Pearl*, to a concept such as emotional scarring and trauma illustrates a huge leap in confidence for Charles over the span of the study. Further indicating his understanding of his local context in the school, Charles indicated that he was very careful with his discussion of trauma and scars; he had learned about his students on a personal level and understood that trauma could be and is a very real part of their lives. Through the cross-visitation process, Charles had gone from learning the school and his students, and learning to lead engaging discussions about emotional scars, in which he displayed sensitivity to his students and their life situations.
The reflective discussions that occurred through the cross-visitation process helped Charles to understand the possibilities much sooner than he might have, were it not for his desire to participate in the cross-visitation study and the accompanying reflective discussions.

**Thinking and learning like students in the classroom**

One of the most important discoveries the Math teachers and I made together was the fact that we could and should learn by thinking like students in the classroom. The most poignant example came when Bob and I were visiting Courtney who was working with zoom factors and triangles. Because I had decided to try to do the problem with the class as part of my field notes, Bob and I had to work with each other in the same way that the students did. We became a team of two in which Bob knew more than I did. He had to help me understand the concept, teaching it to me, the way a student would teach another student. This is a key component to CPM mathematics and the way in which students are expected to learn. By placing ourselves in the position of student, an opportunity to remember what it was like to be a student who did not understand something important was created by the cross-visitation process.

Bob saw that I was struggling with the problem and attempted to help me, initially to no avail. As we kept going however, with Bob’s help, I finally understood the problem and most importantly, I understood the mathematics behind it. Additionally, Bob had figured out a way to explain the concept to someone who knew relatively nothing about it at the beginning of the class period. It was a near exact illustration of CPM’s insistence
that students who teach other students learn by doing so; they enrich their own learning by working with a struggling student. In this example, Bob had learned what it was like to be a student in his classroom who might be struggling to explain a concept to another student. I had acted as the struggling student who benefitted from his peer’s continuing attempts to explain the concept.

This moment created an opportunity for me to tell Bob something during our last cross-visitation discussion. During our conversation, I told him that I was glad he had missed the CPM training the previous summer because it forced him to learn in much the same way his students learned. I said to him,

I’m really glad, and I say this now that it’s April, and I don’t say it in jest, but I’m really glad that you didn’t get to do the CPM training in the summer. And I say that only because of what you just said: ‘I can’t even understand where I’m going and I’m the teacher.’ So think about how the kids feel. Where does that put, like where does that put you as the teacher and how do you remember being in the student’s spot? You’re trying to figure out what the heck you’re supposed to do as a, as a math teacher in a high school, that you haven’t done since the eighties. You know, you’re a new math teacher, you’re in a new school, you’ve got new kids, and you missed part of the professional development. So you’re in a tough spot. But the kids are coming in here and they’re in that same spot, you know, but you have to lead them. But you have to think about, or maybe it helps to think about you know, where they are, and what they know, and what they don’t know. And what they’re concerned about.

I would never have said this to Bob in the beginning of the year, mostly because it would not have occurred to me; however, at the end of the year, having practiced face-to-face reflective discussions with the teachers, and having built strong professional relationships, this commentary was extremely important to articulating a way in which teachers learn. They learn by doing; by acting on a problem; by solving both pedagogical and classroom problems, and by adjusting to their students’ needs. Both Courtney and
Bob had different understandings of what the school year held in store for them, and they both learned by getting through it with their students, and as a collaborative team.

In a final moment, Bob found himself learning from his students, which was exciting for all of us. He was describing his lesson on pinwheels and the angles that are involved in their creation. He had displayed his students’ work on the wall for easy reference. In our post-observation discussion, Bob referenced his journal which read,

So that was one of the things that I learned was easiest that a student pointed out, and I was like ‘yeah, that’s really good. If all of the angles are pointing outward, it’s a convex polygon. If you find at least one angle that’s pointing inward, then it becomes non-convex.’ So I thought that was like ‘hmmm. Yeah that’s easier to remember.’

During the reflective observation discussion, Courtney clarified, “And they came up with that on their own?” to which Bob said “One of the students says ‘well, they’re all going, all of ‘em are going out and none of them are pointing in,’ and I was like ‘none of what are pointing in?’” Bob then stood up and showed us on the wall where the pinwheels were and gave examples and then said, “So the kids were like, as soon as I told them that, they were all like, ‘oh, yeah, that’s easy.’” Allowing himself to learn how to teach a concept by listening to his students enhanced Bob’s success because he could then teach his students in a more relatable way. His learning took time, but he had taken an active part in that learning process.

**Conclusion**

By opening windows into their practice through the cross-visitiation process and making their practice public, the teachers built strong professional relationships, and
developed the capacity to collaboratively reflect upon their practice. In the first example, English teachers Hallie and Charles’ collaboration and willingness to open their practice, helped them both to create new knowledge. Secondly, Math teacher Courtney realized that she needed to heighten her expectations of her students. These two examples served to develop an understanding of how strong professional relationships and reflective practice combined to push the teachers’ and my own learning. It also created the umbrella term “Windows into Practice,” upon which this chapter is based.

In developing professional relationships, Hallie and Charles, and Courtney and Bob demonstrated a desire to collaborate with each other and with other colleagues. For example, Math teacher Courtney willingly opened her classroom so that Bob could see the CPM pedagogy effectively implemented in Courtney’s classroom. Bob improved his questioning techniques throughout the study in part through Courtney’s guidance and the cross-visitation process. These professional relationships and the experiences that resulted from them illustrated that the teachers engaged each other in their learning through collaboration and inquiry.

Through the pre- and post-observation discussions, Hallie, Charles, Bob, and Courtney all created reflections about their practice, learning new things about themselves and their students. Math teacher Courtney realized that the norm of her classroom tended to be monotonous, rather than engaging, and Math teacher Bob learned about the importance of placing himself in his students’ shoes so that he could understand how his students learned. English teacher Hallie helped Charles understand the
possibilities of using outside texts to garner interest in reading novels. Reflective practice was instrumental in the learning processes experienced by everyone in the study.

Throughout the study, I changed my understanding of my role as an administrator in an evaluative capacity. Elements of my leadership identity shifted as I focused on a deeper understanding of my purpose in observing and visiting teachers in their classrooms. While I was required to implement the formal observation process for both the participating and non-participating teachers, I found that I could engage more effectively with the teacher participants as part of the inquiry community in which we all took part. I opened a window into my own practice by entering the classroom as a learning observer, rather than an expert in the content area. Even as an expert in the ELA content area, I learned to respect the decisions of the district’s ELA teachers, working with them as a critical friend who could offer insight within the bounds of their chosen pedagogical methods and practices. The professional relationships I built with the participating teachers over time were important to this learning. Further, my understanding of reflection as discussion within the inquiry community helped me understand that I was part of the community, and not someone who had simply organized it. I was asked and answered questions, and I asked questions of the teachers, both as a critical friend and vulnerable observer.

Opportunities created by the cross-visitation process allowed the teachers and me to participate in and support each other’s learning and improvement of practice. These moments helped me to engage with the teachers so that I could learn about my own practice, while promoting collaborative leadership and learning. In the numerous
examples, the learning that took place would not have occurred in the way that it did were it not for the cross-visitation window into practice that was opened through their participation in the study. In Chapter 6, I compare the quality of interactions between formal observations and the elements of the cross-visitation process as illustrated in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 6:
THE QUALITY OF INTERACTION IN FORMAL OBSERVATION VS. CROSS-VISITATION

As an administrator, creating the opportunity for cross-visitations to occur and being a part of the collaborative discussions helped me learn more about my practice and the practice of four teachers. In Chapter 6, I focus the data and my findings primarily on research question three. Each of the teachers created inquiry sites in their classrooms, exposing a gap between what occurs during the formal observation process a teacher undergoes and what occurs during the cross-visitation process. In this chapter, I compare and report on four observational experiences. In the first comparison, I offered a suggestion during a formal observation post-conference with an English teacher which I thought of during the observation. I compare that to a reflective discussion between English teachers Hallie and Charles contrasting the data from the formal observation which illustrates a much richer and more valuable overall experience for the English teachers and myself, as a building administrator. In the second example, a Social Studies teacher discussed her struggles with the use of learning pods during a formal observation conference. I contrasted that conference with a collaborative learning experience between Math teachers Bob and Courtney. To create these comparisons, I use data from the web-based formal observation program, my field notes and the reflective cross-visitation discussions to illustrate how collaborative cross-visitation discussions result in richer and more generative learning experiences for the teachers and myself.

