PEER OBSERVATION AND LEARNING COMMUNITY AS INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS: BEGINNING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

by

SUSAN HARE BOLEN

(Under the Direction of Sally J. Zepeda)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop deeper understandings about what happened when peer observation and a learning community were offered as an instructional support experience for beginning teachers. The researcher wanted to know what beginning teachers thought about peer observation and learning community and if these supports made a difference for them. To achieve this purpose, there was a primary question. What can we learn about supporting beginning teachers when they participate in peer observations and a learning community? To be able to answer this primary question, the following secondary questions guided data collection and analysis. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports? What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process? What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and a learning community? What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students? This study was conducted at one elementary school in Georgia. Six first, second, and third year teachers were recruited as participants. Each participant observed a peer each month, attended a monthly learning community meeting, wrote in a journal, and was interviewed twice.

Based on case study as the primary methodological design, datum was identified and collected following a systematic and integrated process. As a participant observer in this study, the researcher scheduled and facilitated monthly learning community sessions, conducted individual interviews with participants (once in November and once in February), wrote reflectively in a journal, and posed questions about her own practice.

The major findings from this study included three propositions. First, beginning teachers can be self-directed in their own professional learning. The participants exhibited a motivation to learn and followed through with their professional learning. Second, collegial, professional relationships provide instructional support to beginning teachers. Because the participants connected personally and professionally, they were able to discuss issues of practice that were important to them. Third, beginning teachers can embrace reflective practice. Because participants became more reflective, they gained perspective about their work and their students while making shifts in practice.

INDEX WORDS: Beginning Teachers, Peer Observations, Learning Community, Instructional Support

PEER OBSERVATION AND LEARNING COMMUNITY AS INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS: BEGINNING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

by

SUSAN HARE BOLEN

B.S., Auburn University, 1985

M.Ed., The University of Louisville, 1990

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2009

PEER OBSERVATION AND LEARNING COMMUNITY AS INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS: BEGINNING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

by

SUSAN HARE BOLEN

Major Professor: Sally J. Zepeda

Committee: Denise M. Glynn
Betty Shockley Bisplinghoff

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2009

DEDICATION

There are three people that have sacrificed to make this degree possible for me. I dedicate this work to my husband, Edward Bolen, and our children, John and Zoë. It was Edward's idea for me to pursue this degree. He believed I could do this long before I did. Throughout this four year journey, he has done more than his share of parenting and tried to be content with having little of my time and energy. He has done all of this while shepherding the good people of our congregation and caring for his own parents. I have been able to earn this degree, in large measure, because of the kind of man that Edward is.

John and Zoë Bolen have spent the last four years watching their mom study, write, and go back and forth to The University of Georgia. Both of my children have been nothing but encouraging about this endeavor even when it meant missing a band concert or a Scout event. Over these last four years the two of them have grown taller and become more independent. I am proud of both of you, and I am honored to be your mother. At the graduation ceremony, I wish that all three of you could walk across the stage with me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. I would offer that it takes a lot more than a village to earn a PhD. Four years ago when I began this work my family, congregation, friends, and professors began their work of guiding and encouraging me. For this I am grateful.

To my family – Thank you for encouraging me…your daughter, sister, wife, mother, niece, aunt, and cousin. This degree work has affected the amount of time that we have spent together. You have been unfailing in your support of me. This support has sustained me.

To my congregation – Milledge Avenue Baptist Church - Thank you for supporting not only me but Edward, John, and Zoë. When other graduate students discovered that my husband was a pastor, many would ask, "What does your congregation think about your doctoral work?" With great joy, I could honestly say, "My congregation is proud of me and my work." Thank you for believing in me.

To my friends – You have encouraged me as I have worked through this big undertaking. Your kind words delivered in the neighborhood, in the hallways at work, and in the hallways of Aderhold buoyed my spirits and helped me persevere.

To my committee members – Dr. Betty Shockley Bisplinghoff advised me from the first semester I was a doctoral student. She has pushed my thinking and challenged me. Dr. Denise Glynn taught me the art of academic writing. With her guidance I learned to write not only a literature review but an entire dissertation. Her willingness to sit with me and

guide me through a writing conference over and over again is to be commended. Her constant encouragement has been appreciated.

To my major professor - I met Dr. Zepeda for the first time when my daughter rang Dr. Zepeda's doorbell and sold her some Girl Scout cookies. Zoë and I sat in Dr. Zepeda's living room and talked with our neighbor at the other end of the block. Dr. Zepeda is a hands on kind of mentor. She has given me much of her time and energy and been a source of encouragement and counsel. Because she is down the street, she has gotten to know my family as well. Thank you Dr. Zepeda for coaching me through this.

My village is more like a large metropolitan area and is made up of hundreds of people that have encouraged me and my family through this process. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We cannot expect teachers to create a vigorous learning community among students if they have no learning community to nourish them (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2000, p. 49).

There is a critical need to focus on issues related to teacher support because retention issues continue for many school systems in the United States (Ingersoll, 1995; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2005). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) estimates that schools in the United States spend more than $2.6 billion annually replacing teachers who have dropped out of the profession. National trends show that approximately, 14 % of new teachers leave by the end of their first year; 33 % leave within 3 years; and almost 50 % leave in 5 years (Alliance for Excellent Education; Ingersoll, 1995, 2001). Consequently, at the end of five years, one of every two teachers hired will quit. If the purpose of public schools is to provide a quality education for all children, then efforts must be made to curtail teacher attrition.

Teachers typically leave the profession due to a combination of the following factors: inadequate preparation path, poor hiring experience, unacceptable working conditions, out-of-field placement, inadequate pay, and poor administrative support (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Knapp et al., 2004; Rochkind, Ott, Immerwahr, Doble, & Johnson, 2007). While the normative entreé path for teachers has been to graduate from a 4-year teacher education program, enter employment upon completion, and spend the first three to four years gaining professional

competence, Cochran-Smith (2006) points out, we have a new generation of teachers, entering the profession from multiple entry points, with varying degrees of preparation for their teaching experience.

Alternative preparation paths were established at the state and national levels as a response to hiring shortfalls. However, teachers certified through alternative preparation paths leave at nearly double the rates of traditionally prepared teachers; they are 3.5 times more likely to leave during the school year; and they are less likely to treat teaching as a career compared to teachers certified through traditional teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fisk, Prowda, & Beaudin, 2001).

The composition of the teaching force is much different than it used to be. Therefore, the instructional supports needed by beginning teachers must be varied (Zepeda, 2006). Susan Moore Johnson (2001, ¶ 1) offers, "Today's new teachers are as likely to be 40 year old former lawyers or scientists with a five-week certification course behind them as they are to be 20-somethings fresh from teacher education programs." Whether beginning teachers enter teaching through a traditional four year undergraduate program or come into the teaching workforce as a second career, providing instructional supports that strengthen teaching and learning and help to provide beginning teachers with the instructional expertise they need to stay in the profession must be provided.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop deeper understandings about what happens when peer observation is offered as an instructional support experience for beginning teachers in a learning community. The research literature associated with identifying needs of new teachers consistently lists peer observation, smaller class size, mentors, common planning time,

orientation for new teachers, and non-evaluative observations with feedback as instructional supports that new teachers want the most (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Eick, 2002; Gilbert, 2005; Hall, Johnson, & Bowman, 1995; Luft & Cox, 2001; Oberski, Ford, Higgins, & Fisher, 1999; Rogoff, 1984; Williams, Prestage, & Bedward, 2001). A recent study relying on data from six school districts used survey data from hundreds of new teachers over the course of two years to situate the needs of local new teachers within the national issue of new teacher support. These local data identified peer observation as the area of greatest interest and need for new teachers (Gilbert, 2005).

Background of the Study

Teachers are a large part of the national workforce. Positioning teachers within this body enables one to compare and contrast the teaching workforce with other like professions in the United States. By exploring the teaching workforce, the labor market, demographic characteristics related to teachers, and supply and demand in the workforce, the reader will better understand the situation of the teaching force in the United States.

The Teaching Workforce

Today's teaching workforce is the largest in our country's history (National Education Association, 2003). Public school K-12 teachers number 3.2 million, comprise 4% of the civilian workforce and 14% of all white-collar employees, with the total demand for new entrants averaging 200,000 per year (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ingersoll, 1995; 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). New college graduates with teacher education training have traditionally been the largest source of new hires. Other types of new hires include delayed entrants, those that transfer from other professions, and reentrants with the numbers of these new hires rising (Broughman & Rollefson, 2000; Johnson, 2001).

The national annual turnover rate for teachers averages 14% while the average of total employee turnover is 11%. Specifically, the teacher turnover rate is higher than the turnover rate for doctors and lawyers, is about the same as other female-dominated professions such as nursing, and less than lower skill professions (Johnson et al., 2005). Teaching is a fluid profession. Historically, K-12 teaching has been a low status profession, often viewed as a temporary line of work for women and a stepping stone for men (Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson et al., 2005).

Labor Market

Women, who have historically made up the vast majority of the teaching force in America, now have multiple career options available to them (Broughman & Rollefson, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 2006; Loeb & Reininger, 2004). In the 1950s and 1960s, a high number of women entered teaching, due in part to the career limitations experienced at that time (Broughman & Rollefson; Hanushek & Pace, 1995). Now, women have more choices and while some choose to teach, many more do not. Cochran-Smith (2006) further notes that the number of teachers entering the profession at mid-career is rising. While mid-career teaching entrants are highly valued for their work experience and maturity, they also bring to the work place different expectations about working conditions. For example, mid-career workers understand that working conditions vary and are willing to transfer or change jobs to gain the conditions that are favorable for them personally (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Working conditions as related to school culture and a teacher's ability to teach well are often cited as the most important ways teachers derive satisfaction from their work (Johnson et al., 2005).

\

Demographic Characteristics

That the number of minority teachers in the workforce is shrinking at the same time the number of minority students is rising is well documented (Grissmer & Kirby, 1997; NCES, 2009). Specifically, Hispanic pre-service students are more likely to enter and to stay in teacher training programs than African American pre-service students (Hanushek & Pace, 1995). Generally, high quality African American students exit from teaching throughout the teacher preparation process and are usually not replaced with like candidates, while white females are the most likely group to complete a teacher preparation program and stay in teaching long term (Broughman & Rollefson, 2000; Hanushek & Pace).

Supply and Demand

Because student learning largely depends on what teachers know and can do, being able to attract and retain a high quality teaching staff significantly impacts instruction and learning (Ingersoll, 2001; Loeb, Elfers, Knapp, & Plecki, 2004). Darling-Hammond (2000) resported, "the strongest predictor of state-level student achievement in reading and math was each state's proportion of well qualified teachers" (p. 15). When the demand for teachers exceeds the existing supply, three negative effects emerge (Billingsley, 2004). First, lower quality personnel are hired. Second, students receive inferior educational experiences. Third, student achievement levels are lower. When teacher supply is limited, quality is often sacrificed, which disproportionately impacts low-ability, low-achieving classes and high poverty students (Baker & Smith, 1997). Therefore, the impact of keeping teachers in the profession is felt most keenly by students.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study leads to a set of questions intending to help us understand how beginning teachers view and experience peer observations in a learning community. The researcher sought to identify what beginning teachers think about peer observation and learning community and if these supports make a difference for them. To achieve this purpose, there is a primary question. Specifically, what can we learn about supporting beginning teachers when they participate in peer observations and in a learning community? To be able to answer this primary question, the following secondary questions guided data collection and analysis. These secondary questions included:

1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning communities as instructional supports?
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and a learning community?
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?

Conceptual Framework

This study relied on constructivism, which is defined as "the meaning making activity of the individual mind" (Crotty, p. 58, 2003). Crotty further elaborated that constructivism is the unique way in which people make sense of the world. Constructivism is both a philosophy and a set of instructional practices. Philosophically, constructivism advocates that the world is without inherent meaning. Meaning is what we impose on the world. Instructional practices influenced

by constructivism value process over product, make use of the guided discovery process, emphasize authenticity within learning, and focus on the learner (National Development Plan, 2002). Furthermore, constructivists advocate that learning is an active process that differs among individuals, is focused on the construction of relationships, and the interpretation of meaning (Theorists Related to Vygotsky, n.d.). The two major strands of constructivism are cognitive and social. Both of these strands share the same basic assumptions about learning and value the role of language in learning (Lev Vygotsky, n.d.; National Development Plan). This study relied on social constructivism.

Social constructivism stresses the need for collaboration among learners, and views the context in which learning occurs and the social contexts that learners bring with them as crucial (Kim, 2001). Social constructivists emphasize the importance of both culture and context and are associated with the developmental theories of Bruner and Vygotsky (Kim, 2001). Social constructivists believe human activity constructs reality, knowledge is socially and culturally constructed, and that learning is a social process. The work of Vygotsky and Bruner emphasizes the role of language and other people in learning. This emphasis on language and the social context labeled Vygotsky and Bruner as social constructivists (Learning and Teaching: Piaget's Developmental Theory, 2005; Theorists Related to Vygotsky, n.d.).

To many, Vygotsky is considered the developer of social constructivism (National Development Plan, 2002; Theorists Related to Vygotsky, n.d.). Vygotsky believed that learning preceeds development. Additionally, he placed great importance on the context of learning (National Development Plan). Vygotsky developed the theory of the Zone of Promixal Development (ZPD) which refers to the gap between what a person can achieve through independent problem solving and what they can achieve through problem solving in

collaboration with peers that are more knowledgeable. Essentially, the ZPD advocates that learning depends on social interaction (Lev Vygotsky, n.d.).