Research question three asks how making the classroom a site of collaborative inquiry would influence teacher and administrator learning. The comparisons offered take
the formal observation process, which is not a collaborative process but rather a top-down process, and places it in contrast with the cross-visitation process, which is collaborative and inquiry-based. In the cross-visitation process, the teachers and I created inquiry communities through which we had face-to-face interactions which enabled us to construct knowledge together. The formal observation process includes face-to-face interactions, but there is little if any opportunity to construct knowledge as an administrator/teacher collaborative tandem. Cross-visitation allows educators to be active learners in order to create new understandings of teaching and learning. In formal observations, teachers can be active learners throughout the process, but much depends on their attitude toward learning about their craft, their openness to suggestions from administrators, the willingness of the administrator to create suggestions while observing, and the capacity of administrators to raise questions about the observation. Cross-visitation is deliberate reflection on practice and experience, while formal observation processes are not. In both processes, educator learning takes place over time; however, I argue that cross-visitation both quickens and deepens educator learning. Finally, in cross-visitation, educators investigate their practice intentionally and locally. Participants theorize about and examine their practices collaboratively. The formal observation process does not provide such opportunities. The examples in this chapter demonstrate these differences, illustrating that cross-visitation, particularly with an actively participating administrator, can be much more effective for educators and for student achievement.
*A suggestion from a formal observation*

Findings from Chapter 5 illustrated what can happen when a window into a teacher’s practice is opened through cross-visitation. Incorporating reflective discussions, the teachers and I built on each other’s knowledge, helping to improve our collective practice. An important part of the discussions was that the teachers helped each other gather strategies, and that we built those strategies as an inquiry community. To contrast the co-construction of knowledge and practice in our cross-visitations, I begin with an example from a formal observation of an English teacher named Matt, who did not participate in the official study.

During a scheduled formal observation, I watched as Matt struggled through his lesson. Students were not working together and they were misbehaving. During the lesson, Matt was working with vocabulary, particularly with the difference between denotation and connotation. He received many “needs improvement” ratings in the evaluation rubric. Matt was very upset about the ratings, visiting me in my office to ask me why I had rated him so low, as he had never received a “needs improvement” in his career. He was so upset that I felt I must have his post-conference prior to the weekend, as I didn’t want him worrying over the results; I wanted to show him that I understood his disappointment as a professional, and that the formal observation process, and my ratings, were meant to help him improve his practice. Additionally, I wanted to help maintain the professional relationship Matt and I had built in the time that I had been employed at the research site, and for Matt to see me as a critical friend, rather than just his evaluator.
In my formal observation notes about the lesson, I wrote the following about the difference between denotation and connotation:

With connotation and denotation, there is so much more that can be done to illustrate the two concepts. Visuals, video clips, more pertinent examples are all necessary in order to really grab the students’ attention and ensure that they are learning what they need to learn through the lesson. I was thinking about a point in time during the 2008 election when Senator Obama called Senator Clinton a skilled “politician.” That could be taken as a compliment in the denotation sense, but he was really making a comment about her (and any politician’s) ability to say what they need to say in order to get votes…

During our post formal observation conference I tried to make further connections to the vocabulary words used in the lesson and how they might be taught in different ways that would help the students learn the words more effectively and permanently. As a former English teacher I was in a good position to do this, as I had worked through improving my own strategies during my career. One of the examples I used was soliloquy. Matt said his students had struggled mightily with the term soliloquy and its use in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet. The students understood that a soliloquy was an aside, spoken to the audience by a character (denotation), but they did not understand why playwrights used the technique, or what the audience gained by hearing the “private” speech (a type of connotation). As with many techniques used in the theater, understanding the rationale behind the use of the technique is more important than simply being able to define it.

I asked him whether the literary term soliloquy had to be taught through Romeo and Juliet or whether the students simply needed to know what a soliloquy was. He confirmed that the students needed to know what a soliloquy was and that it did not have to be taught through Romeo and Juliet. In fact, Romeo and Juliet did not have to be taught at all, but it was expected to have been taught by the tenth-grade teachers in the
district. This speaks to the similar difficulty explained in Chapter 5, in which some English teachers did not use the CSQT format for quoting literature (Lytle & Fecho, 1991). For all intents and purposes, it was expected that Romeo and Juliet be taught by teachers who worked with 10th, 11th, and 12th graders.

My suggestion was that he try to take a relatable character from a young adult novel, and have the students write a soliloquy from that character’s point of view. I used the example of Melinda, the protagonist from Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson. In Speak, Melinda is raped and becomes progressively mute throughout her freshman year of high school due to the trauma of her attack. What I envisioned was that Melinda would “speak” a soliloquy in her mind as written by the students. As such, Matt could incorporate writing while helping his students get to know Melinda as a character. Most importantly, the students might understand soliloquy more effectively through the experience of writing in that form; it would not be just another literary term any more.

In my field notes about the interaction, I wrote that Matt had been excited about the idea, but in the analysis phase of this study, I realized that I had come up with the suggestion on my own, through my experience as an English teacher. I realized that both my field notes and the web-based format for the observation process was essentially acting as a suggestion machine. The results of the formal observation conference were not much different than the teacher looking to the internet for help in working with a concept.

Matt was very excited about the suggestion, but our conversation ended there. I do not know whether that suggestion was put into effect, because I never had time to
revisit his classroom, and I never asked Matt if he had used the suggestion or not. In this case, I asked a question to help the teacher, he gave me the information I needed to do so, and then I offered a suggestion with which he agreed. There was not any true dialogue.

This formal observation example illustrates a non-dialogic conference which took place between an administrator and a teacher. Because we were not acting as part of an inquiry community, what came from the conference was a suggestion that may or may not have been used. While I believe the suggestion that I made was a strong one, one that I would have used in my own classroom, the quality of the interaction between Matt and me lacked depth. In the same way that students learn more deeply when they come up with ideas on their own, Matt did not have that opportunity due to the way the formal observation process is set up. In the cross-visitation example below, there is a positive difference in the quality and richness of the interactions between myself and the teachers involved that illustrate what might have been, had Matt and another teacher been participating in an inquiry community.

In Figure 6.1 (p. 105), the difference between what occurs in a formal observation conference and a reflective cross-visitation discussion about practice is depicted. The figure illustrates what happens in the next section, “Selecting Strategies to Enhance Student Achievement,” in which English teachers Hallie and Charles discuss the difficulties of replacing curriculum, and how our collaborative reflective discussion allowed us each to think about solutions to the problem together.
Selecting “Words Their Way” strategies to enhance student achievement

In the next example I contrast Matt’s formal observation conference with a cross-visitation discussion between myself and English teachers Hallie and Charles. With professional development being such an important part of the district’s movement forward, it is my job as an administrator to make sure the techniques and strategies are being implemented in the classrooms, and to help teachers when they struggle. In the following collaborative conversation, Charles was grappling with “replacing” content for strategies; he felt that if he took thirty minutes to teach a vocabulary lesson, then he would have to find something in his curriculum to remove to make room for that strategy. He said,

I think you have to have a fundamental change in philosophy, whereas before, maybe vocabulary was, ‘well you need to learn these six words.’ The difficulty is those vocabulary lessons that [the professor] was showing us, those strategies, take longer than the way that we typically did, and it’s finding that time, ‘okay, I can do this vocabulary lesson, but it’s gonna take a half hour’… and you’re trying to pull back that time from somewhere else.
As we talked through Charles’ dilemma, Hallie clarified that the “Words Their Way” instructor was not suggesting that the teachers use all of the strategies he brought to the table, but rather to try one or two, to become proficient in their use, before moving on to more strategies. The idea was to build a repertoire of strategies that would work in given situations in the local classroom environment. Additionally, Hallie commented on the fact that the manner in which vocabulary was to be taught, according to the professional development, made it more fun and interesting for the students. She said,

It’s so great the things that we learn about um, making vocabulary more interesting and fun to students, because I know in the past, you know, sometimes kids would dread when they had to, we had to pull out the vocabulary books and we had to learn new words, or you know study roots, or you know, um prefixes or suffixes, or whatever, but I think the way that um, that some of those strategies that we learned in vocabulary classes with [the professor], was a little interesting, and I think that the students will be more motivated because they are really a part of the learning, and um, so, when they’re a part of the learning, they’re more invested. I mean, that’s just another thing that’s like, an ‘a-ha’ moment, you know. It’s like, we already know these things, but just to have it pointed out makes it more, like, puts it at the front, of more like our thinking.

Hallie points out the importance of the co-construction of learning for the students in an effort to help Charles understand the good things they have both learned in the professional development. While Charles agreed, he struggled with how to find time to make those strategies truly work in his classroom. It was evident that Charles wanted to use the strategies—when he said “you have to have a fundamental change in philosophy,” he was talking about adopting new ways of working with and thinking about practice. He just did not know how he could find that point of success. I responded to him by saying,

I think if you look at the effectiveness of the strategy—so like going from the ‘here’s a list of 20 words and on Friday we’re gonna have a quiz,’ and I know that’s how we learned in school, right, so throughout the week, you’re probably
spending 45 minutes on that ineffective strategy. So that half-hour, I think that might be a way to turn that on its head. Don’t think of it as ‘I’m losing time,’ think of it as ‘I’m gaining time’ in terms of comprehension, in terms of not having to explain things… If you’re able to teach them those things about words, not teaching [the students] words, but things about words, then the other stuff may come easier and so in the end it sort of saves time.

Before I could even finish my thought, Charles broke in and said, “You’re gaining time on the back end.”

Charles may not have left the conversation completely convinced about the new strategies; however, he understood for himself that he could work the strategies into his class and gain time through doing so. This reflective conversation helped him understand the possibilities that might come from letting go of old habits and replacing them with new pedagogical philosophies aimed at fostering practices that could improve student achievement. Because we were working together in an inquiry community, we were much more at ease with pushing each other’s thinking. In the first example, with Matt, there was no inquiry community, which meant that there was much less of a support system, if any, built from the conference. In the example with English teachers Hallie and Charles, Hallie was the person who was able to convince Charles to try the different strategies. She pointed out that he did not have to use all of the strategies and that she could see how success was possible in using them. We pushed each other’s thinking about the value of taking the time to go in depth with vocabulary to enhance students’ comprehension and their future ability to learn more efficiently.

The idea that Hallie was a willing participant in using the new vocabulary strategies made working toward convincing Charles of their validity easier. Had I been alone with Charles, my comment about saving time in the long run might not have meant
as much. Because I was part of the inquiry community, my comment helped him see validity in the work, as illustrated by the fact that he finished my sentence: “You’re gaining time on the back end.”

The quality of the interaction between Hallie, Charles, and myself as an inquiry community was much richer and generative than the conference between Matt and myself. The work we did in this cross-visitation discussion was extremely valuable to each of us in that we knew both where we had come from, and where we wanted to go. As a team of colleagues, we had a direction which we wanted to follow, which was the use of the new strategies deliberately and carefully, in the local context, so that students would achieve at a higher rate.

As an instructional leader, the comparison between the two anecdotes pushed my thinking toward how I might collaborate with other educators when face-to-face collaboration was not a possibility. This experience forced me to look at other ways I might discuss educator practices without being able to do so in person.

**Convincing a teacher to use learning pods**

Part of the difficulty with the formal observation system comes from the fact that it is summative in nature. As discussed in the literature review, a teacher’s entire annual evaluation could come from one observation. It is extremely difficult to push teachers to try something new while at the same time, evaluating and rating their practice. In the next example, I formally observed a Social Studies teacher named Kim twice. Because Kim was untenured, the state required two observations of Kim, so that she would have a mid-
year rating and an end-of-year rating. Against the norm of formal observations, she asked me to visit a specific class section, because she wanted help in getting control of her students. Having spoken with the teacher and observed her informally prior to the formal observation, I knew that she was struggling, and had offered to show her how the use of pods might help both she and her students. It was a rare occurrence for Kim to ask me to observe her formally, while hoping to get help and improve her practice in terms of the disciplinary problems in her classroom.

In previous conversations, Kim had shown extreme trepidation about the use of learning pods in her classroom. She believed they could work in other classes and other schools, but not with her students. In other words, they could only work with “higher level” students. The same low expectations were discussed in Chapter 5 with Math teacher Courtney.

During the lesson, after holding a pre-observation conference, I watched as Kim struggled to get her students organized for a poster project about the Revolutionary War. Under the domain of “Creating a Culture for Learning,” I wrote in the electronic form,

The classroom, if set up in pods, would illustrate a culture for collaboration. At one point, you ask the students ‘why is this taking so long?’ in terms of getting together in groups. This is a good question, but as you’ll see below, you would be better off with pods already set up.

The students spent several minutes forming into disorganized clumps, rather than neatly arranged learning pods. In the category of “Physical Space,” I wrote,

Going back to the make-up of the classroom, the desks should be set up in pods [prior to student arrival]. This way, you would have them in groups and they would already be working together, making this type of project more efficient. This is an expectation at this time. Students are sitting on desks reading to each other and there are many desks in the middle of the room that are in the way. You
would have a lot more room to walk around and work with the kids. It would be a lot more conducive to your movement [around the class] if you had the pods as well.

This second comment is important for two reasons. First, I do not offer any examples of other teachers who might be able to help Kim implement the pods. Because Kim was not part of an inquiry community, I did not engage her in metacognitive conversation or pose questions about the affordances and challenges of her current room arrangement. Were she a part of an inquiry community, I would have offered questions or suggestions alongside our colleagues, as occurred through the cross-visitation process. Raising questions, or offering an example might have created a more collegial professional relationship between us. Additionally, I could have moved away from the comment “This is an expectation at this time,” which sounds, and is, very authoritative. As an administrator, this directive is one for which I am able to offer little, if any support.

In our post-observation conference, we discussed the use of pods, but Kim pushed back at me the entire way. She just could not see it working with her kids, saying “you’ve seen my classroom. The kids can barely follow directions or read what I’m asking them to read.” Indeed, I had witnessed Kim’s lessened workload for her students, because they continued to be unable to “keep up” with her expectations. However, if she had increased her expectations, speeding the pace of the class, similar to both Math teacher Courtney (heightened expectations) and Charles (increased pace), she may have seen that the students could indeed keep up. But even when I pointed out that what she was doing was not improving her results, she could not bring herself to see pods happening in her classroom.
During the second formal observation, Kim had eased her classroom out of rows and into pairs. She had separated her classroom into two halves which allowed the students to face each other. Under “Creating a Culture for Learning,” I wrote,

The most important element seen in this lesson and in our discussion following the lesson, is that you have set up a culture for learning in which you are the lead learner for the class. Everyone takes their cues from you, and I think the fact that you have been willing to ease your feet into the water with the desks facing each other and things like that illustrate that you are willing to learn.

I added below, in the same category that, “The students are working for the most part. There are some who are not, but that is to be expected, as it would happen in rows. The kids are thinking though, and that is the most important part.” When I said “as it would happen in rows,” I was referring to the fact that students are going to talk to each other regardless of the formation of the desks. Additionally, I was referring back to the fact that what Kim was doing in February was not working, as stated above. Finally, in the “Organizing the Physical Space” section, I wrote,

We’ve talked about the physical space and I think you’re doing well with that. Keep thinking of the positives involved with this and thinking about what WASN’T working before. Have things gotten worse? Probably not. I think the effort at getting the room in halves, so that the students are facing each other is great. They are able to talk to each other, rather than only talk to you. It’s a good compromise from the last time and the class is running a lot more smoothly.

Once again, the teacher showed a willingness to comply, but she did not appear fully committed to making a change to her practice. As we talked through the second post-observation conference, Kim asked if one of the professional developers could help her work with student learning pods. Her request illustrated that she was interested in getting further help for her classroom and her students; help that in our current school structure is not feasible. Once again, the formal observation conference was less effective because it
did not include the opportunity to have a deeper, collaborative conversation about classroom practice like we had in the cross-visitation.