Vygotsky's social constructivism emphasized social interaction. Vygotsky believed that social learning happens before development. He advocated the importance of the ZPD where a more knowledgeable other provides scaffolding for other learners. In short, Vygotsky believed that social interaction leads to increased knowledge (Kim, 2001).

Bruner's ideas about child development are linked to Piaget while his theories about instruction can be traced to Vygotsky (Constructivist Theory-J Bruner, n.d.; Theorist Related to Vygostsky, n.d.). Bruner believed that learners actively construct new ideas and understandings based on their past knowledge (Constructivist Theory-J. Bruner; National Development Plan, 2002; Theorist Related to Vygotsky). Bruner valued engagement by the learner and advocated a discovery approach to teaching and learning. He brought forward the term "spiral curriculum" linking its importance to the notion that all learning is based on what you already know (National Development Plan, 2005).

Because Piaget's work played a central role in the school of cognitive theory, he is considered a cognitive constructivist (Atherton, 2005). Piaget's constructivism focuses on common learning stages which support his theories of how a child's thinking evolves over time. He does advocate that knowledge is actively constructed. Furthermore, he views himself as a detached observer (Kim, 2001).

Constructivism is a good fit for this study because as a researcher I was able to examine the complexities of peer observations, and engage in reflection, decision making, and problem solving with the participants. In addition, new learning or knowledge was not created alone but rather through the interaction of existing knowledge, beliefs, and values with new ideas or

experiences in a social context – the learning community (Gordon, 2004). Therefore, meaning was developed through interacting with others, with actively involved individual learners, and shared through a group process (Richardson, 2003; Zepeda, 2007). This view of constructivism was influenced by the works of Dewey, Vgotsky, and Bruner, and Giroux's work related to teachers as intellectuals who are capable of being responsible for raising questions about what they teach and how they teach it (Bruner, 1966, 1977; Dewey, 1930, 1933, 1939, 2004; Giroux, 1988; Rieber & Robinson, 2004).

Finally, the motivation work of Ryan and Deci influenced this study (2000). Ryan and Deci found that humans have a deep need to be competent, autonomous, and connected to others. When these three needs are met, growth, integration with others, social development, and personal well being tend to become more optimal which enhances motivation and personal mental health. Motivation is valued by employers because motivation produces energy, direction, persistence, and maintained change (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, the instructional support of peer observation was offered to beginning teachers in an attempt to help teachers gain full competence sooner. Action research framed the peer observation model providing beginning teachers with autonomy related to their own learning. A beginning teacher learning community was the final component of this study which provided beginning teachers with a way to debrief and connect to each other. All three of the human needs as specified by Ryan and Deci (2000) were provided to the participants in this study.

Significance of the Study

From 2000 to 2010, roughly 2 million teacher vacancies will occur in the United States (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002). These vacancies represent approximately 50% of the teaching force in this country (Cochran-Smith, 2006). Because the United States produces more than

enough teachers to meet its need, but loses more than 50% within the first 5 years in the classroom, teacher retention is a key challenge facing public education (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson et al., 2005). Specifically, excessive teacher turnover presents financial, instructional, organizational, and hidden costs (Johnson et al.).

Financial Costs

Financial costs of employee turnover can be calculated using five different industry models. The United States Department of Labor estimates turnover costs at 30% of the departing employee's salary. Using this formula, teacher turnover in the United States costs an average of $12,546 per teacher (Johnson et al., 2005). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) estimates that it costs $2.6 billion annually to replace teachers who leave the profession. Furthermore, turnover costs an organization nearly 2.5 times the employee's initial salary in lost productivity and personnel costs, while the recruiting, hiring, and training of a new teacher costs a district approximately 30% of the exiting teacher's salary with this cost being nonrecoverable (Alliance For Excellent Education; NCTAF, 2005).

Instructional Costs

Instructional costs related to teacher turnover are significant but harder to quantify because the quality of the teacher is the most important factor in producing student achievement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Sanders & Horn, 1998). The overall quality of the teaching force, plus the quality of the supports put into place to support teacher's work, impact student learning (Knapp et al., 2004). High teacher turnover erodes teacher quality and student achievement because many beginning teachers leave the profession before they become the type of high-quality teacher who consistently improves student learning (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; NCTAF, 2003). Specifically, the most dominant factor affecting student

academic gain is the effect of the teacher, and this effect increases over time. Furthermore, children who had less effective teachers 3 years in a row posted academic achievement gains that were 54% lower than children who had the most effective teachers for 3 years in a row (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002). In addition, the residual effects of successful and unsuccessful teachers can be evident up to two years later (NCTAF, 2002). Therefore, if teachers leave schools before they are competent, it is likely that students will be taught by a succession of beginning teachers who are less effective than experienced teachers because seldom do veteran teachers replace veteran teachers (Johnson et al., 2005; NCTAF, 2003).

Organizational Costs

Organizational costs are the third type of cost related to teacher turnover. The continuity and community that are foundational pieces in strong schools is disrupted when the workforce turns over (NCTAF, 2003). For example, teacher turnover undermines the ability of the school to build and sustain learning communities that are needed to support reform efforts, and forces administration and remaining teachers to re-establish professional relationships, work routines, and norms within schools (Johnson et al., 2005; NCTAF).

Hidden Costs

A hidden cost related to teacher turnover is its impact on students in high-poverty schools. Schools with low student achievement, high rates of poverty, misbehavior, and minority pupils have higher teacher mobility. Specifically, teacher turnover is 50% higher annually in high-poverty schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2008) reports that the percentage of full-time school teachers with 3 or fewer years of teaching experience is significantly higher in schools where minority enrollment represents more than 75% of the student body. High poverty public schools typically have more

difficulty maintaining a highly qualified staff than do more affluent schools (Ingersoll, 1997, 2003). Therefore, students in these schools are more likely to be taught by a greater number of inexperienced teachers who might be working on emergency waivers and are teaching out of field than their counterparts in suburban schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Johnson et al, 2005).

Furthermore, high-poverty schools are often unable to develop a strong stable faculty that can nurture beginning teachers because these schools are often less equipped to support new teachers in their efforts to become effective (Alliance for Excellent Education; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). All of this makes closing the achievement gap between minority and white students even more challenging. The need for beginning teachers to have a strong start with solid instructional support is clear and the costs of not giving teachers a strong start in their profession are significant (Alliance for Excellent Education; NCTAF, 2005).

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined within the context of this study in an effort to help the reader better understand this study.

Beginning Teacher – Teachers in their first, second, or third year of teaching, sometimes referred to as novice or new teachers (Georgia Department of Education, 2004).

Instructional Feedback – Purposeful, constructive comments situated in the pre-observation conference, observation, post-observation conference cycle of instructional supervision support teacher development. Instructional feedback may be offered by a peer or supervisor and is intended to help teachers understand their practices and to grow in their instructional skills (Zepeda, 2007).

Learning Community – The literature frames learning communities in numerous ways; however, in this study, learning community is defined as a group of first, second, and third year teachers who meet monthly with their instructional coach to reflect and to write about their peer observation experiences, to share their learning with the community members and to talk through their next steps. Journal writing related to peer observation experiences and perspectives about those experiences are the opening activity at each of these community meetings. The meetings are held in a learning community member's classroom. This sharing allows the learning community to work interdependently toward individual goals that permit and enhance personal and professional growth with the long-term goals to raise student achievement and to promote the growth and development of teachers (Curry, 2008; NCTAF, 2003; Zepeda, 1999, 2008a).

Peer Observation – There are multiple ways to define peer observation; however, for the purposes of this study, the peer observation process is framed within an action research context. First, the beginning teacher forms a question of concern about his or her own practice. Next, the beginning teacher observes a peer in the classroom to collect data which is relevant to the posed question. Finally, the beginning teacher reflects and analyzes the collected data and forms a plan of action. Typically, peer observation and peer coaching involve a cycle of a pre-observation conference, observation, and a post-observation conference with the focus of providing instructional feedback to the teacher being observed (Joyce & Showers, 1981; Zepeda, 2007).

Overview of the Research Procedures

This study was conducted at one elementary school in Georgia. Data was collected from August 1, 2008 through February 28, 2009. Six first, second, and third year teachers were recruited as participants. Each participant observed a peer each month, attended a monthly learning community meeting, wrote in a journal, and were interviewed twice. Based on case

study as the primary methodological design, data were identified and collected following a systematic and integrated process. As a participant observer in this study, I scheduled and facilitated monthly learning community sessions, conducted individual interviews with participants once in November and once in February, wrote reflectively in a journal three or four times per week, and posed questions about my own practice and shared them with the group.

Merriam (1998) asserted that case study research shares common characteristics which include:

- The research brings understanding and meaning to the reader.
- The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis.
- The researcher is engaged in fieldwork.
- The researcher must have an inductive analytical position.
- The final product contains abundantly descriptive findings.

Case study was selected as the design methodology for several reasons. First, the nature of the research questions lends itself to case study design because case study offers a way to investigate and to understand a phenomenon that is situated in real life, complex, and has multiple variables. Furthermore, case study is a good fit for education because case study brings about understanding that can affect practice (Merriam, 1998).

To construct a case study, a site must be selected where specific issues can bound the study. Next focused research questions must be developed. Third, multiple data sources must be identified and used (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Yin, 1994). Yin's view is that each research question needs multiple data sources with this multiplicity of source being a major strength of case study. The fourth step in conducting a case study is data gathering. This involves visiting the site, understanding power arrangements, collecting and reviewing data daily, and writing in a

journal. The final step in case study research is analyzing and interpreting data and writing the final report with the research questions providing the focus for data analysis. The sorting, resorting, organizing, and reorganizing of the data brings forward labels and categories which provide insight about the research questions. When writing the case study report, the researcher writes an abundant description of the site, explains his or her perspective and relationship to the case, and provides a member check (deMarrais & Lapan; Yin).

Stake's (1981) work informs us that case study knowledge is concrete, contextual, developed by reader interpretation, and based on populations determined by the reader. With case study, determination of meaning is left to the reader (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004) because "the case to be studied is a complex entity located in a milieu or situation embedded in a number of contexts or backgrounds" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.449).

Organization of this Dissertation

Chapter 1 gives the purpose of the study; provides background information relevant to the study; states the research questions; identifies the theoretical framework and the methodology; speaks to the significance, assumptions and limitations of the study; defines terms; and gives an overview of research procedures. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature pertaining to (1) beginning teachers including information about career stages and adult learning, (2) induction, (3) professional development including information about job embedded learning, and action research, (4) peer observation, and (5) learning communities. Chapter 3 presents the research method. Chapter 4 presents findings from the study including a cross-case analysis. Finally, Chapter 5 presents discussion, implications and recommendations based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

You cannot improve student learning for all or most students without improving teacher learning for all or most teachers (Fullan, 1996, p. 423).

According to The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) high numbers of beginning teachers are leaving the profession within three years. Recent research indicates new teachers desire the instructional support that peer observation and collaboration with peers provides (Gilbert, 2005; Hall et al., 1995, Lam, 2001). Therefore, a study which focuses on implementing the instructional support of peer observation in a learning community setting with beginning teachers is significant and timely.

A qualitative approach which relies on case study as a methodology was selected for this research study to describe perspectives of beginning teachers when peer observation in a learning community setting is offered as an instructional support experience for new teachers. Within this chapter, a review of the related literature pertaining to: (1) beginning teachers including information about career stages and adult learning, (2) induction, (3) professional development including information about job embedded learning and action research, (4) peer observation, and (5) learning communities is offered.

Beginning Teachers

The State of Georgia defines a beginner through its tenure guidelines. In Georgia, teachers are considered a beginner until they sign their fourth, full-time contract and earn tenure (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). To stem attrition among beginning teachers whose

preparation paths are diverse, we need to understand their challenges and to identify authentic support systems.

In a study of first and second year teachers in six Georgia school districts, Gilbert (2005) found that peer observation, mentoring, instructional feedback, common planning time, and having smaller classes were what new teachers indicated as giving them the most instructional support. This question was posed two consecutive years, and each time the most valued support strategies were the same. Teachers explicitly told Gilbert they "wanted multiple opportunities to interact with their more experienced colleagues while doing meaningful work" (p. 39).

Since 1996, beginning teachers surveyed annually by the National Education Association have positioned the number one factor that helps them learn to teach well is working in a cooperative setting with competent teacher colleagues. New teachers value collegial work, desire opportunities to work in community, and consider positive interactions with their peers an essential part of their work (National Education Association, 2003). These values change the priorities of the teaching workforce and the context of the daily work of the teacher (Johnson et al., 2005; Kardos, 2004). The findings of Gilbert (2005) and the National Education Association (2003) confirm the idea of further inquiry into using peer observation in a learning community as an instructional support for new teachers.

Specifically, new teachers want structured time for planning, for preparation, and for professional development (NCTAF, 2003, 2005). Therefore, instructional supports for beginning teachers must be reevaluated and restructured because beginning teachers' professional needs, their school-based support, and retention are all linked (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000; Gilbert, 2005; Guskey, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; Moir, 2003). School based support personnel who want to meet the professional needs of beginning teachers and retain them need to

understand the career stages of teachers, the needs of adult learners, and the power of a comprehensive induction system.

Career Stages

Teachers learn their jobs in stages with the average teacher taking three to four years to become fully competent (Hebert & Worthy, 2001). Therefore, supervisors of teachers need to be aware of the career stages of teachers because all teachers whether they are beginners or veterans have personal and professional needs (Smith & Varna, 1996; Zepeda, 2007). There are many career stage models. Table 1 represents a sampling of such models.