Because there was no inquiry community, Kim had no face-to-face learning interaction with another teacher who had found success with the use of learning pods. She asked for an opportunity that would help her understand further the connection between her prior and emerging knowledge about learning pods when she asked to be included in the professional development visits. This illustrated a desire to be a part of an inquiry community, similar to the cross-visitation community, which is currently not available to all of the teachers. Kim’s deliberate reflection about her practice helped her move toward student collaboration, and her actions (moving desks in her room so students were facing each other; placing students in pairs) illustrate that her learning would take place over time. The important point is that she wanted to create a further knowledge of practice, but the formal observation system had to be augmented in order for her to do so. What she was asking for was not something I could offer through the formal observation process alone.

In a final contrasting example, the difference between the formal observation conference between myself and Kim, and a reflective cross-visitation discussion between Math teachers Courtney and Bob is illustrated. As is illustrated through the example, the inquiry community and the active learning, generative conversations, and interrogation and interpretation of materials is paramount to the success of our discussion.
Collaborative learning through Cross-Visitation discussion

To contrast Social Studies teacher Kim and her difficulty with pods, I offer a final example of the learning that took place through collaborative processing in a post-observation discussion between Math teachers Courtney, Bob, and me. Following their third cross-visitation experience, we were reviewing Bob’s lesson and his use of grids for his students to build 3D figures. Through participating in the activity with the students, Courtney noticed that there was some confusion due to the manner in which Bob’s foundational worksheet was formatted. In preparation for our discussion, Courtney wrote in her reflective journal, “Maybe introduce or model what the front, top, right views look like so students can see it first before they draw the views. The views are tough for them, so maybe show them an example first.” Courtney had prepared an important point for processing in our post-discussion. The field on which the students were supposed to make 3D figures was 9x9 on Bob’s worksheet, rather than 3x3 as Courtney was suggesting. See the figure below:

Figure 6.2: Grids used in Bob’s Geometry Class (Left) and as Suggested by Courtney (right)
The following is their discussion quoted verbatim. While I was with them, I simply let them talk, as I too was interested in what Courtney was attempting to convey:

**Courtney:** “The grids that they were doing, the front, maybe make ’em a 3x3?”

**Bob:** “Mmhmm.”

**Courtney:** “’Cause that’s what the map plan is.”

**Bob:** “Weren’t they 3x3?”

**Courtney:** “I think, when they were shading it, it was bigger.”

*Bob gets up to check one of the sheets that is on his desk so he can see what Courtney is talking about.*

**Courtney:** “Or it was a 5x5 maybe.”

**Bob:** “No, I think it’s 9x9.”

**Courtney:** “Oh!”

**Bob:** “Oh, oh, I see what you’re saying.”

**Both:** “Yeah.”

**Courtney:** “If it were a 3x3…”

**Bob:** “You see this was the original, so that—”

**Courtney:** “Yeah. So make these all 3x3.”

**Bob:** “Yeah, good idea.”

**Courtney:** “So make all these 3x3.”

**Bob:** “Yup, ’cause that would have confused ‘em.”

**Courtney:** “So if it’s 3 high, they can shade all 3. Where if it’s only 2 high…”

**Bob:** “Right, ’cause now, they’re kind of doing it randomly”
**Courtney:** “’Cause they were doing it in the middle.”

**Bob:** “Mmhmm”

**Courtney:** “So that was one thing that I…”

**Bob:** “No, that’s good input, yup. If it would have been consistent on all of these like that, ‘cause you’re right”

**Courtney:** “’Cause I think it, the squares, I think it threw *me* off to see what they were doing”

**Bob:** “Yup.”

**Courtney:** “Just from already teaching it, before.”

**Bob:** “No, that’s good input.”

In this conversation, Bob and Courtney process the information together. Courtney has already done the lesson, so she has input that is helpful to Bob, but also to herself. She had not used the three by three grid in her own lesson; in fact, she had not used a grid sheet at all. Rather, she had had her students draw the figures in their notebooks, which made her lesson more difficult to follow for her students. In other words, both teachers learned from the reflective post-observation discussion. By designing the lesson a different way, by trying something new (the gridded worksheets) that he felt his students might engage with, Bob set up a learning experience for both teachers without even realizing it.

During this interaction, I realized that I did not have to play the traditional role of the administrator as the ultimate expert. Instead, I watched as they acted as experts for each other. The shift in my identity that had begun to occur helped me to listen closely in order to expand my own instructional repertoire. This experience also helped me develop
a deeper appreciation for the inquiry community of which I was a part, and how creating more inquiry communities as part of the school culture could improve the practice of many more educators.

Unlike Math teachers Bob and Courtney, Kim, the Social Studies teacher, did not have a sounding board to discuss the possibilities which pods could offer her classes; she did not have the opportunity to see success as formally set in motion by an administrator. While Kim was one of five teachers I observed formally twice, due to her non-tenured status, I was not able to offer her the same ongoing support provided by the cross-visitation experiences of the study participants. There was no professional bond with another teacher that resulted from the observation. Kim and English teacher Matt had minimal opportunities through which to engage in their conferences; they did not have the opportunity to be part of an inquiry community. This data supports the idea that the communication that occurs through the formal observation process is less generative than the reflective discussions that are part of the cross-visitation process.

In contrast, the cross-visitation process opened a window into the practices of the participating teachers and me three times, and really, throughout the study and beyond. The difference between the rate at which Social Studies teacher Kim improved her capacity to work with learning pods compared to the teacher participants’ learning about their practice is a crucial take-away from this study. For example, with the ability to process the information they had experienced together, Bob and Courtney both came to agreement on the most effective method to carry out their lesson. This will translate to subsequent teachings. Additionally, they learned to improve strategies which optimize
student achievement. The teachers were practicing exactly what they wanted their
students to practice: Collaborative, discovery learning.

Conclusion

The comparisons above illustrate the beginnings of a shift in my identity as a
building administrator. Through this study, I have moved from a position of observer/
evaluator, to critical friend, and coach. While I must maintain my responsibilities as an
observer/evaluator, I have learned the value of a culture of inquiry among educators,
allowing me to become more comfortable with the vulnerability that accompanies this
shift in my identity. As a practice, reflective and collaborative inquiry communities offer
generative new understandings of education which I have now added to my
understanding of my leadership position.

By comparing the formal observation protocols and the cross-visitation process, I
made two important discoveries: 1) The formal observation system is a one way
communication system, while 2) The cross-visitation process allows for a deeper
expansion of educators’ practice.

The formal observation system

As discussed in the literature review and in the examples in this chapter, the
formal observation process is a primarily closed system. It does not allow for dialog
between administrators and teachers, which reifies the divide between them. The way the
electronic evaluation system is set up, comments about teacher’s lessons volley between
evaluator and teacher to the point where no one knows whether those comments are being read by either party. The formal observation system is a one way communication system between the “expert” administrator, and the classroom teacher; it is not a communication system between educators. Therefore, I question the validity of the time spent executing the formal observation system.

**The Cross-Visitation process**

As inquiry communities are developed through the cross-visititation process, deeper learning can take place through reflection, generative conversation and wider expansion of an educators’ repertoire of practice. While the cross-visititation process is very time consuming, the value of the inquiry communities that include teachers and administrators as *educators* compared to the questionable reliability of the formal observation system must be factored into the time constraints. In all, the time it takes to create, maintain, and participate in an inquiry community is well-spent.

One of the most important aspects of the cross-visititation process is the fact that each educators’ expert blind spot can be exposed through the inquiry community, making what might be invisible to an expert in a content area, or an administrator, visible. Each educator in the study experienced a new understanding of their practice because they were with other teachers, and me, as a building administrator. For example, Math teacher Courtney alerted Bob to the fact that his grids were confusing to her, and therefore, to his students. English teacher Hallie, along with me, helped Charles to envision a new way to conduct his vocabulary lessons.
My expert blind spots were exposed as well. I began to understand that my blind spots came more as expectations from myself and my teacher colleagues. Through the inquiry communities, I realized that I didn’t have to have all the answers, and that I could make myself vulnerable within the inquiry communities by asking valid questions that pushed our collective thinking, opening our repertoire of practice to new ideas and insights about how to help students understand the difficult content that we, as experts, already understood.

Through the cross-visitation process, educators can make deeper, more significant changes to their practices by developing a strong repertoire of skills that they can share with other educators. The relationships they build with colleagues allow them to be open to change through the iterative structure of the inquiry community. Ultimately, many of the answers that teachers are looking for are right there in front of them, in the minds of their colleagues. The cross-visitation process can open that window to the world of other educators and their practices.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND MOVING FORWARD

I begin Chapter 7 with a discussion of my learning as a building administrator, particularly with research question 3 in mind: How might making the classroom a site of collaborative inquiry influence my professional learning as a building administrator? From this question, I build upon the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 to illustrate the changes and improvements I made to my practice, highlighting the necessity for a shift in my identity as a building administrator in order to capitalize on this powerful learning. As a building administrator, I have shifted my identity from that of an observer and evaluator, to one of coach and critical friend to my teacher colleagues. This shift began to blur the boundaries between administrators and teachers, and is best illustrated, for the purposes of this study, through the diagram originally presented in Chapter 6. I have incorporated it below for ease of reference:

Figure 7.1: The Difference between Interactions in Formal Observation Conferences vs. Cross-Visitation Discussions
Figure 7.1 (p. 120) demonstrates the vertical alignment of the observation system traditionally used in schools, on the left side. The right side of the diagram portrays the inquiry community of teachers and a building administrator in the collaborative cross-visitation process. Through the shift in my identity as a building administrator I have learned to incorporate the most effective elements of cross-visitation into the formal observation system which I am required to use as a building administrator.

The cross-visitation model supports an effective form of communication, collaboration, and learning among teachers and a building administrator; however, both teachers and building administrators are tied to the formal observation system, leaving little time to participate in the cross-visitation process. Therefore, the goal of this first section of Chapter 7 is to present what I learned about my role as a building administrator, and how I can incorporate my learning into both the formal observation system and the cross-visitation process to fuse together the best elements of each.

Through my participation in the study’s inquiry communities, my role as a building administrator shifted, along with my identity in the research site, to that of coach and critical friend. Reflecting on this and examining my practice thoroughly, I recognized three specific shifts in my identity which deepened my understanding of my role in the school setting. The three shifts in my identity and their benefits are discussed in detail below. They include 1) A difference in how I related to the teachers I supervised, 2) How to collaborate more effectively when it is hard to find time for collaboration, and 3) Being comfortable with vulnerability.
1. A difference in how I related to the teachers I supervised

Reading through my reflective journals and field notes, I noticed a difference between how I related to the study participants as the year progressed and how I related to and communicated with the study participants compared to teachers outside of the study. When I reviewed my journals and field notes, I found that, at the beginning of the research process, I focused on participants’ classroom management skills, particularly with Bob and Charles, as they were new to the school and both teachers had asked for help in that area. For example, I was hyper-focused on Bob’s classroom management at the beginning of the study. In my journal, I wrote about an observation of his class:

Bob should not be struggling with the things he is struggling with. Students out of their seats, hoods, ear buds, revolving door to the bathroom. At one point he reminded a student that he had asked to go to the bathroom! Keep the kids in the classroom!

As the study progressed, I stopped focusing on Bob’s classroom management problems and began to consider how I could incorporate elements of classroom management into our collaborative inquiry group discussions. In my journals about the cross-visitations with the Math teachers, I discussed pedagogical elements of the lessons, rather than focusing on classroom management. I wrote that Bob “had a really great response to a student today. He got the student to think through the problem and, between the two of them working together, the student was able to understand.” The most important point about this comment is that instead of focusing solely on classroom management, I instead integrated classroom management elements upon which Bob had improved into my other comments. In this case, Bob was managing his classroom by working closely with the students. The focus of my journal entries had shifted to Bob’s
pedagogy, which in turn, shifted how I thought alongside Bob and Courtney in our inquiry community. My relationship with the Math teachers became a collaborative inquiry community. I was relating to the teachers in a more collaborative way; as a coach and critical friend.

I did not have the same experience with other teachers in my evaluation caseload who were not a part of the research study. While I am always trying to get to know the teachers in the building, I could not create the same bond in which I found myself enveloped with the two inquiry communities. My journal entries about other teachers I observed were simple thoughts. For example, “She needs to get a handle on that one table, or she’s not going to last!” or “Why is he still using worksheets? We’ve been over this and over this. What is the problem?” I found that I made these comments in my journals and field notes, but I never acted on them in person with the teacher. I never said anything to the teachers, because I did not make the time to do so. I did not relate to the teachers outside of the study in the same way that I related to the teachers in the cross-visitation process.

2. How to collaborate more effectively when it is hard to find time for collaboration

One of the difficulties revealed in the commentary above was finding time for collaborative practice in the daily life of a school. It was impossible for me to implement a collaborative inquiry community with an evaluation caseload of 18 teachers; it simply would have taken too much time. However, from collaborating with four teachers in an inquiry community, I found that my practice as a building administrator grew.
In reviewing my journals and field notes, I found that my expectations of myself and the teachers with whom I worked, along with our practices, evolved over the period of the study. At the beginning of the study, my contact with teachers was brief, and many of our written interactions had more to do with classroom management than pedagogy. For example, I often wrote about bathroom passes in my reflective journal, and in observation materials read by teachers through the electronic evaluation system. I tried to help teachers keep their students in class using a specific procedure for using the bathroom that I had used in my classroom. During the “Core Analysis” phase of the study, I realized that the practice of writing about bathroom processes was ineffective. My comments weren’t pedagogical in nature. I did not want to take precious time during post-observation minutes to discuss how students could use the bathroom.

By the end of the study, my journals indicate deeper conversations that occurred in short amounts of time through different media. They were effective for both the teacher and myself. For example, I observed a teacher working with her students on different forms of censorship. The students read about censorship and then discussed the different forms of censorship in their learning pods. While this brought the students’ perspectives and life experiences to the table, they were not fully engaged in their learning. In the observation commentary sent to the teacher, which was written during the class period, (a standard practice which is used to save time), I suggested that she use a YouTube video to capture students’ interest more effectively. I did not have a specific video in mind, but I assumed that there must be something on YouTube that could help her accomplish this task. When I got back to my office, I went to my computer to look up
videos about censorship and found one that included a young adult author of a book the students had read. The video was 2 minutes and 36 seconds long and the author talked about “intellectual freedom.” Within five minutes of finishing my observation, I sent the link to the video to the teacher and she used it during a class period later in the day, with great success.

In this experience, I was able to create time using the tools I had at my disposal. I collaborated with the teacher through email after using the internet to find information. My comments and feedback were pedagogical in nature, they saved time, and the teacher reported that not only had she used the video, but her students were more engaged, particularly due to the “intellectual freedom” element. This tangible change in my practice demonstrated to me that different forms of communication could be used to collaborate with teachers, in the ever-busy world of the school community. I could create time for collaboration, even if the collaboration wasn’t face-to-face with the teacher.

3. **Being comfortable in vulnerability**

Throughout this process, I became comfortable with my lack of expertise as a building leader, which made me vulnerable as an observer/evaluator. In many teachers’ minds, the administrator is supposed to be the expert, but we cannot be experts in all content areas. An administrator’s practice therefore, must be enhanced through an understanding of how to expand the community of learners within the school, especially teachers, and how to learn from teachers to enhance the administrator’s knowledge-base.
The administrator must be willing to allow teachers to use their expertise to teach the administrator, so that everyone’s practice can improve.

There were times when I asked questions of teachers to understand what they were trying to accomplish with their lessons. In doing so, I was also pushing my own thinking. However, I was making myself vulnerable by asking questions, instead of providing answers. In an important collaborative discussion with a non-participating teacher toward the end of the study, we were discussing the idea of “thinking like an historian.” The teacher had taken workshops on such thinking, but expressed to me his concern that his ninth graders were coming from middle school having done nothing but rote memorization of dates and facts about history in their social studies classes. I was unaware of this problem because the district had made such a strong move toward critical thinking; the idea that middle school students were learning history in this fashion surprised me. I asked the question, “How do we bridge the gap between those two teaching practices?” I did not have an answer for the teacher; rather, I asked him the question, and that placed us in a more collaborative mode for discussion. My vulnerability was illuminated in the fact that I did not tell him what to do because I did not have expertise in his content area. This illustrated the value of vulnerability in order to create a fruitful collaborative discussion with the teacher.