Table 2.1
Representative Sampling of Career Stage Models

Model Name	Stage Name	Years in Field	Description
Fuller's Model (1969)			
	Survival		Focus is coping
	Task		Focus is tasks
	Impact		Focus is meeting needs of learner;
		self-growth & development	
Berliner's Model (1989)			
	Novice	Year 1	Rational, inflexible
	Advanced Beginner	Years 2 & 3	Begin to acquire knowledge & transfer it
	Competent	Year 4	Make conscience choices, set priorities, & create a plan
	Proficient	Year 5	Intuition & ability begin to work together
	Expert	After Year 6	Everyone does not get to this point of development
Huberman's Model (1989)			
	Career Entry	Years 1 to 3	Novice period – time of survival & discovery
	Stabilization Period	Years 4 to 6	Tenure granted, career commitment, sense of instructional mastery, interested in new approaches and understanding students

Table 2.1 (cont.)
Representative Sampling of Career Stage Models

Model Name	Stage Name	Years in Field	Description
Huberman's Model cont. (1989)			
	Experimentation OR Reassessment	Years 7 to 18	Activism, try new approaches, confront institutional barriers OR Self-doubt, disenchantment, may leave the profession
	Self-acceptance OR Conservatism	Years 19-30	Relaxed, serene, greater relational distance from students OR Complain & criticize
	Disengagement	Years 31-40	Gradual withdrawal, serenity OR bitterness
Dreyfus & Dreyfus' Model (1986)			
	Novice level		Usually follows explicit rules
	Advanced Beginner level		Usually follows explicit & content-specific rules

Table 2.1 (cont.)
Representative Sampling of Career Stage Models

Model Name	Stage Name	Years in Field	Description
Dreyfus & Dreyfus' Model cont. (1986)			
	Competent level		Can choose a plan, goals & strategies for when to apply rules & procedures
	Proficient level		Intuitively assess each new situation in a detached & deliberate way against their environment
	Expert level		Deep situational experience acquired through involvement in a specific skill domain for extended periods

Based on the work of Fuller, 1969; Gordon, 2004; Huberman, 1989; Kagan, 1992; Zepeda, 2007.

The models in Table 1 represent generalizations that are not true of all teachers at all times because there are many variables that affect the development of a teacher. For example, a teacher's career can be significantly impacted by personal or professional transition events such as the birth of a child, divorce, or attending graduate school (Glickman, 1985). Teachers that come into the teaching profession from alternative paths will move through career stages too, however, these teachers will bring different professional experiences with them into the teaching force which means they will move through their career stages at different rates than traditionally prepared teachers (Zepeda, 2006).

Adult Learning

The term adult learning implies a continued capability to learn. Most adults need and want to grow because learning is empowering and enables adults to make critical judgments and

ask crucial questions of their practice which then leads to shifts in their methods over time (Glickman, 1985; Zepeda, 1999, 2007). Therefore, a thorough understanding of the principles of adult learning is essential.

The five principles of adult learning include:

- Adult learning is self-directed.
- Adults want knowledge that directly applies to their current situation.
- New learning must be linked to prior learning.
- Adults come to learning opportunities with differing levels of readiness to learn.
- Adults that voluntarily attend professional development are the ones that want to learn more (Dalellew & Martinez, 1988; Glatthorn & Fox, 1996; Glickman, 1985; Gordon, 2004; Zemke & Zemke, 1995; Zepeda, 1999, 2007, 2008a).

Adult learners and constructivism hold several commonalities. Adults bring life experiences and prior knowledge to their learning. Constructivism values this prior knowledge as a way for learners to build meaning. In a setting where constructivist theory is applied, the educator's role becomes one of a facilitator allowing learners space and time for choice in their learning which implies relevance (application). This choice and relevance honors the different levels of learning present in any group of adult learners (Huang, 2002). Working in tandem, these principles work to empower teachers and to contribute to transformational learning. Adults want authentic learning with immediate application, a flexible learning structure, a learning climate built on trust, active participation, and their different levels of conceptual development acknowledged (Glatthorn & Fox, 1996; Glickman, 1985; Zepeda, 2008a).

We understand that the pace that beginning teachers move through the models of career development will vary; however, the learning needs of beginning teachers prepared in a

traditional manner have much in common. For example, beginning teachers typically tend to focus on themselves and have difficulty figuring out exactly what to teach (Grossman, Thompson, & Valencia, 2001). Once beginning teachers can better manage themselves, their concerns then shift to the behaviors and learning of their students (Glickman, 1981; Kagan, 1992). Often beginning teachers have an idealized perspective of their view of students and inadequate knowledge of procedures and routines, which can lead beginning teachers to become obsessed with classroom control to the extent that they design instruction with disruptive behavior in mind (Grossman et al.,; Kagan; Reynolds, 1992). Additionally, beginners lack a thorough teaching knowledge base which results in overly time consuming planning and ineffective lessons. Specifically, they tend to be focused on solving problems without trying to define or understand the problem, and they define issues of difference or diversity as problematic because they are not equipped to handle such issues (Reynolds).

Similar to Veenman's work (1984), the work of Glatthorn and Fox (1996) further confirms six common issues for beginning teachers. These issues include:

- Difficulty handing classroom discipline.
- How to motivate students.
- Individual differences of students.
- Assessing students' work.
- How to maintain an effective relationship with their students' parents.
- How to organize the work of the class.

Furthermore, the research of Grossman et al., (2001) adds that beginning teachers struggle with their image of self as a teacher, their own inadequacies, and their content knowledge.

There are no absolutes only generalizations when framing the learning needs of beginning teachers. All of the generalizations about beginning teachers in this section of the literature review, however, are supported by the career stage models in Table 2.1. Professional development and induction systems built on these career stage models are relevant to the needs of adult learners.

Induction

Beginning teachers need help making the transition from being a student of teaching to a teacher of students with the most meaningful support focusing on a high quality teacher preparation experience prior to employment, a comprehensive induction program during the first three years of teaching, and continual professional development through a learning community (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; NCTAF, 2005; Zepeda, 2007). Induction and professional development together provide the instructional support that new teachers need to become competent, confident veteran teachers by integrating beginning teachers into the profession, providing opportunities for skill development, guidance for daily work, and multiple opportunities to evaluate their performance (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Johnson et al., 2005).

The best induction programs are systems that are embedded in the school's culture. In these systems, roles, activities, and outcomes are well defined, and are grounded in face-to-face interactions which are planned, implemented, and evaluated thoughtfully. In addition, excellent induction systems recognize effective teaching occurs over time, new teachers can be taught the professional habits of inquiry and analytical thinking which will improve the quality of their teaching, and early support leads to longevity of career (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Zepeda, 2007). Well conceived and well-implemented teacher induction

programs are successful in increasing job satisfaction, efficacy, and retention of new teachers (Fuller, 2003; Holloway 2001; Strong & St. John, 2001; Wilson, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 2001). Furthermore, a network of supports that are focused on ensuring that beginning teachers become more competent in their work integrates new teachers into the school community and promotes professional dialogue among all staff (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Feiman-Nemser; NCTAF, 2005).

Comprehensive induction can be delivered in a variety of ways but is often presented as a combination of three components; mentoring, professional development and formal assessment which are all focused on addressing the concerns of beginning teachers, the goals of the school, and the specific needs of the student population (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002; NCTAF, 2005). Specifically, mentoring, a common component of induction systems, may promote teacher retention by focusing on emotional and technical support but may not necessarily support learning to teach (Andrews & Quinn, 2005; Kennedy, 1991; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Wang, 1998; Ward, Dianda, vanBroekhuizen, Radio, & Quartz, 1992). Additional inquiry into teacher support that is focused on learning to teach would strengthen findings related to teacher retention. The present study focused on introducing the instructional support of peer observation as a support focused on learning to teach within a learning community.

Additional research concerning mentors suggests that when mentors become involved in lesson observations and lesson based discussions, the management and teaching skills of beginning teachers are influenced (Brown et al., 1989; Luft & Cox, 2001; Oberski et al., 1999; Rogoff, 1984). This finding aligns with what the researcher wants to know, namely what beginning teachers think about peer observation and does it make a difference in their teaching.

However, these studies were limited to the mentor/mentee relationship with the mentor taking the lead role within the relationship. Furthermore, the idea of learning communities was not an integral part of these studies and was not linked to peer observation.

Additional inquiry into lesson observation was conducted by Williams, Prestage, and Bedward (2001) whose research concluded that school culture shapes lesson observation and discussion between mentors and new teachers. However, this research does not pursue peer observation as an instructional support which can improve instructional ability nor does this work link learning in community, action research, and peer observation.

Finally, the work of Mulholland and Wallace (2001) indicated that induction of new science teachers would have been optimal if the discussions focused on teaching and had been accompanied by classroom observations among peers. These results, while relevant, do not: speak to teachers in other content areas, address the idea of learning in community, or explore the idea of choice as related to peer observation which teachers conduct in an action research frame.

Induction is the bridge between teacher preparation programs and the work force. In addition, a comprehensive induction system reduces teacher attrition as much as 50%, raises teaching quality, fosters leadership capacity within schools, and improves student achievement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002). However, high quality pre-service education coupled with induction is not enough to adequately prepare beginning teachers for all that they will need to know and do throughout their career (Smith & Varna, 1996). To fully make the transition from being a student of teaching to a teacher of students ongoing professional development sponsored by school districts that gives teachers opportunities to learn through a community might make a difference in teacher attrition.

Professional Development

Beginning teachers need an infusion of knowledge with opportunities to integrate what is learned through the support that professional development can offer (Dietz, 2008). Consequently, it is key that beginning teachers are socialized into learning by being immersed into a culture of life-long learning that is cohesive, supportive, questions the tasks of teaching, and provides instructional support (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Wong, 2002). Professional development is optimal when there is understanding about how adults learn, what motivates adults, the work environment of the school, and the characteristics of the teaching profession (Zepeda, 2008a). Knowledge of how teachers grow, what their needs and interests are, and respect for their profession should all be reflected in the professional development opportunities made available to teachers (Glatthorn, 1992; Glickman, 1985; Zepeda, 1999, 2008a).

Professional development fosters teacher engagement, enthusiasm, and effectiveness, and lowers teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll, Bobbitt & Quinn, 1997; Johnson et al., 2005). Because teaching represents a significant professional learning challenge and the practice of teachers must be continually upgraded, an important role of the school is to foster the expertise of the teaching staff (Ingersoll, 1995; NCTAF, 2003, 2005). Professional development must focus on learning how to make a difference with students by implementing ongoing improvements aimed at accelerating student achievement (Dietz, 2008; Guskey & Huberman, 1995). Successful professional development is envisioned as a capacity building effort that is focused on growth; both individual and institutional (Fiszer, 2004; Glickman, 1985; Gordon, 2004; Guskey & Huberman; Zepeda, 1999, 2008a). Specifically, the upgrading of teachers' professional skills is fundamental to school improvement and raising student achievement (Guskey & Huberman). High quality professional development should be: individualized,

flexible, reflective, continuous, based on a respect for the teacher as a knowledgeable professional, and change oriented (Glatthorn & Fox, 1996).

Implementation of continuous professional development requires a school culture that is adaptable to change because the focus of professional development is making changes in practice (Fiszer, 2004; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Zepeda, 1999, 2008a). Even though change is difficult, action based on learning is still a reasonable outcome. The likelihood of implementation of new ideas is greater, however, when teachers work in a school whose culture is one of ongoing learning, when teachers analyze student data, and link student performance to their own (Fiszer). Furthermore, Joyce and Showers (1995) offer that teachers involved in reflective dialogue are much more likely to transfer innovative ideas into practice.

Effective professional development is focused on contextual issues, student learning, and implementing instructional changes that will improve student learning (Zepeda, 2008b). This is more likely when professional development is (1) connected to the curriculum materials that teachers are issued, (2) guided by state and local academic standards, and (3) linked to the assessment measures that teachers must use (American Research Association, 2005). In addition, effective professional development bundles multiple learning opportunities that work in complimentary ways in an intentional, ongoing, and systemic way. Intentional professional development begins with a clear purpose and worthwhile goals. Ongoing, systemic professional development is continuous, takes advantage of daily job-embedded opportunities for learning, and involves everyone that impacts student learning (Guskey, 2000; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Zepeda, 2008a).

Job-Embedded Learning

When professional development becomes a daily, ongoing learning experience that is customized and immediately applicable, and utilizes modeling, reflection and ongoing dialogue, it has become job-embedded (Zepeda, 1999, 2008a). In addition, the focus of job-embedded professional development is improving instruction in all classrooms by giving teachers multiple opportunities to learn new methods, apply them, and observe positive results within the context of a community. Ideally, this type of learning will attract and retain some teachers while it pushes others out (Johnson et al., 2005; NCTAF, 2003, 2005).

Students are best taught in schools that are organized to promote collaboration (Johnson et al., 2005). Schools that allow a collaborative culture build camaraderie and send a strong, positive message to teachers about the serious nature of teaching. Through collaboration, teachers understand what they know, why they know it, and the assumptions they are working under. Consequently, when teachers collaborate, they plan, brainstorm ideas, participate in practitioner research, and talk in a reflective manner about their practice. Furthermore, the process of collaboration allows teams to identify instructional patterns and coordinate efforts to improve student achievement while improving their practice (Dietz, 2008; Fiszer, 2004; Kise, 2006; Zepeda, 2004a). Additionally, collaboration is a way for teams of teachers to work together to facilitate their own professional learning which raises job satisfaction. Consequently, the likelihood that teachers will choose to stay in the profession longer is raised (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Glatthorn, 1987).

Learning that is relevant, promotes collegiality, enhances reflection, combats isolation, and provides timely feedback to participants facilitates the transfer of new skills into practice which is the objective of all professional development (Zepeda 1999, 2008a). Professional

development is highly contextualized and driven by the fact that teachers vary greatly in their levels of development, expertise and commitment. Therefore, job embedded professional development must be grounded in teachers' needs and concerns, and provide opportunities during the work day for learning that are full of opportunities to reflect and to collaborate (Glickman, 1985; Zepeda, 2006).

Action Research

Action research is a collaborative form of professional development which has emerged as a way of involving teachers in research so that they can better understand their work, are able to reflect, refine and improve their teaching in a timely manner, and can solve professional problems of concern to them (Glanz, 2005; Glatthorn, 1987; Glickman, 1985; Gordon, 2004; Guskey, 2000; Zepeda, 2007). Additionally, because action research is focused on the need to improve instruction, it is a credible way to foster instructional improvement (Glanz; Glickman). Therefore, "action research improves teaching and learning" which makes action research a credible methodology to use while participating in peer observation (Glanz, 2005, p. 17).

Action research is based on the belief that thoughtful, inquiring teachers have both the required initiative and ability to devise valid questions and pursue answers concerning their teaching and their students' learning (Guskey, 2000). These research oriented teacher leaders work in schools where there is opportunity to discuss, collect data, reflect on their practices with their principal and peers, and engage in on-going self-study by using data to inform their decisions and guide their work with a vision (Glanz, 2005; Zepeda, 2008a). Engaging in reflection and reflective activities like action research helps new teachers develop their understanding of learners (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1999) and instruction (Adams & Krockover,

1999; Crawford, 1999). The results generated from action research propel change (Zepeda, 2008a).

While action research can take many different forms, most action research involves teachers identifying an important problem, observing each other, collecting data, giving feedback, and developing a workable solution (Glatthorn, 1987; Zepeda, 2007). All of this is accomplished by implementing a four step cycle; (1) selecting a focus for the study, (2) collecting data, (3) analyzing and interpreting data, and (4) taking action (Glanz, 2005). This process supports the idea that good decisions are data based while the best decisions are made after collecting and examining data, reflecting on alternatives, and getting feedback from another person (Zepeda, 2008a).

Action research efforts in education continue to evolve with the primary focus of all of these efforts being educational change that enhances the lives of students and professionals. This is accomplished by asking questions of practice aimed at student achievement (Mills, 2000; Noffke & Stevenson, 1995). Bringing action into the generation of knowledge, expanding who generates this knowledge, and producing practical knowledge that impacts practice are all important purposes of action research because individual and collective change is the goal of action research (Boog, Coenen, & Keune, 2001; Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Parsons & Brown, 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Peer Observation

One of the best ways to learn is by observing others (Guskey, 2000). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) tells us that peer observation is one of the most effective models of professional development. Furthermore, the NCTAF's (2005) 21st Century Learning Community Model calls for teachers to learn alongside veterans using

observation of peers and self as a way to guide reflection and self-assessment. In addition, many of the key skills teachers need to develop during their first few years of teaching happen only through professional practice. Therefore, new teachers should have time to observe and get feedback from colleagues while practicing their craft (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002). Over time, when new teachers are provided the opportunity to both observe their peers and to be observed, they develop understandings of different perspectives, learn to listen for and try out new ways of knowing, participate in discussions of effective classroom practice and make decisions related to curriculum, and connect their practice to instructional improvement (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005). Peer observation is a unique form of job-embedded professional learning that focuses on the transfer of skills (Grossman et al.,; Zepeda, 2008a).

The six aims of peer observation as outlined by Martin and Double (1998) include:

- Peer observation helps teachers understand and develop personal approaches to instruction.
- Through peer observation and the collaboration that ensues, teaching techniques and styles are improved.
- Interpersonal skills of teachers are refined through the peer observation process.
- Self-appraisal skills of teachers are expanded.
- Planning is developed and honed when colleagues are involved.
- Peer observations help teachers identify practices that have merit and those that need further improvement.

These aims further clarify the purpose of peer observation and the impact peer observation has on teaching and learning. A clear focus paired with reflection and feedback work together to make the peer observation model of professional development effective.

First, the purpose of the peer observation process is to improve the quality of teaching and learning via observation and reflection. Second, a clear, well communicated focus built on common purpose is essential for laying the foundation of trust necessary to make peer observation effective. Third, it is vital for teachers to engage in a high-quality, nonjudgmental feedback exchange. Furthermore, this feedback should be specific, help guide the teacher, authentic, and direct. Reflection, focus, and feedback are all incorporated in the traditional peer observation design (Fiszer, 2004; Guskey, 2000; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Zepeda, 2007).

Peer observation may be defined in several ways. Bell (2001) defined peer observation as a structured, peer-supported teaching development program that includes feedback on observed teaching and feedback on reflection with an education developer monitoring and providing feedback. The clinical supervision model of peer observation design is a three-fold process: (1) pre-observation meeting, (2) observation, and (3) post-observation session. In this study, the peer observation experience involved the participants acting within an action research framework. Each participant posed a question or wondering related to teaching and learning, observed a peer, collected data, analyzed the data, and then puts a plan of action into place. The entire peer observation process is tied back to teacher learning (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Zepeda, 2007).

Peer observation has many benefits. First, peer observation is a useful, learner driven, tool. New staff members gain tremendously from seeing good practice in action while veteran

teachers often receive validation related to implementation. Second, peer observation enhances the overall professional development program of the school by helping to shift the culture of the school to one of learning for all, removing barriers to observing classroom strategies in context, and elevating analysis and reflection to job-embedded status. Third, peer observation promotes reflective dialogue between the entire staff which can support changes in practice. Finally, peer observation raises the self-esteem of practitioners (Fiszer, 2004; Guskey, 2000; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004).

The work of Bright and Vacc (1996), Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004, 2005), Martin and Double (1998), and Shortland (2004) focuses on using peer observation as an instructional support with professors at the college level. These studies recommend peer observation as an instructional support for teachers in higher education but do not generalize their findings to K-12 teachers.

Furthermore, studies designed to introduce the instructional support of peer observation for preservice teachers are plentiful (Anderson, Barksdate, & Hite, 2005; Gemmell, 2003; Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Rauch & Whittaker, 1999). These studies recommended peer observation as an instructional support for pre-service teachers but do not include beginning teachers in the participant pool.

Additionally, veteran teachers and the support that peer observation provides to them has been the topic of research by Arnau, Kahrs, and Kruskamp (2004), Van Soelen (2003), and Zwart, Wubbels, Bolhuis, & Bergen (2008). Each of these studies confirmed the support that peer observation provides but excluded beginning teachers from the research.

Finally, Eick's (2002) study focused on two new middle school science teachers whose induction experience included opportunities to reflect, observe, model, and support one another.

However, the peer observation experience in this study was limited to participants observing participants. No study has been found thus far that combines the instructional support of peer observation in an action research frame with beginning teachers in a learning community setting.

Most new teachers have few opportunities to observe the work of their peers (NCTAF, 2005). Specifically, most teachers are rarely observed by anyone other than their students (Fiszer, 2004). For example, only 55% of teachers polled in the state of Washington had ever participated in a peer observation (Loeb et al., 2004; Knapp et al., 2004). Typically, teachers do not have the opportunity to observe a peer, have a collegial conversation, and get feedback related to sharpening their instructional practices (Fiszer). Therefore, additional inquiry that links opportunities for beginning teachers to participate in peer observation in a learning community setting is timely.

Learning Communities

Learning communities build capacity. Strong, instructional leadership focused on teacher growth is essential for the implementation and existence of learning communities. Teachers and principals must work together to provide this leadership. The principal who understands that learning communities are built by everyone in the school shifts their work focus to that of facilitator and guardian of teacher learning and empowers teachers to build their leadership potential (Zepeda, 1999, 2004b, 2008a, 2008b). Participation in a learning community engages teachers in learning, connects faculties, builds strong teaching practices, focuses the goals of the school, raises teacher effectiveness, student achievement, teacher efficacy and job satisfaction which makes teacher turnover less likely (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Grossman et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; NCTAF, 2005). Students are best served in schools that are organized to promote interdependence and collaboration among teachers because those groups of

teachers collectively are focused on improving instruction which improves student achievement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Johnson et al., 2005).

Zepeda (2004b) conducted a study focused on building learning communities in one elementary school over a two year period. In this study, the principal used instructional supervision to bring together the learning communities. While peer observation was used as an instructional support, the participants were teacher volunteers that were not necessarily beginning teachers.

Curry's (2008) research incorporated learning community into a school by implementing Critical Friends Groups. The focus of these groups was instructional improvement through ongoing practice centered conversations about teaching and learning. Findings from this study supported using learning communities as tools to improve instruction; however, peer observation as an instructional support was not part of this study.

A learning community can be the catalyst for powerful job-embedded learning focused on improving instruction in all classrooms by giving teachers multiple opportunities to learn new methods, apply them, and observe positive results within the context of a community (Johnson et al., 2005; NCTAF, 2003, 2005). Job-embedded learning is relevant, promotes collegiality, enhances reflection, combats isolation, and provides timely feedback to participants that facilitate the transfer of new skills into practice which should be the objective of all professional development (Zepeda 1999, 2008a). Furthermore, Cochran-Smith and Lytle offer that there is a relationship between teacher learning in community and efforts to change the culture of teaching (1999).

Building relationships which foster teacher development and raise teacher capacity is the heart of learning in community. In addition, those closest to the students have voice and are

empowered to implement initiatives which will improve student achievement (Dietz, 2008; Koellner-Clark & Borko, 2004; Zepeda, 1999, 2008a, 2008b).

When teachers participate in peer observations in a learning community setting, they draw from their own experiences and examine questions and issues that are important to them, which impact teaching and learning and link inquiry and action. Research indicates beginning teachers desire the regular collaboration and communication that comprise learning communities (Knapp et al., 2004; NCTAF, 2005). By connecting inquiry and action, teachers are put into the role of researcher which is appropriate because those who do the work often know how to improve the work and are in the best position to make changes to teaching practices (Dietz, 2008).

The Alliance for Excellent Education, (2004), notes that few teachers have the opportunity to participate in rigorous professional learning that changes their practice. While creating such a supportive, intellectual learning community within a school is rare, we cannot expect teachers to build rigorous learning communities among their students if they have no such community to sustain themselves (Grossman et al., 2000; NCTAF, 2005). This study will promote community which supports change in teaching practice by providing opportunities to affirm practice and build confidence.

Linking inquiry with action brings change. Even though change is difficult, action based on learning is still a reasonable outcome. However, the likelihood of implementation of new ideas is greater when teachers work in a school whose culture is one of ongoing learning, where teachers analyze student data, and link student performance to their own (Fiszer, 2004). Furthermore, Joyce and Showers (1995) believed that involving all teachers in reflective dialogue raises the transfer rate of beliefs to practice to almost 100%. Schools that allow a

collaborative culture build camaraderie and send a strong, positive message to teachers about the serious nature of teaching. Through collaboration, teachers understand what they know, why they know it, and the assumptions they are working under (Dietz, 2008; Fiszer; Kise, 2006; Zepeda, 2004a). Collaboration is a way for teams of teachers to work together to facilitate their own professional learning. This concept of inquiry linked with action is often referred to as action research (Glickman, 1985).

Participating in peer observations driven by an action research frame within a learning community provides a collaborative environment for teachers to come together and learn by examining practices and having a deep level of professional talk with the goal of improving teaching and learning which makes successful learning communities an excellent model of professional development (Dietz, 2008; Zepeda, 2004a, 2008b).

Learning community in this study is defined as a group of first, second, and third year teachers who meet monthly with their instructional coach to reflect and write about their peer observation experiences, share their learning with the community members and talk through their next steps. Journal writing related to peer observation experiences and perspectives about those experiences are the opening activity at each of these community meetings. The meetings are held in a learning community member's classroom. This sharing allows the learning community to work interdependently towards individual goals that permit and enhance personal and professional growth which raises student achievement (Curry, 2008; NCTAF, 2003; Zepeda, 1999, 2008a). This configuration of a learning community will allow teachers to talk about questions that are important to them and build collegial relationships that are grounded in practice which will foster teacher development and raise teacher capacity.

Chapter Summary

Teacher attrition presents high financial, instructional, organizational, and hidden costs. Therefore, efforts must be made to stem attrition. Participating in a (1) high-quality teacher preparation program, (2) a comprehensive induction program, and (3) continual professional development through a learning community are ways to help new teachers make the transition into teaching while lowering the attrition rate (Johnson et al., 2005).

This review of literature supports the idea that high-quality professional development makes a difference in the lives of beginning teachers. Specifically, high-quality professional development is positively associated with greater teacher retention and student achievement (Johnson et al., 2005).

This study builds on research about beginning teachers, peer observation, and learning communities. The research frames issues nationally and within Georgia by building on the work of others in the fields of teacher induction and instructional supervision as a means to support teachers. This study is a qualitative, case study that employs a constructivist conceptual framework and focuses on a population of beginning teachers in one elementary school in a small city in Georgia.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

> Teachers must take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach and how they are going to teach it
> (Giroux, 1988, p. 126).