As we talked, we discovered that one of the ways we might help students think like historians, is through their emotions. For example, the teacher might ask his students to take the role of civil war soldier who has just been ordered to storm a hill with little, if any chance of survival. “What would they write about in a journal, or possibly a final
letter home?” I asked. We discussed what such a piece of writing would look like, and how an assignment like that might engage his students more effectively, pushing them away from the rote memorization they were accustomed to, and preparing them to think critically, and with emotion. We also came to the conclusion that we had to have more training on how to question students in order to encourage critical thinking. In this example, I had made myself vulnerable by not offering an answer, but rather, engaging in a collaborative discussion with the teacher, which resulted in a positive outcome. I would not have felt comfortable having such a conversation at the beginning of the study, or when I first became an administrator.

4. **What are the next steps in my learning?**

   The next steps in this learning process are to continue the reflective journaling process and to continue keeping notes about my practice. Into that process, I must add a regular, thorough review of my notes, so that I can refine my ideas, and enhance my collaborative practice as an individual who comes together with teachers through conversation. As illustrated in the three points above, I have come to understand the difference in how I relate to the teachers I supervise, I have learned how to collaborate more effectively with teachers when finding time to collaborate is difficult, and I have learned to be comfortable in vulnerability. I was able to incorporate the ideas gleaned from my reflective journals and my experiences with teachers, about how to fuse the best elements of the cross-visitation process, and the formal observation system. Each of these shifts in my identity, which have pushed me from observer/ evaluator to critical friend
and coach, will be refined as I continue my practice as an administrator, taking on new responsibilities in the future.

**How My Learning Coincided with the Learning of the Teacher Participants**

I now turn to how the teachers learned throughout the process of cross-visitation. As a technique for improving practice through collaboration and inquiry, cross-visitation proved a valuable experience for the teachers as well as myself. In this portion of the chapter, I discuss the research questions that guided the initial part of this study and how the study’s findings support responses to those questions.

**Creating the opportunity for teachers**

The opportunity to engage in the cross-visitation process for the teacher participants and me allowed us all to open windows into each other’s practice, and establish strong professional relationships that contributed to our ability to learn with each other collaboratively. For example, English teachers Hallie and Charles were offered a forum through which they were able to discuss their desire to share strategies and practices with each other and to collaborate. I engaged with them by clarifying and offering further assistance in improving their practice, which in turn, improved my practice.

In addition, the reflective collaborative discussions that derived from this process allowed teachers to learn from one another, and myself, and work together to improve their practice and thus, student achievement. Math teachers Courtney and Bob illustrated
the importance of reflective discussions when they realized that they might use different body language when teaching a lesson that they are not excited to teach. In terms of my shift in identity from observer/evaluator to that of critical friend and coach, these conversations allowed us to become part of each other’s practice, creating a more horizontal, cyclical process for evaluation as illustrated in Figure 7.1 (p. 120).

Cultivating teachers’ capacity to support each other in collaborative practice

The cross-visitation lessons and the reflective discussions that took place before and after them increased in quality throughout the study. For example, Math teacher Bob improved his practice of questioning his students toward discovery through his continuous discussions about inquiry learning with Courtney. English teachers Hallie and Charles also built upon their capacity to support each other throughout the study, as illustrated by their discussion of the possibilities that could come from using outside resources in order to push student interest in reading a novel. The cross-visitation process created an opportunity through which the teachers and a building administrator could support each other in learning through coaching and critical friendship. The collaborative process present in the cross-visitation discussions was important to all of our learning. The teachers had a similar shift in their identities to critical friend and coach, because of the collaborative opportunities provided by the cross-visitation process in which they were engaged.
Engaging with teachers as an administrator to promote collaborative learning

An important finding that adds to the body of research about the cross-visitation process is that administrators can build positive and strong professional relationships with teachers that are collaborative in nature and which move toward a shift in the identity of a building administrator, blurring the boundaries that are traditionally held between the two parties. In each example described in Chapters 5 and 6, I contributed to the teachers’ learning and, thus, my own learning. As a critical friend and coach, I made myself vulnerable which allowed me to learn from the teachers, and improve my practice. For example, English teacher Hallie and I helped Charles to understand how he might incorporate vocabulary into his curriculum in order to save time, rather than thinking he had to replace pieces of his curricula in order to accommodate what he saw as cumbersome new strategies. As an administrator, I improved my practice by learning to push back against Charles’ inability to see the effectiveness of the strategies he was expected to incorporate. Such pushback is not evident in my practice prior to this research study.

In addition, I pushed Math teacher Courtney’s thinking when she articulated that her fun lessons were a break from the norm, rather than the norm in her classroom. Had I not had a strong professional and collaborative relationship with the teachers, I would not have been able to participate in the discussions as a collaborative colleague—to push their thinking to higher levels and expectations of their students. This experience helped me improve my own practice, as I shifted my identity from an observer/evaluator to a
critical friend and coach. My interactions inside the inquiry communities helped me to offer a richer evaluation experience from which we all could learn.

**Making the classroom a site of inquiry**

Each of the teacher participants’ classrooms became sites of inquiry as part of the study. As we progressed through our learning, these sites of inquiry became more and more significant in terms of how we learned. I specifically planned to have each part of the process, all discussions and lessons, take place in the participants’ classrooms for several reasons: 1) I was attempting to disrupt the power dynamic between the teachers and myself as a building administrator; 2) I was attempting to blur the boundaries between us by meeting in the place where the teachers felt most comfortable; 3) I wanted all participants, including myself, to be focused on teaching and learning. Holding the discussions in the very place where the lessons took place was the most effective way to accomplish these goals.

During our visits to the inquiry sites, Math teacher Bob improved his questioning techniques, and English teacher Charles pushed his students to think deeply about portions of *The Pearl*. Through each lesson, both teachers became stronger as we all worked together and coached each other through the study. Even when the classroom seemed like just a meeting place, inquiry was at the forefront of the teacher’s minds. For example, in a post-observation discussion that took place in Bob’s classroom, we happened to see that he had displayed the pinwheels that his students made as part of his teaching of the elements of triangles. Prior to the meeting and his lesson, Bob had
watched Courtney’s pinwheel lesson and decided to use colored paper, as opposed to the white paper that Courtney had used. He also chose to display the pinwheels on his wall, something Courtney did not do. Courtney became excited by this and stated that she would use the colored paper for her pinwheels the following year, and further, that she would display more student work in her classroom. In this case, the Math teachers showed that inquiry, and the inquiry site in particular was transforming their thinking as teachers. Using the classroom as the site of inquiry allowed Bob and Courtney to be comfortable in their own environments, along with allowing all of us to be focused on teaching and learning in that environment. This result could not have occurred if the meeting took place in my office, where many post-observation discussions take place in the traditional setting and formal observation process.

**How Cross-Visitation influenced the professional learning of teachers**

The teachers in this study learned about their practice because of their participation. They showed that they were willing to make time to see other teachers teach, and then discuss with them what they saw. Math teacher Bob visited Courtney and other teachers on his own prior to the study. An important distinction that illustrates the value of the cross-visitation process is that Bob did not have the structured opportunity to participate in collaborative discussions about what he saw in his visits to Courtney’s classroom. His visits prior to the study were more to verify that he was implementing CPM correctly, as he was a new teacher who had missed out on the CPM training. During the cross-visitation process, Bob, Courtney, and I discussed the lessons collaboratively,
and through reflective practice we were able to co-construct the knowledge that was important to improving our practices, together. The inquiry community and cross-visitation process made Bob’s classroom visits more worthwhile.

As another example, Hallie and I influenced Charles’ understanding of what he could do in terms of his use of vocabulary strategies and how he could engage his students in their reading. The strong professional relationships between myself and both sets of teachers, our reflective practices, and the windows into our practice opened through the cross-visitation process helped us all to become better practitioners.