Introduction

The purpose of this study led to a set of questions intending to help us understand how beginning teachers view and experience peer observations. The researcher wanted to know what beginning teachers thought about peer observation and learning community and if these supports made a difference for them. To achieve this purpose, there was a primary question. Specifically, what can we learn about supporting beginning teachers when they participate in peer observations and a learning community? To be able to answer this primary question, the following secondary questions guided data collection and analysis. The questions that guided this study included:

1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning communities as instructional supports?
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and a learning community?
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?

Research Design and Rationale

Rationale for Qualitative Methods to Study How Beginning Teachers View and Experience Peer Observations

Classrooms, which are crucial contexts for education, are extremely difficult environments to study. At present, unprecedented amounts of time and resources are going into studying classrooms in an attempt to figure out what is really going on and why things happen as they do. Qualitative research attempts to understand the way things are and what they mean by using narrative, descriptive approaches to data collection to produce knowledge that can be used by other teachers (Guskey, 2000; Mills, 2000).

Prominent characteristics of qualitative research include:

- Using the natural setting as a source of data.
- The researcher as the instrument of data collection.
- Inductive data analysis being used predominantly.
- Richly descriptive final reports.
- Research focused on the meaning that events have for participants.
- Revealing, pervasive and unique data.
- Allowing the process and product to be emergent (Bogdan, & Biklen, 1982; Eisner, 1991; Lincoln, & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).

Naturalistic research describes interactions, work, and people with more than raw scores, and views the situation as unique but ordinary (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). Therefore, the power of qualitative research is in its ability to enrich our understanding of the phenomenon by looking at it holistically and within context (Parsons, & Brown, 2002). This approach keeps the relationship between research and life intact (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). In addition, qualitative

research views teaching as a highly complex, content specific, interactive act, acknowledges issues of context by capturing differences across classrooms and schools, provides insights into connections between theory and practice, and is an activity of practitioners (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003; Schön, 1991).

Inquiry is a fundamental tool that teachers use when making informed decisions. Teacher inquiry is considered to be intentional, visible, planned reflection which is focused on problem posing and problem solving which leads to reform of the teaching profession. Therefore, a practitioner's stance toward inquiry reflects the reality they work within. Transaction with the situation shapes both the situation and the practitioner in a process that is focused on understanding the situation and changing it. This is accomplished through reflection, posing questions, collecting and analyzing data, reading relevant literature, and collaborating with colleagues.

Inquiry as stance relates inquiry to practice, acknowledges that inquiry produces knowledge, and brings a closer understanding between knowledge and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003; Schön, 1991). In this study, teacher inquiry framed the peer observation process. Teachers posed questions about their practice and observed peers that would provide data related to their question. Teacher researchers see themselves as passionate learners who connect emotionally to what they are trying to know and understand (Kincheloe, 1991). Questions that teachers ask allow their voices to be heard and give voice to issues teachers determine to be of utmost importance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). Because this study was focused on teacher inquiry, case study methodology was chosen.

Case Study

Merriam (1998) lists three special features of case study. First, case study is particularistic, meaning that it is focused on a particular situation or case. Second, case study is descriptive. The final product of a case study is abundantly descriptive including as many variables as possible and painting descriptions of interactions over time. Finally, case study is heuristic, which means that case study may bring the reader new meaning, extend the reader's experience with the topic, or simply confirm what is already known. deMarrais and Lapan (2004) would add another special feature of case study. In their work, case study is considered an evolving process where the researcher must be willing to allow questions that guide the study to change and new questions to emerge that fit the focus of the study. The evolving nature of case study requires a reflective, focused researcher.

This study incorporated all three of Merriam's features of case study. The case study method was chosen because the researcher was interested in understanding how people make sense of something rather than testing a hypothesis. Focusing on perspectives of beginning teachers concerning peer observation and learning community as instructional supports was the particular situation or case. In addition, in a case study, the participant sampling is small, nonrandom, and purposeful (Merriam, 1998). This study focused on six beginning teachers in one elementary school. In writing the findings related to this study, the researcher endeavored to help the reader hear the voice of the participants while describing each case. Finally, working on this case study provided the researcher with new meanings related to the needs and capabilities of beginning teachers.

Case study is a process of "inquiry that helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). Specific to case study is the idea of an intensive description and analysis of an individual,

community, or institution which is bounded. This limiting of the object of study is the defining characteristic of case study (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). This study was limited to first, second, and third year teachers and to the instructional supports of peer observation and learning community.

Conceptual Framework

Constructivism was the conceptual framework chosen for this study because constructivism offers a broad orientation for the study of teaching and learning (Rodriguez & Berryman, 2002). Constructivists choose complex, relevant problems because they believe people learn best when they are able to construct their own knowledge while shifting perspective from the individual to relationships (Dietz, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Building on prior knowledge and through open discussion and reflection, assumptions are challenged, cognitive conflict emerges, solutions are tested, and conflict resolves. In this process, learning is constructed through engaging in reflection, decision making, and problem solving rather than delivered. The new learning or knowledge is not created alone but rather through the interaction of existing knowledge, beliefs, and values with new ideas or experiences in a social context (Gordon, 2004).

Constructivism influenced this study in numerous ways. First, the researcher who is the instructional coach in the school chose to study perspectives of beginning teachers about two instructional supports that could be offered at the building level. The participants constructed their own learning during the peer observation process by: forming their own question related to practice, choosing who to observe and when to observe, collecting their own data, reflecting on their experience in order to generate meaning, and shifting their practice in ways that made sense to them. This model of peer observation emphasized reflective thinking, decision making and

problem solving as a way to construct learning while respecting participants' autonomy and empowering participants to create their own understandings.

Learning community meetings gave participants an opportunity to share the learning they constructed in the peer observation process with their peers. This sharing of knowledge in a social context provided a chance to create new knowledge through a group process. Learning shared with the community enhanced the learning of participants by confirming commonalities and raising questions not yet encountered.

The role of the researcher was also influenced by the constructivist framework. The researcher defined her role as a participant observer not an expert and intentionally refrained from framing questions about practice for participants and solving participants' problems. Additionally, the researcher worked to facilitate the processes of peer observation and learning community by scheduling learning community meetings, helping participants that asked schedule peer observations, and facilitate learning community meetings making an effort to listen more than talk when interacting with participants and facilitating the learning community meetings so that the group acted as expert and not the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher was encouraging of any efforts shared by participants asking participants questions that would help further construct their learning.

Finally, this study was influenced by Dewey and Bruners' ideas related to the role of discovery in learning, Giroux, and Deweys' ideas about meaning making, and Dewey and Vygotskys' beliefs about the role of experience in understanding (Bruner, 1966, 1977; Dewey, 1930, 1933, 1939, 2004; Giroux, 1988; Rieber & Robinson, 2004).

Data Sources

This study examined how six beginning teachers viewed and experienced peer observations and learning communities. The largest possible sample of teachers in one elementary school, which was both a sample of convenience and provided maximum variation of participants, was used. The researcher prepared a list of potential participants and the principal of the school confirmed the completeness of the list. During preplanning, the researcher met with all of the potential participants, explained the research project, and answered questions. Appropriate paper work was handed out and beginning teachers were assured that their participation in the research study was voluntary. Appendix A presents the Participant Letter. Appendix B presents the Consent Form. Appendix C presents the Participant Profile. Over the next two weeks, the researcher met one-on-one with each possible participant to answer questions. While the researcher is known to all participants, she does not supervise or evaluate any teachers or communicate confidential teacher conversations to the administration.

Profile of the Participants

Table 3.1 provides information about the six participants in this study.

Table 3.1
Overview of the Participants

Participant	Gender	Teacher Preparation Experience	Number of Years in Teaching	Number of Years at the School	Job Assignment
Beverly Ford 24 years old	Female	BS – 4 year traditional program	3	3	First Grade Classroom
Rheema Capra 43 years old	Female	M Ed –BA in History	1	1	Second Grade Classroom
Stephanie Bradshaw 22 years old	Female	BS – 4 year traditional program	1	1	Second Grade Classroom
Kari Speakman 25 years old	Female	BS – 4 year traditional program	3	3	Third Grade Classroom
Elias Clinton 28 years old	Male	BS – 4 year traditional program	3	3	Fourth Grade Special Education (collaboration and direct instruction)
George Bailey 37 years old	Male	Masters in Psychology– alternative Certification program	2	2	Fifth Grade Classroom

The participant pool was not a random sample nor does it necessarily reflect the overall makeup of the faculty with respect to race, gender, age, or teacher preparation experience; however, the participants do resemble the typical composition of “new” teachers within the school system.

Profile of the School District

The data collected are from one elementary school in one school district in Georgia. The school district presents itself as an urban system that embraces diversity while providing a challenging and meaningful education. This district employs approximately 975 teachers. 767 of those teachers are White, 180 are Black, 8 are Hispanic, 15 are Asian, 1 is Native American, and 4 are multi-racial. Typically, 15% of those teachers leave the school district each year as compared with 14% nationally (Johnson et al., 2005; M. Wooten, personal communication, July 2008).

The school district has an enrollment of 12,100 students in 13 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 3 high schools, 1 alternative school, and 1 early learning center. Fifty-four percent of these students are Black, 19% are White, 20% are Hispanic, and 2% are Asian. While 50% of the public school students in Georgia are eligible for a free or reduced lunch, 74% of the students in this school district are eligible for a free or reduced lunch which qualifies this district for Title 1 status (E. Keese, personal communication, March 2009). Table 3.2 presents this demographic information.

Table 3.2
School and District Total Population and Student Population Demographics

	District	School
Total Faculty and Staff	2,200	76
Total Certified Staff	975	42
Total Student Enrollment	12,100	517
Percentage of Student's enrolled in:		
English as a Second Language	9%	5%
Special Education	14.5%	14%
Free and Reduced Meal Program	74%	57%
Percentage of Students that are:		
White	19%	29.2%
Black	54%	53.2%
Asian	2%	4.9%
Hispanic	20%	12.7%

The school district is divided into two halves east and west with each half further divided into two quadrants. One traditional high school sits in each half. One traditional middle school sits in each quadrant, and three or four elementary schools sit in each quadrant. All of the elementary schools in a quadrant feed into the middle school in that quadrant which then feeds into the high school on that side of town. Students are assigned to a middle school and a high school; however, school choice at the elementary level has been in effect since the mid 1990s. While the amount of choice has shifted over the years, elementary school choice has been in continual existence since its inception.

The Board of Education voted in the fall of 2008 to end school choice at the elementary level and move to zoned neighborhood schools for the 2009-2010 school year. This change in policy has been received with mixed feelings by the general public. Many of the elementary schools in the district will have more new students than returning students. Likewise, teacher

assignments follow student population. Staff allotments for the 2009-2010 school year were released in February 2009. The Human Resources Department has been working closely with principals to transfer teaching staff from schools that are shrinking to schools that are growing.

The projected growth rate for the public schools in this district in northeast Georgia is 1% to 2% over the next decade. The school district has been working with Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax monies to gradually remodel schools, build additions to schools, and build new schools. Three brand new elementary schools are scheduled to open one at a time over the next three years. Two of those schools are in separate quadrants on the east side of town. The other school is on the west side of town. One of the elementary schools on the east side of town will open July 2009. The new principal has been named and is working to fully staff that school with a combination of personnel that are voluntarily transferring and employees new to the school district (M. Wooten, personal communication, July 2008).

District level support for new teachers was implemented for the first time for the 2008-2009 school year. These supports included: three days of new teacher orientation prior to pre-planning, a building level mentor, meeting with a district level support group of new teachers at your grade level once a quarter, and a cabinet level contact that comes to check on you twice a year. In previous years, new teacher support has been defined at the school level and varied greatly (S. Holt, personal communication, August 2008).

Profile of the Research Site

The elementary school where the study was conducted was established in 1977 on the west side of town and has 517 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The racial breakdown of the students is as follows: 53.2% of the students are Black, 29.2% are White, 12.7% are Hispanic, and 4.9% are Asian. Fourteen percent of the students are enrolled in special

education (EXC) and 5% are enrolled in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. At the school site, 57% of the students are eligible for a free or reduced lunch which makes this elementary school a nontitle school (E. Keese, personal communication, March 2009).

The school faculty includes 24 classroom teachers, 18 support teachers (ESOL, EXC, EIP, PE, Music, Art, Media, Speech, Gifted), 1 counselor, 1 instructional coach, 1 assistant principal, and 1 principal. Thirty-six certified personnel are White, 10 certified personnel are Black, and the staff averages 11 years of experience. Tables 3.3 and 3.4 presents information about certification level and career stages of the faculty.

Table 3.3
Certification Level of Teachers at the Research Site

Certification Level	Percentage of Teachers
T-4 Bachelor's Degree	43%
T-5 Master's Degree	46%
T-6 Specialist's Degree	1%
T-7 Doctoral Degree	0%
Leadership Endorsement	4 certified employees

Table 3.4
Years in Career Stages for Certified Staff at the Research Site

1-3 Years	4-9 Years	10-15 Years	16-20 Years	21-25 Years	25 Years +
10	14	8	7	5	5
21%	29%	16%	14%	10%	10%

Currently several staff members are enrolled in graduate programs: one in doctoral work, two in specialist's programs, and five in master's programs. The school site has averaged 10%

teacher turnover annually over the last 3 years, which is below both the district and national turnover rate (E. Keese, personal communication, March 2009).

The teaching staff is organized into teams sorted out by grade level and support services. Each team has a leader that meets with the principal once a month and is responsible for bringing back information to their team and facilitating weekly team meetings. Generally, team leaders act as a liaison between teams and the principal. Teams meet two Wednesday afternoons with their extended team members to plan collaboratively. The entire faculty and staff meet together the first Wednesday afternoon of the month for book clubs and a staff meeting.

Beginning teachers at this elementary school receive support in addition to the district level supports that have been put into place. Teams work collaboratively in their planning and implementation of the curriculum standardizing much of what happens at grade level. Furthermore, the school based instructional coach provides support specifically to beginning teachers through peer observation experiences, a monthly learning community, and by actively building a relationship with these new teachers.

The school campus contains the school building, 12 portable classrooms which house all of the second grade classrooms and most support classrooms, and the construction site for the new school facility which is scheduled to open in the winter of 2010. When the new school is completed, staff and students will move to that building and most of the old building will be torn down. One wing of the current building will be renovated and attached to the new building. The new building is projected to be large enough to house all staff and students.

At present, the staff of this school is preparing for a shift in student population for the 2009-2010 school year. Due to the move away from school choice and to neighborhood schools, 60% of the current student population will leave and go to the elementary school in their

neighborhood. Additionally, the school is projected to have a smaller student population next year. Projected teacher allotments are down by four teachers for next year. While natural attrition, specifically retirement, moving, job sharing, and a voluntary transfer, took care of those four slots, the beginning teachers in the study were affected by the anxiety of this situation. The January learning community session became a question and answer session about the transfer process because the learning community session followed a called faculty meeting to explain intent forms and how transfers would be made. Hire date was used to determine who would be transferred if natural attrition did not solve the staffing issue. These participants represent the most recent hires in the building (A. Nowell, personal communication, February 2009).

Profile of my Work as an Instructional Coach

As a qualitative researcher, I had to examine my work as an instructional coach and look at my subjectivities. I was interviewed for the instructional coaching position at the research site in June of 2006 and began my work there in late July 2006. The year prior the school district had funded an instructional coach part time in all of the elementary schools whose mandate was to work closely with the building principal and help move teachers through the process of converting the curriculum from the Quality Core Curriculum to the Georgia Performance Standards and to shift teaching in the elementary schools to a standards based approach. During the school year 2005-2006, an instructional coach had worked at the research site three days a week focusing on writing workshop instruction, building voluntary membership in book clubs, and building relationships with teachers in the building.

Early in July of 2006, I came to the school and met with the principal. We began to think through my mandate, the state of the school, how to focus my job, and to get to know one another. Over the years, the principal had worked hard to create a school culture and climate that

was respectful and trusting. Her success is reflected in the fact that students at the research site typically score higher than the district average on standardized tests and teacher turnover is lower than the district average. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 present Criterion Reference Competency Test percentages of students in this school district and at the research site .

Table 3.5
School District – CRCT - Percentages of Students that Met Expectations and Exceeded Expectations in 2007-2008.

Grade	Reading	Language Arts	Math
1	85%	78%	81%
2	87%	74%	75%
3	79%	81%	54%
4	80%	77%	52%
5	79%	83%	53%
Average	82%	78%	62%

Table 3.6
Research Site – CRCT - Percentages of Students that Met Expectations and Exceeded Expectations in 2007-2008

Grade	Reading	Language Arts	Math
1	90%	89%	80%
2	95%	84%	77%
3	93%	91%	56%
4	85%	78%	60%
5	86%	89%	67%
Average	90%	86%	68%

Teachers at the research site are very loyal to students and to the principal. People come to this school to work and they stay.

Because instructional coaches work 10 more days than teachers, I began working prior to preplanning which gave me some time to meet with the principal, talk through the big picture of

what needed to happen both in the long run and the short run, and finesse my job focus. We determined that I would have a three-prong focus: professional development, beginning teachers/teachers new to the school/teachers that made a big job shift, and co-teaching with veterans to gain clout in the building.

Working together, we communicated this job focus to the faculty during preplanning. I worked out the details of my daily work looking to the principal for advice along the way. This three prong job focus stayed intact my first and second years, however, how I handled the pieces of my job shifted and changed each year. During my third year, we dropped the co-teaching focus because I had established clout in the building and the other two pieces of my work had expanded greatly.

I have enjoyed a warm collegial relationship with the principal. We work well collaboratively and share a common understanding about how to work with adults and children and what it means to educate students. We speak frankly and freely with each other and have clearly established our roles. She voices expectations for staff and offers me as a support to meet those expectations. I seek her advice prior to acting. We communicate routinely, working together to move the school forward instructionally. Furthermore, working with the principal has helped me to think through and define my leadership style.

I intentionally defined my role as an instructional coach to be one that is relational, a communicator, a collaborator, and a scholarly practitioner. At no point did I set myself up to be the expert or the enforcer. In my daily work, I try to connect to faculty and staff, communicate clearly, listen actively, work with teams and individuals, and inform my work with academics. I strive to make all of my interactions respectful and to show goodwill to all. I also make every

effort to be a visible, engaged leader that knows what is going on and is actively working toward the bigger picture.

When I began thinking through how to situate this study within my work, I wrestled with how to make the peer observation process and learning community meetings fit into the culture and climate of the school and within my framework as a coach while ensuring the rigor, relevance, validity, and reliability of the study itself. Much of what I read about peer observation had the teacher working with an instructional supervisor to frame problems related to practice, determine where to observe, and decide what shifts in practice the teacher would make. Some of the peer observation articles that I read had teachers using mandated forms for a paper trail and the instructional supervisor accompanying the teacher to the observation. These ideas did not fit into my ideas about respecting teachers and effective instructional leadership.

I began reading about action research practiced by teachers and became intrigued. These articles described teachers forming questions about their own practice, choosing who would be best to observe, and looking at the data collected to decide how to shift their own practice. This type of approach felt like a better fit with the school culture and climate. I will admit that initially I was a little overwhelmed about having so little control over the study. I had to think through my ideas about teachers related to trust, respect, initiative, and follow through and realized that action research was the approach that I wanted to implement with the peer observations.

Next, I began to think about the learning community meetings. I read articles about learning communities and used the internet to see what professional organizations had to say about learning communities. I thought about the coaching model that I had intentionally put into place and what I believed about teaching and learning. All of this led me to frame the learning

community sessions as a time of reflecting, writing and sharing with my role defined as facilitator. I worked with the group to set dates and times for the meetings, communicated with the group to remind them of upcoming meetings, provided journals for participants to use, typed a suggested agenda, and helped the group move through the agenda at the meetings. I consciously worked to keep myself within this role. I did not want the meeting to feel like an accountability session or participants to view me as the problem solver. To avoid both of these issues, I did not seek out participants to ask if they had done their peer observation, and I did not offer solutions to their problems. Instead, I intentionally was encouraging of any efforts shared with me and asked participants how they would help each other.

Data Collection Procedures

The focus of the study was to find out what beginning teachers think about peer observation and learning community and if these instructional supports made a difference for them. Participants were given the opportunity to participate in peer observations and a learning community for beginning teachers once each month, and were interviewed twice by the researcher.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews twice with each of the six participants. Appendix E presents the questions posed in both interviews. Appendix F presents the probes used in interview two as aligned to each research question.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. After the first interview, questions and responses were analyzed and the second set of the interview questions was formed. The researcher also collected field notes during both sets of interviews.

The researcher observed the participants in monthly learning community meetings and in their classrooms, facilitated learning community meetings, interviewed the participants twice

using an interview guide that was open-ended and influenced by previous interactions, and wrote reflectively in a journal. In addition, the researcher collected artifacts such as observation data and e-mails, and charted the peer observations of the participants. Data collection occurred from August 1, 2008 to February 28, 2009. Permission to conduct the study was granted from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Georgia, the school district, and the principal of the school.

Table 3.7 is an overview of the data collection processes and sources. The biggest obstacles to data collection were the challenges related to scheduling learning community meetings and participant interviews in a school whose schedule is full.

Table 3.7
Overview of the Data Collection Process and Data Sources

Data Collection Process	Data Sources
1. Observe teachers in learning community meetings once per month	• Observation notes • Audio recordings of meetings
2. Read and analyze journal entries of the six teachers.	• Journal entries
3. Researcher records in own journal.	• Journal entries
4. Interview six teachers twice.	• Field notes • Audio recordings of interviews • Interview transcripts

Data Collection from Learning Community Meetings

Monthly learning community meetings lasted approximately 45 minutes, were held in participants' classrooms, and were audio recorded and transcribed.

Table 3.8
Learning Community Meetings

Meeting Date	Meeting Length
September	40 minutes, 47 seconds
October	53 minutes, 04 seconds
November	46 minutes, 48 seconds
December	37 minutes, 52 seconds
January	0
February	36 minutes, 43 seconds

The researcher acted as a facilitator. In learning community meetings, all participants shared their learning and next steps with the group. In addition, the researcher made field notes throughout each meeting.

Agendas were drafted for all learning community meetings and included three main pieces: reflecting, collaborating, and learning from observations. During the reflecting time, participants were give opportunities to read back over their journal entries and to write. The collaborating time was a time for participants to share their questions, thoughts, and reflections from their journals and their practice. Learning from observations was a time for participants to share their question about their practice that drove their previous peer observations, the actual experience of the peer observation, and what their next steps would be.

The researcher listened to recordings of meetings and read through field notes noting data that linked back to beginning teachers' perceptions about peer observation and learning communities. Examples of this work are presented in Table 3.9

Table 3.9
Categories, Quotes, and Emerging Propositions from Learning Community Meetings

Categories	Quotes	Emerging Propositions
Perspective	"point of reference" "perspective on how my centers were going" "I can do this."	Relationships as instructional support
Articulate their need	"I want to observe how…" "I need strategies for…" "I want to see it in action."	Relationships as instructional support Reflective practice Self-directed Learning
So What?	"Now I need to decide…" "Once you see a good idea you have to try it." "So I switched…"	Relationships as instructional support Reflective practice Self-directed Learning
Strategies	"try to collect approaches" "lots of strategies out there"	Reflective practice
Relevance	"I have to see it." "engage in it" "I chose this."	Self-directed learning
Vulnerable	"I've never had to…" "The thing I am battling with…"	Relationships as instructional support

Notations were made in the margins of the transcripts and coded. Categories were formed and compared with other data. Appendix G presents common concepts and resulting quotes related to each research question from the learning community sessions.

Data Collection from Journals

Participants and the researcher wrote in journals during learning community meetings, peer observations, and the work day. The journal was provided by the researcher and contains dated entries. The following is an excerpt from Beverly Ford's journal.

> Observing peers has helped me incorporate different teaching methods and academic lessons into my class. When observing peers I investigate the language they use when teaching or talking with a student. While in their class I also get ideas on how to change the space in my room to make things more available…It's great to read and listen to what is supposed to be done and how it's suppose to be.

The researcher read through journals noting and coding data that linked back to beginning teachers' perceptions about peer observation and learning communities. Table 3.10 presents examples of themes found in journals.

Table 3.10
Examples of Themes in Journals

Examples of Themes in Journals
1. thinking – mulling - shifting
2. all about the asking
3. accountability through learning community
4. normal to voice a problem
5. children aren't going to change; therefore we have to change

These notations were sorted into categories and compared with categories generated from other data sources.

Data Collection from Interviews

Interviews were conducted using an interview guide. See Appendix E for interview guides. Questions from the first interview were correlated to the research questions. Table 3.11 presents this correlation.

Table 3.11
Examples of Interview Questions From Interview One That Are Related to Research Questions

Research Question	Related Interview Question
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community supports? support?	What are your thoughts about peer observation as an instructional instructional What are your thoughts about learning community as an instructional support?
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	What have you learned about yourself by participating in peer observation? Learning community?
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experience with peer observation and a learning community?	What have you figured out about teaching and learning due to your experience with peer observation and learning community?
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	What is your perspective on how participating in peer observation and learning community has impacted your students?

The researcher took field notes throughout the interviews noting topics and questions that were covered but not included in the interview guide. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The researcher listened to the audio recordings and read through the transcriptions noting and coding data that linked back to beginning teachers' perspective about peer

observation and learning communities. Table 3.12 presents the research questions and accompanying codes from the first interview.

Table 3.12
Research Questions and Accompanying Codes From First Interview

Research Questions	Positive Codes
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports?	helpful choice relevant practical beneficial model intentional support
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	isolation perspective boost permission to change flexible
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and learning community?	reflection gained strategies more tools more ideas Different strategies
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	learning more improves Knocks down barriers student oriented

Those notations were sorted, categorized, and compared with data generated from other sources.

Data Analysis

The three major sources of data in case study research include interviews, observations, and documents, with interviews seen as essential (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 1994). In this particular case study, the major sources of data included: interview and learning community meeting

transcriptions, the researcher's journal, and the participants' journals noting information that refers back to the sub-questions associated with this study. In case study, data gathering and data analysis are concurrent with the researcher generating hypotheses along the way (Ragin & Becker, 1992). Merriam (1998) notes that case study does not claim any specific methods for data collection or analysis. However, Yin does insist that researchers must pull together the data and organize it so that it is usable and produces an audit trail. See Appendix D for audit trail. This organization of data is important because the goal of data analysis in case study is communicating understandings which are derived from the various data sources (Merriam, 1998).

Constructivism influenced data analysis by focusing the researcher on instances where participants constructed their knowledge, what was happening to help participants construct their knowledge, what life experiences participants brought to their learning, and how participants made meaning out of their experiences.