Relating my learning and how it coincided with the learning of the teacher participants through the knowledge/practice framework

The shift in my identity as a building administrator began when I became a member of the cross-visitation team. While Cochran-Smith and Lytle's knowledge/practice framework serves as a theoretical frame for teacher learning and research, my understandings of teaching, learning and schooling were advanced by working in collaboration with teachers. Treating teaching and leading as collaborative inquiry has transformed my view of the co-construction of knowledge. During the study, I collaborated with the teachers to construct my own knowledge of how to observe and evaluate teachers fairly and accurately through face-to-face interactions. I actively learned about my own practice by linking my prior knowledge to new understandings gained through the cross-visitation process. I practiced deliberate reflection and I understand that learning to be a good administrator is a lifelong process; one which will
require me to interrogate, interpret, and theorize my practice within inquiry communities like those in this study.

**How the Best Elements of Cross-Visitation and Formal Observation Can Be Fused**

What I learned through this study must come back to the shift in my identity which I believe is necessary for the formal observation and cross-visitation processes to move forward. The formal observation system will not be eliminated, nor do I think it should be. I do not think that the cross-visitation process is a stand-alone process for providing ratings for teachers. Rather, teachers working with other teachers and an administrator can enhance the teacher rating system tremendously. Below, I suggest some conditions under which such a paradigm shift, which would fuse the two observation/evaluation systems, could happen using examples from the study.

*Administrators must be willing to incorporate partner-teacher input into their formal observations.*

Through this study, I came to a new understanding of my role as an administrator with the help of the inquiry communities in which I took part. While watching a Math lesson, I could ask my partner-teacher what was happening if I was confused about a concept, as I did with Bob while visiting Courtney. As a participant in a reflective discussion with the English teachers, I clarified points by pushing teachers’ thinking, as I did when Hallie and Charles were discussing Charles’ difficulty with the new ways in which vocabulary was expected to be taught. Were it not for these two points in the cross-visitation process, I would not have been able to fully understand what was
happening in either situation, placing me at risk of offering the teacher an incomplete evaluation and a less than valid rating due to my own lack of understanding.

In formal evaluations, evaluative input from teachers could be incorporated into the actual written evaluation in a new section of the formal evaluation forms, or it could be written into existing sections by the observing administrator who has collaborated with another teacher. This study affirms the successes of including teachers as part of the feedback and evaluation system discussed by Sporte et al., 2013 in the results of the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UCCCSR) study. Additionally, this study supports the Learning-Oriented Field Experience Assessment (LOFEA) which encouraged teachers to construct their own professional knowledge through self-assessment, as part of the negotiation of feedback (Tang & Chow, 2006). Finally, this study is consistent with Marshall’s (2005) support for a shift away from sole principal ownership to the mutuality of teacher and principal evaluations which include working together in collaborative teacher teams. Further examination of both the cross-visitation process and the formal observation system will provide a better understanding of how this might work.

An evaluative cycle must be created for teachers and administrators to participate in this type of evaluation.

Because of time constraints, cross-visitation for every teacher, with or without the involvement of an administrator, would be impossible. Therefore, an effective system might be one in which teachers and administrators participate in a cyclical process through three or more school years. For example, one year, teachers might be involved in
the process of “goal setting,” through which the teacher and administrator could negotiate goals that push the teacher toward improving their practice and/or student achievement. The teacher would consider how they would like to improve their practice, and the administrator would observe the teacher with those goals in mind throughout the year. In the next school year, the teacher might be in his or her “cross-visitation year,” in which the teacher and administrator would work together to find a partner teacher to create an inquiry community. This finding coincides with the concept of the learning loop discussed in Bryk, et al., 2016, in which changes are made through reflexivity between the working theory, the practical measurement and the standard work process of evaluations from year to year.

In both scenarios, the identities of the teacher and administrator become more horizontal than vertical. Both scenarios offer teachers the ability to examine their practices as they would like to, by collaborating with an administrator. The scenarios also offer an important opportunity for the administrator to participate in collaborative inquiry which will help to hone his or her skills as an observer/evaluator, and critical friend and coach.

*Teachers and administrators alike must build new professional relationships through which they see themselves as partners, rather than adversaries.*

As a third condition, teachers and administrators must be willing to set aside the traditional adversarial understanding of their roles. Teachers often feel that administrators are out to get them, particularly through the observation system, and often, administrators use the observation as a source of power over a teacher. An observation system in which
the power dynamic shifts to one which is more collaborative, would require a shift in this long-standing adversarial relationship within school communities. The findings of this study support helping teachers to become leaders within their faculties as discussed by Stein and D’Amico (2002), and pushing administrators and teacher leaders to create communities of scholars within their faculties by increasing collaboration as discussed by Ragland (2017). Moving toward a more collaborative observation system would improve school climate, as it did with the teachers and myself during the cross-visititation process. Again, this requires a shift in my identity as I move forward in my career as a building administrator.

While there are many more conditions under which these improvements to the observation system could be made, these three are a start to the process. It is imperative that, if a paradigm shift like this were to happen, the focus must always return to the fact that observations are meant to improve teacher and administrator practice and foster student achievement.

**Limitations to the Study**

While the cross-visititation process has become an important part of my practice and the teachers’ practices with whom I worked, I must continue to improve upon the cross-visititation model. In planning future iterations of the process, I will take the following into account.
Assumptions about what teachers knew

I made three assumptions about what teachers knew how to do that were not accurate. First, I assumed that the teachers knew how to write reflectively about their practice. After I reviewed their initial writings, I found that they struggled to reflect via writing. Thus, one rich source of data I had expected about teachers’ practice was not available to me for this study. In future iterations of the cross-visitation process, I will create opportunities to model and engage teachers in reflective writing experiences. While our reflective writing was limited, the use of discussion and oral inquiries proved to be valuable.

Second, I assumed that teachers knew how to be critical friends to one another. For example, when the teacher participants praised their colleagues too heavily, I realized that they were not being completely honest with each other, and I had to step in and push the collaborative discussions toward parts of the lesson that were less than successful. This was particularly prevalent in conversations with Math teachers Bob and Courtney. Bob rarely had anything critical to say about Courtney’s practice. More constructive criticism among the colleagues and myself could help us all learn more from this process.

Finally, I had hoped that teachers would be able to engage in focused inquiry, but I found that, while each teacher felt the need to examine their practice, their areas of inquiry were not focused, which may have limited the depth of written reflections in which teachers engaged, and reduced the potential impact that participating in cross visitation had on teachers’ practices. However, I found that for the cross-visitation process to be effective, a focused area of inquiry might be asking too much of the
teachers. The cross-visitation process might not be the forum through which to examine a specific area of practice. The teachers had the flexibility to look at the classrooms visited holistically and provide feedback based on what they viewed as a need.

**The use of protocols**

I planned to use protocols from the National Teacher Reform Faculty to guide the cross-visitation discussions throughout this process. After the discussion of the Lytle and Fecho (1991) article, in which I attempted to use the “Peeling the Onion” protocol, I abandoned the use of protocols because I did not feel it was successful. I felt it restricted our discussions. Instead, I relied on the organic discussions that were taking place, ensuring that one person was not taking over the conversation. While I might return to protocols as part of a consultation process to prepare for discussions, for example, using the “Peeling the Onion” protocol to discuss the Lytle and Fecho (1991) article, I would not bind the teachers or myself to protocol use in future iterations of the cross-visitation program.

**Directions for Future Research**

Three areas stand out as important directions for future research by administrators as practitioners. The findings reported from this study make these areas rich with possibility for further inquiry.
How can the Cross-Visitation process be structured to optimize learning for teachers?

While the teachers in this study learned much about their practice, improvements can always be made. Further inquiry into this process includes how teachers participate in the cross-visitations. After the first round of cross-visitations, I found that the English teachers participated as co-teachers in the classroom. They walked around the classroom making sure students were on task, answering questions, and pointing out further directions for student thought. On the other hand, the Math teachers remained observers in each other’s classroom. Even when Bob and I worked together to solve the geometry concept that I was struggling with, as discussed in Chapter 5, we worked with each other, and not with the students. Further inquiry might illustrate which method of visiting a colleague’s classroom is most beneficial.

How can the Cross-Visitation process be structured to optimize learning for administrators?