Constant Comparative Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using constant comparative analysis which was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). When using constant comparative analysis, the basic strategy is to constantly compare data beginning with a particular data bit and comparing it with other data bits in your data set (Merriam, 1998). In this study, data bits from individual interviews and learning community verbatims were compared with each other to determine categories within each case. Then case based categories were compared across cases. Table 3.13 illustrates the codes from one case correlated to the research questions and Appendix H details the codes from the other five cases.

Table 3.13
Case: Rheema Capra

Research Question	Codes
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports?	"really helpful" "meaningful" "not awkward" "choose" "don't feel alone" "good for me" "relate" "common ground"
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	"perspective" "that's OK" "I can do it." "I'm doing a good job." "too much leeway"
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and learning community?	"meet them at their level" "my centers were good" "I can change." "differentiation is hard"
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	"student oriented" "giving them choice" "has to work for the kids" "meet them at their level"

Then common data bits were sorted into categories. Ragin and Becker (1992) contend that comparisons within constant comparison analysis have two functions. First, comparisons may help deconstruct what is commonly seen as unique or unified. Second, comparisons may take that which seems broken up into categories and construct the pieces into a unified whole.

The process of constant comparison analysis begins with identifying units of data which are defined as bits of information that can be as small as a word or as large as pages of field notes and sorting them into groupings that hold something in common (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln

and Guba (1985) note that a unit of data must reveal information relevant to the study, cause the reader to think beyond the piece of data at hand, and can be the smallest piece of information if it can stand alone. The task for the researcher is to break the bits of information down, compare them with other bits of information looking for recurring themes by comparing, sort them by these themes, and classify them in new ways. The classification leads to categories that are compared to each other. Comparison of bits of information, themes, and categories is constant until a theory can be formed (Merriam). When analyzing the data for this study, theory was developed in this manner. Table 3.14 illustrates some of the theory development process.

Table 3.14
Memo Defining Each Category Derived from the Data and Aligned to the Research Questions

Category	Research Question	Definition
Autonomy	1, 2, and 3	relevance, choice, decision making
Vulnerability	1, 2, and 3	risk taking in community, revealing self
Support through Community	1, 2, and 3	asking questions, sharing successes, seeking solutions, observing each other
Professionalism	3	reflect, articulate, shift in practice
Pedagogy	3	differentiation, strategies, constantly shifting
Student Focused	4	bigger picture, off self, seeking ways to engage students

It is important to realize that all data was not meaningful and was not used to derive a theme.

The process of category construction begins with reading the first transcript and the researcher jotting down notes in the margins. These notes might be in the form of comments, observations, or questions. After the first reading of the transcript is complete, the researcher rereads his or her notes trying to group like notes together. The researcher moves through each datum in the same way. Then groups of notes are compared, with the notes being merged into a master list. After the researcher reflects back over the purpose of the research, the researcher is ready to name the categories or groups taking care that the groups are mutually exclusive, the name fits the data in the category, and the names are conceptually congruent (Merriam, 1998).

At this point in the data analysis, the researcher has sets of categories and is ready to comb back through the data looking for more bits of relevant information that were overlooked previously. It is crucial that the researcher develop a system to manage this process which might include the use of file folders or index cards (Merriam, 1998). This type of data analysis is termed inductive because themes are allowed to emerge out of the raw data (Patton, 1990).

Trustworthiness

Consumers can know that research results are trustworthy when there has been some accounting for the validity and reliability of the results. Validity and reliability reflect concern and attention to the way that a study is conceptualized; the way data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted; and the way that a researcher presents the findings (Merriam, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1981) pose three questions related to reliability and validity.

1. Were the interviews reliably and validly constructed?
2. Was the content of the documents analyzed properly?
3. Are the conclusions that the case study brings forward situated on the data?

In this study, the interviews were reliably and validly constructed. The questions asked in the first interview were pulled directly from the research questions. The questions for the second interview were formed based on analyzing the data from the first interviews and the learning community verbatims. Both interviews and all of the learning community sessions were audio recorded. Interview transcriptions were given to participants as a member check. Secondly, the content of the documents in this study were analyzed properly. Constant comparison techniques were used. Feedback from more knowledgeable others was solicited and utilized. Each participant was given their written case and asked for feedback. Finally, the conclusions that the case study brings forward are situated in the data. The discussion portion of Chapter Five is grounded in the research literature and in the data that this study generated.

Validity

Validity begs the question, "How might you be wrong?" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 105). Maxwell says there are two general threats to validity: researcher bias and reactivity. Researcher bias is defined as the subjectivity of the researcher, which can surface through data selection that fits the researchers' existing theory or selection of data that seem prominent to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Shweder, 1980). One test of possible bias is to explore how open you are to contrary findings (Yin, 1994). It is key for researchers to explore and explain their possible biases and how they will be neutralized (Maxwell). Bias also may lead to questions of ethics over how data are collected and findings are made known (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1981) emphasize that bias can be neutralized when data are confirmed through cross checks, triangulation, peer review, and member checks. Bias was controlled in this study by the use of cross checks, triangulation, peer review, and member checks. The researcher checked data bits from one participant against each other and against data pieces from other

participants. Three main sources of data were used and checked to see if similar themes emerged. The researcher discussed findings with her major professor, a professor in the qualitative department, her peers, and her spouse and copies of transcripts were sent to all participants seeking feedback.

Reactivity is defined as the way the researcher influenced the research setting and participants (Maxwell, 2005). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) offer that eliminating the influence of the researcher is impossible. Therefore, researchers must understand their influence, control it, and use it productively. To minimize reactivity, it is key for the researcher to avoid leading questions and to fully understand how they are influencing the responses of the participant (Maxwell).

In this study, the researcher controlled the influence of reactivity by acknowledging the position of power that she holds, making a plan to reduce the influence of that power, and determining how that power could be used productively. While the researcher holds no evaluative power, she does have the ear of the principal and is perceived as part of the administrative team. The researcher has always made a consistent effort to be seen as a part of the teaching staff by locating her office on a classroom wing and not in the main office, building relationships with teachers, spending time with teams and with individual teachers, being visible throughout the school day, and performing duties expected of teachers.

Because the researcher is the instructional coach, her time is more flexible than a classroom teacher. Therefore, she can cover classes for participants to participate in peer observations, take the time to connect with all participants outside of the learning community setting, and observe participants in their classrooms. The researcher intentionally has taken the role of participant observer meaning that she participates in peer observations and in learning

community meetings making an intentional effort to facilitate these experiences for others by doing more listening than talking. Maxwell (2005) would further offer that validity is a goal rather than a product and cannot be guaranteed by the choice of methods.

The two types of validity are internal validity and external validity. Internal validity is concerned with matching research findings to reality (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). The researcher must ask, "Do the findings capture what is really there?" (Merriam, p. 201). Six strategies offered by Merriam to enhance internal validity are:

1. Triangulation – Using multiple data sources and methods to confirm findings.
2. Member checks – Taking the data back to the participants to verify accuracy.
3. Long-term observation – Gathering data over a period of time.
4. Participatory modes of research – Involving participants in the research.
5. Researcher's Bias – Clarify and communicate that at the beginning of the study.

In this case study, triangulation, member checks, and long-term observation were used as strategies to insure internal validity.

External validity is concerned with taking the findings of one study and applying those findings to another situation (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). External validity asks, "How generalizable are the results?" which assumes internal validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). deMarrais and Lapan (2004) would offer that generalization is not a goal of case study because case study is focused on discovering the uniqueness of each case. Furthermore, a single case is selected because the researcher wants to understand the specific case in-depth (Merriam, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further state that "the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (p. 460).

Leaving the extent to which a study's findings may be generalized to another situation or setting should be left to the people in those settings (Firestone, 1993; Kennedy, 1979; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Dockerell & Hamilton, 1980). Merriam proposes that when the researcher provides a thick description, describes how typical the program is, and maximizes diversity within the research readers can better determine if the situations match and results apply. External validity in this case study was secured through the measures suggested by Merriam above.

Reliability

Reliability demands that if the study were repeated the results would be the same. Therefore, the focus of reliability is replication of findings for establishing truth (Merriam, 1998) while the goal of reliability is to minimize errors and biases in a study (Yin, 1994). Merriam asserts that there is no way to establish reliability in the traditional quantitative sense because qualitative studies are more context bound and replication of qualitative studies will not produce identical results in other contexts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) would offer that thinking in terms of dependability or consistency of results helps insure reliability in qualitative studies. Dependability or consistency means that outsiders would agree that the results make sense given the data collected.

This chapter presented the methods used in this case study. The next chapter, Chapter 4, presents the findings and a cross-case analysis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

You can always learn something from somebody
(Elias Clinton, participant).

Introduction

The purpose of this study led to a set of questions intending to help us understand how beginning teachers view and experience peer observations and learning community. The researcher wanted to know what beginning teachers think about peer observation and learning community and if these supports made a difference for them. To achieve this purpose, there was a primary question. Specifically, what can we learn about supporting beginning teachers when they participate in peer observations and a learning community? To be able to answer this primary question, the following secondary questions guided data collection and analysis. These questions included:

1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning communities as instructional supports?
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and a learning community?
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?

This study built on research about beginning teachers, peer observation, and learning communities. The research framed issues nationally and within Georgia by building on the work of others in the fields of teacher induction and instructional supervision as a means to support teachers. This study is a qualitative, case study that employed a constructivist conceptual framework and focused on a population of beginning teachers in one elementary school in a small city in Georgia.

Data sources included interview transcripts from two interviews, journals, and audio recordings and transcribed verbatims from monthly learning community sessions. The data are presented first in individual case studies and then across cases. Data collection occurred from August 1, 2008 through February 28, 2009.

Participants were selected because of their status as first, second, or third year teachers at one elementary school and because of their willingness to participate in this study. Of the participants, two are male, four are female, two participants are African American, and four are White. Additionally, two of the participants are beginning their second careers. Thus, they are older than the typical beginning teacher and bring professional work experience from other fields with them.

The interviews were transcribed, reviewed at length, and coded. Verbatims from learning community sessions that tied back to the research questions were transcribed, reviewed, and coded. The researcher read both participants' journals and her own journal noting codes. All of the codes were reviewed and sorted. Patterns emerged which then formed the foundation for the themes.

Stephanie Bradshaw

Stephanie is one of four teachers assigned to teach second grade at the research site. Stephanie's team is comprised of two veteran teachers and two beginning teachers. Due to space issues, the entire second grade is situated in trailers which presents its own set of challenges related to moving children through the campus, bathroom facilities, square footage of classroom space, availability of water, and noise from the construction site behind the school. Noise from the heavy equipment on that site has been more exciting and problematic for the students and teachers in the twelve trailers on the school campus than those in the main building.

Stephanie is 22 years old and a first year teacher. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in education from a traditional four year teacher preparation program in a local university and is certified to teach students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Stephanie is single and has no family in town. She came to this area for college and chose to stay upon graduation.

Teaching second grade is Stephanie's first teaching assignment and her first experience in a professional position of any type. While in college, Stephanie was assigned to various grade levels for field experience but never to second grade. Stephanie held small jobs intermittently while attending college. Though not currently enrolled in graduate school, Stephanie has given some thought as to when graduate school would fit into her professional life. Stephanie had more than one job offer and chose to remain in her college town to begin her teaching career.

Peer Observation – It Levels the Field

When asked about opportunities to participate in peer observations, Stephanie focused on the relevance of the process that was used to implement peer observations. Because she was not "told what to do" but instead was able to "think about it for myself and make my own decisions,"

the peer observation process was important to her and pertinent to her professional growth. Peer observations based on her needs and her decisions put her in charge of her own learning.

Peer observations were also a part of her student teaching experience, however, because there was no context or question driving the experience she found that experience to be without meaning. According to Stephanie, "I would just kind of show up…and I would look. I mean I couldn't tell you what I saw in those classrooms." Stephanie feels strongly that context is important in the peer observation process. She believes that" some experience makes peer observations more meaningful."

Observing her peers enabled Stephanie to "make the shift from what you read to what you saw to what you do." Stephanie mentioned in an interview that she had "absolutely no experience in second grade" and had "read about everything but had never seen any of that with second graders ever in my entire life. The last time I was in a second grade classroom I was seven years old." Observing her peers helped her to take abstract ideas from professional readings and shift those ideas to concrete application. Without the opportunity to observe her peers, Stephanie wondered "what she would have fallen back on when she failed." Even though Stephanie has a lot of initiative she admitted that if there had been no opportunity for peer observations it would have been "hard to ask to go in, you know, to someone's classroom because I would wonder what are they thinking about me?"

The biggest thing that Stephanie has gained from peer observations is "seeing how they're (teachers) putting all this together…Georgia Performance Standards, curriculum, resources, and best teaching practices." Once Stephanie had seen how teachers were able to make it work, she was able to pull learning out of her peer observation experience. She commented, "Observations have given me lots of different ways, new ways, for me to think

about it (teaching). My reading rotation and everything that works now is really a direct result of those observations. It seems like everything is pretty much straight from something I saw." Stephanie has been able to see different ways to teach and learn which is evidenced in these two questions that she proposed while interviewed, "What does teaching look like? What can teaching look like?" Stephanie has figured out that teaching looks different for many people.

Participating in peer observations has "opened up a line of communication" between Stephanie and her peers. Going into classrooms to learn about teaching and learning has given Stephanie a context for what "teaching and learning looks like in this school." Stephanie feels that she has become more connected to the school and with her peers because she has been able to spend time watching them work and talking with them about their practice. In short, Stephanie feels that "it (peer observation) kind of levels the field" between beginning teachers and veteran teachers in her school.