Referring to the limitations of the study, one area that might help administrators to understand how to structure learning for teachers and administrators alike is whether teachers from multiple content areas should participate in the cross-visitation process versus teachers from one content area. In this particular study, I certainly learned from having participated with both English and Math teachers. However, future research should be conducted regarding whether working with two subject areas is optimal. Other possibilities include working with two to four teachers from the same content area, or pairing a teacher from one content area with a teacher from another content area.
Another possibility for future research is having multiple administrators participate in the cross-visitation process. This could include administrators from the same building or administrators from different grade level buildings. Research in this capacity would require a multi-level approach in which the administrators would need to carve time out of their schedules to meet with the teachers and their fellow administrators in separate meetings. A study like this would help administrators get to know what is happening in their buildings, or understand the culture of their district if working with administrators from other buildings in the district. Such a study could even delve into inter-district cross-visitation processes.

**How might collaborative inquiry be incorporated into the formal observation process?**

Having gone through this process as an administrator, I see value in adding collaborative teacher comments to my own comments as part of the overall evaluation process. The cross-visitation process enabled me to get a better understanding of the teacher participants’ work because of the discussions that took place before and after the observations. Teachers acting in a more “official” capacity during evaluations could add validity to the observation system, making it more useful and helpful to all teachers involved while pushing for the shift in the power dynamic between teachers and administrators. The addition of teachers to the system would allow both teachers and administrators to act in a coaching manner, possibly making everyone’s practice more effective. More research in this area would help our understanding of this possibility.
Conclusion

As a professional educator, I have dedicated my practice to the belief that I am a teacher first and always. This study allowed me to combine that powerful belief with my career choice to be an administrator. I examined the cross-visitation process because I have always thought it would be good for teachers. As an administrator, I have seen that there is value in my facilitation of and participation in this process. The teacher participants and I fostered strong professional relationships through which we were able to open windows into our practices by thinking and discussing collaboratively about how we might become better educators.

As I move forward in my career, I must continue my push to shift my identity as a building administrator, along with the identities of my administrator and teacher peers. Results from this study necessitate a thorough examination of how teachers and administrators can work collaboratively, in order to help students achieve to their greatest potential. The evaluation process is one of many ways through which this examination could occur. The positive outcomes from when administrators and teachers make themselves vulnerable by opening windows into their practices are evident throughout this research. To make the greatest future gains, I foresee the continued teaching of reflective practice, and use of cross-visitation to discover what is possible for educators and students alike.

While there is still a lot to learn on my part and the teachers’ part, I believe the areas of inquiry suggested, along with the discussion of the findings in this chapter
illustrate the strong value and importance the process of cross-visitation holds for teacher and administrator learning toward improving student achievement.
APPENDIX A
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR DISSERTATION STUDY

This chart illustrates the program which was implemented for this study. Each teacher involved with this research was a participant in either CPM math training (Math Teachers Courtney and Bob) or PLN training (English Teachers Hallie and Charles) along with other district professional development trainings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-research discussion regarding teacher reading of Lytle &amp; Fecho (1991) “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation” to acclimate teachers to the process of cross-visitation. The discussion used “The Final Word” protocol from the National Teacher Reform Faculty.</td>
<td>Field notes; audio recordings of conversations; teacher and administrator reflective journals;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-research discussions regarding what each teacher would like to see in their students’ work and their own classroom procedures throughout the year. This was an ongoing discussion in order to follow the lead of the inquiry.</td>
<td>Field notes; audio recordings of conversations; teacher and administrator reflective journals; interviews</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Observation #1</th>
<th>Mr. Mitchell met with Hallie and Charles to discuss lesson plans and expectations for observations.</th>
<th>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss lesson plans and expectations for observations.</th>
<th>Field notes; audio recordings of conversation; teacher and administrator journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End January 2017 – All pieces took place within one week per subject. I was present and participating in all observations.</td>
<td>Hallie observed Charles</td>
<td>Courtney observed Bob</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles observed Hallie</td>
<td>Bob observed Courtney</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation #2</td>
<td>Mid-March 2017 – All pieces took place within one week.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Hallie and Charles to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hallie observed Charles</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Hallie and Charles to discuss lesson plans and expectations for observations.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss lesson plans and expectations for observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles observed Hallie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Hallie and Charles to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After the study was completed, we celebrated with a group dinner in a neighboring town.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation #3</td>
<td>End-April 2017 – All pieces took place within one week.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Hallie and Charles to discuss lesson plans and expectations for observations.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss lesson plans and expectations for observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hallie observed Charles</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Hallie and Charles to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles observed Hallie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Hallie and Charles to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
<td>Mr. Mitchell met with Courtney and Bob to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After the study was completed, we celebrated with a group dinner in a neighboring town.</td>
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APPENDIX B
AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR FUTURE CROSS-VISITATION EXPERIENCES

In order to implement the cross-visitation process, the following steps should be set up.

First, I will illustrate the elements that need to be executed in order to prepare teachers for the experience. I will then refer to the chart, which lays out a schedule for the cross-visitations to take place.

1. Choosing the right teachers to be involved in the cross-visitation process is important. The process must be completely voluntary on the teachers’ part. The teachers should know that the process is not evaluative in nature and is meant to help them with their practice, as is illustrated throughout this dissertation.

   While I worked with two English and two Math teachers for the dissertation study, in the next iteration, I will work with teachers from one content area. I have written this implementation plan with that in mind. For purposes of clarity, I have chosen Biology teachers as the example.

2. Formal observations should be completed for each of the teachers involved. This will offer the administrator and the teacher a baseline from which to work.

3. Once the teachers have been selected and have agreed to participate in the process, several elements must be reviewed so that their experiences can be most beneficial:

   a. **Reflective Journaling:** Teachers should know how to write reflectively about their practice and each other’s practice. Writing in this way will help them prepare for the collaborative discussions that will take place before
and after each cross-visitation round. A short reading on reflective journaling should be given to the teachers to review prior to the start of the process.

b. **Critical Friendship:** Teachers must be able to be critical of themselves, and their peers, and be willing to accept constructive criticism. A short reading on critical friendship should be given to the teachers to review prior to the start of the process.

4. Teachers should read and discuss Lytle and Fecho’s (1991) article “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation” in order to gain a good understanding of what they can expect through the cross-visitation process. This article will serve as the starting point for the teachers moving into each other’s classroom and opening their windows into practice.

5. This chart illustrates the visitation schedule for the cross-visitation process. Each teacher involved will participate in a collaborative discussion about the Lytle and Fecho (1991) article, and then three cross-visitation rounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Biology Pairing #1</th>
<th>Biology Pairing #2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Observation</strong></td>
<td>Teacher 1 – Fall Semester</td>
<td>Teacher 1 – Fall Semester</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher 2 – Fall Semester</td>
<td>Teacher 2 – Fall Semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Article discussion and confirmation of understanding regarding critical friendship and reflective journaling</strong></td>
<td>Discussions regarding teacher reading of Lytle &amp; Fecho (1991) “Meeting Strangers in Familiar Places: Teacher Collaboration by Cross-Visitation” will acclimate teachers to the process of cross-visitation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Observation #1</strong></td>
<td>Administrator meets with Biology teachers to discuss</td>
<td>Administrator meets with Biology teachers to discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Period</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td></td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning-Spring Semester – All pieces take place within one week.</td>
<td>lesson plans and expectations for observations.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher 1 observes Teacher 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher 2 observes Teacher 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrator meets with Biology teachers to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation #2 Mid-Spring Semester – All pieces take place within one week.</td>
<td>Administrator meets with Biology teachers to discuss lesson plans and expectations for observations.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher 1 observes Teacher 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher 2 observes Teacher 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrator meets with Biology teachers to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation #3 End-Spring Semester – All pieces take place within one week.</td>
<td>Administrator meets with Biology teachers to discuss lesson plans and expectations for observations.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher 1 observes Teacher 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher 2 observes Teacher 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrator meets with Biology teachers to discuss observations, outcomes and ways in which to further inquiry</td>
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</table>
References

About the Penn Literacy Network. Retrieved November 19, 2016, from https://www.gse.upenn.edu/pln/about