Stephanie believes that peer observation benefits kids. She found that when she went into a classroom to observe she not only watched the teacher but she watched the children. Stephanie commented "…when you are not having to be the one worried about the teaching…you're watching the kids who are just like the kids in your classroom. Who are …not engaged in it at all, or don't get it, or are just kind of lost. And, when you go back in your class, then you kind of remember that." The peer observation experience has helped Stephanie figure out where her students are coming from and to focus on their learning. This represents a big shift in her thinking from the beginning of the year when she was focused more on getting through the day.

Learning Community – Really Was About Solving a Problem

Being a part of the beginning teacher learning community has been a way for Stephanie to get more strategies for dealing with her struggles. She held that "she was a little more open" at learning community meetings than at her team meetings with her second grade peers and attributed that to the fact that these two gatherings had two different purposes. Stephanie asserts that second grade team meetings are a time for talking through "what we are going to teach and how we are going to teach it." She believes this time is for "big ideas about content and teaching." Because she is new to teaching, she has found that she tends to sit back and listen at team meetings. She is also the note taker for the team which gives her a task to focus on.

The beginning teacher learning community has been a place for Stephanie where it is "easier to say I am having trouble…". She feels "she gets a lot more support with her struggles here …than from my team." She has found that she can say things like, "I can't figure out how to motivate…, nothing has worked, he needs something, and I don't know" in learning community meetings. Stephanie has also found this setting to be a "good opportunity to hear what other people are struggling with."

Stephanie feels that the beginning teacher learning community is focused on "solving a problem not just dealing with it." She has observed that "most people in the learning community are not first year teachers…they are past the setting up the room worries…they're into their individual students" which has helped her focus on individual students. She has found the learning community to be a place to get help with a particular student. As she so aptly put it, "I have to solve this problem, you know."

Finally, the beginning teacher learning community has been a place for Stephanie to talk about what is going on in her classroom and get ideas. Stephanie feels that she comes away from these meetings with more strategies to take back into her classroom.

Reflection – I Think About Things a Lot

Stephanie stated in her first interview, "Reflecting is big for me." When Stephanie is participating in a peer observation, she finds herself thinking about what is happening in that classroom, what it currently looks like in her classroom, and how what she is seeing might fit into her classroom. She mentioned, "she turns things over in her head and really looks at it from different angles… like a constant conversation."

This near constant state of reflection paired with her experiences with peer observation and in the beginning teacher learning community has made it easier for Stephanie to make changes in her classroom. A week after Stephanie's first peer observation, she received an e-mail from the teacher she observed letting Stephanie know that she had changed the way she was doing centers and then explaining the change. This type of thinking has enabled Stephanie to say to herself "OK, that's not working, move on. Let's just change it up." In fact, Stephanie feels that she is becoming "addicted to changing things in her classroom" which is a big departure from where she was in August. "If you told me a year ago that I would just come in and just completely throw my hands up in the air and say, you know, let's do something completely different, I might not have believed you, but, you know that's definitely something that helped me."

The beginning teacher learning community and her peer observation experiences have given Stephanie a new perspective about herself and the school as a whole. Stephanie explained that the learning community has kept her from feeling isolated. Because she has had so many

opportunities to talk in depth with other beginning teachers and to observe others, Stephanie has a more accurate perception of the different teachers in the school, their strengths, and the skills that they bring to the school. She also has developed more confidence in her own abilities and feels that "it is safe to try new things." Her vantage point has helped her to better "judge her own class and her own abilities and lowered the pressure that she felt so strongly at the beginning of the school year." In addition, the intentional interactions that come with learning community and peer observation have connected her with teachers throughout the building making her feel like she is part of a whole. Stephanie acknowledged that "she could have really felt cut off just because of my location."

Stephanie feels that her learning has shifted greatly from the beginning of the year from "running my classroom to individuals in my classroom." She realizes that she has to "own what she is doing, what she is teaching, and the way she is doing it in her classroom." Even with that lofty shift in thinking, she admits that "some days she is just trying to survive this year and she often feels petrified about these kids that…I do know that I'm leaving behind."

Case Summary

Stephanie believed that choice in the peer observation experience put her in charge of her own learning and gave the peer observation experience a relevant context which made the whole experience powerful. Peer observation gave Stephanie a visual of the big picture of teaching at her grade level which gave her something solid to fall back on as she learned to teach second grade and the big picture of teaching across the school which gave her a context for teaching and learning within the entire school. During peer observations, Stephanie found herself observing her peers and students. She was eager to better understand what engaged students and how teachers handled lack of interest or engagement of their own students.

Stephanie found the learning community meetings to be a time when she could be very honest and forthright about her practice. She also viewed learning community sessions to be focused on problem solving not just problem sharing. The intentional interactions involved in peer observations and learning community have connected Stephanie to the faculty giving her perspective and lowering feelings of isolation.

Late in the first semester, Stephanie shifted her focus from self to students. She better understood that the focus of her job is her students not where to put things or how to manage her daily schedule.

Rheema Capra

Rheema Capra is one of four teachers on the second grade team at the research site. Like the other second grade teachers, Rheema is in a trailer on the school's campus which presents unique challenges as mentioned earlier. Rheema shared a first grade classroom position with a veteran teacher from January to May of 2008. Rheema taught the last half of the day which included lunch, recess, specials, English, writing workshop, and read aloud. For the purposes of this study, I have considered Rheema to be a first year teacher.

Rheema earned a Bachelor of Art in History from a college in New Hampshire. While living in New Hampshire, she began a Master in Education program completing everything but a year long internship. Due to personal circumstances, she opted to withdraw from school at that time. Later, Rheema did earn her Masters in Education at a local college in Georgia.

All of Rheema's professional teaching experience has been at the research site; however, while living in San Diego and New Hampshire, Rheema worked for many years as a corporate travel agent. She comes to teaching as her second career. Rheema is 43 years old, married, and has 1 elementary aged son. When sharing her thoughts about being a beginning teacher at the

age of 43, Rheema said the she is a "lot less nervous than she was when she was 22." She also mentioned that "being a mom she is used to multi-tasking," and she understands that "it doesn't have to be one way or no way…we can readjust…" In short, Rheema feels that "she doesn't freak out as much" as she did when she entered the work force for the first time years ago.

Peer Observation – You Know Seeing It Is Believing

When Rheema talked about her peer observation experience, she mentioned words like "choice and beneficial." She felt that the peer observation process was "more meaningful to them and probably made people happier" because of the role of choice in the process. She further elaborated saying, "…if you give them (teachers) some choice…they're more invested in it, and I think they get more from it." Rheema found that because choice was focused on a question about practice that the teacher posed peer observation was "more beneficial than just going and maybe observing a really great teacher but it may not have had anything to do with what I wanted to do in my classroom." Rheema felt that choice was driven by "something I wanted to try" which made the peer observation relevant and motivating and that she was "going (to other teachers' classrooms) because she wanted to know something not because I screwed something up."

Identifying your own area of need and going to watch a peer of your choice are essential ingredients for a peer observation process. Without choice Rheema thinks "who would ever admit that they wanted to go and observe. It would be like a sentence…a punishment." Without choice Rheema felt that "…everyone would know as you walk down the hall…you weren't doing something right." Rheema feels that most teachers are concerned about what other teachers think of them. She said, "I don't want other teachers to think, wow, she doesn't have it

together. So I think it would be really horrible (to send teachers on peer observations without choice)…you'd never ask to go see anybody."

During peer observations, Rheema found the teachers she observed to be "very welcoming, open to ideas, and OK to talk with about my questions." She discovered that other teachers were fine with being a resource to beginning teachers. The peer observation experience was "not awkward for her at all."

Rheema felt that part of the value of peer observation was "seeing teaching practices I have read about actually put into action." She mentioned, "it's hard to know how to make a change or how to implement something if you've never seen it done…it's just easier to act on what you've seen."

When she walked into the classroom of a peer to observe, Rheema found herself asking herself questions like, "Why is this working? What does this observation mean to me? What can I use in my classroom?" Rheema voiced that it was helpful to see that "it can be done…in a practical real person way," and she felt that all of her observations were good but none put teaching out of her reach. The peer observations, according to Rheema, "were practical" and gave her "a real look at theory into practice" which was valuable to her. Rheema further elaborated that she often "doesn't know how to bring it [theory] down to…the technical."

Rheema felt it was helpful to wait until September to do peer observations instead of August because "I already had a feel for my class. I went to observe the other class and thought, OK, this is going to work for me." That bit of time to get to know her class made it easier to figure out "how are we going to transition into this" and helped her understand "if she was expecting too much."

Rheema discovered that peer observations have "helped me get up to speed…reach competency quicker." Rheema notes that "I probably didn't have to fail as many times" because I had the opportunity to see someone else. She did not have to look "inward quite as much" for the help that she needed.

Rheema found that the peer observation experience has "made me realize there are many ways to do things and exposed me to different ways of teaching. It gave me ideas and my ideas…have been validated. I am not completely out in left field." Furthermore, one of Rheema's observations gave her "a new perspective on classroom management. It is OK to expect certain behaviors and to have high expectations." In addition, during one of her observations she realized, "I was giving them too much leeway."

Overall, the peer observation experience has given Rheema confidence, "I feel much more confident. I guess I've learned that I can do it." Peer observations have clarified the process of how to meet teaching expectations. Rheema supposed this clarity has given her "more of a clear path of what I wanted to do."

Learning Community – I Don't Feel Alone

Rheema views the beginning teacher learning community as a place where "…everybody's equal…because we are all new." She refers to this equality as common ground and says, this "common ground thing makes you feel better." She has "enjoyed getting to know some of my co-workers" and feels that she can relate readily with them "because we are all learning." She feels that the conversation in the beginning teacher learning community is "more back and forth because your idea about something is just as much valued as the next guy because you're all kind of in the same boat together."

Rheema believes the learning community has "opened me up to new resources and kept me from floundering in what do I do because I have something to try…I am getting some avenues to help me." Overall, she feels the beginning teacher learning community has "been a really good resource …giving me some ideas of where to go or what they would do" for problem solving and gaining perspective.

Rheema thinks "it has been OK to say I'm having trouble with this and not try to mask it…and not worry about having people go what?...what's wrong with you?" This problem sharing has helped Rheema to not feel so isolated and given her a more accurate perspective on how she is doing. In her second interview, Rheema spoke to the idea that it is "easy as a new teacher to kind of feel like you're not quite measuring up." She further elaborated by saying, "In talking to other teachers, it is like you realize 'hey, you know, I'm doing a pretty good job'. I don't have to beat myself up because I am not perfect at everything."

Rheema is part of the second grade team and declared repeatedly, "I love my team." She has found that team meetings are more about "what's coming up." Rheema feels like "more of a background player…not a key player" during team meetings. She said, her team "always gives me information if I ask and I'm learning from what they are saying and going off of their plans…experiences." She feels that she is "always on the asking end and rarely offers any information at all." She sees her role in team meetings to be "much more of a listener…than an active participant." She feels that the purposes of the two meetings are different. The team meeting is focused on using the veteran teachers' expertise to plan and pace instruction. The learning community with beginning teachers is focused on solving problems as voiced by beginning teachers. Rheema thinks:

> experienced teachers…not going through the same stuff. So they are not thinking about that kind of stuff. I don't know if you would come up to a

> veteran teacher and say, hey, I don't know how to teach this student. I mean how lame would you be?

Reflection – That's Just How I Work Now

Rheema feels that she is "a pretty big reflector." When she does a peer observation, she finds herself "watching what they do, going over in my mind thinking how this thing would work in my classroom, doing some comparison to what I do." She has found that she is "identifying with what they (peer) are saying and …reflecting back on my own experience." Rheema thinks continually now about "what happened, what worked, what didn't work, and what I'll do next time." All of this thinking and observing has helped her make changes in her practice.

When Rheema went to observe one teacher in particular, she realized, "I'm not on top of it as much as I should be and I've got to be because this isn't working. I was ready to make a change." During other observations she has walked away thinking, "Hey, you know this could work for me…I can do this. I'm going to change." Rheema has also figured out that she cannot duplicate exactly a lot of what she sees because she has to "do stuff that would be right for my kids."

Rheema thinks that her experiences with peer observation and learning community have given her perspective about her job and herself. She expressed that last summer she had "built this job up to such a level that I did not know if I could do it." After observing peers she left "feeling like my centers were pretty good and it still was a lot of work but it was something I could do." Her experiences have given her a boost, helped her believe that she can do her job, and made her realize that her "expectations might not be realistic." She also mentioned that a retired teacher friend and her husband have been very encouraging which has helped her keep a positive perspective. In her own words, "This hasn't been so disastrous as I thought it was."

Rheema has not felt isolated due to the multiple supports that have been put into play. "I've never heard of anyone talk about getting this much support." Rheema further mentioned that she has "felt very comfortable, and there were plenty of people that I could go to." She feels "lucky that one of my teammates was a new teacher." This relationship has given her someone to identify with at the team level. However, she asserted that she was a prime candidate to feel isolated. Rheema voiced, "…especially me being in a trailer. You couldn't get more isolated than that…you can't stick your head in the next door and say, you know, I'm having a problem here." Isolation according to Rheema, forces you to focus inward for your support. Rheema continued, "…you feel really terrible about how you're doing…it's just inward, inward, inward. You don't know how to improve."

Rheema has learned through peer observations and learning community that she wants to be student oriented. She said, "In the observations, I saw a lot of student driven, student oriented learning and that's where I am going." She would like for her role with students to evolve to that of facilitator. This year her work towards that goal looks like "giving them (students) choice during centers and giving them some room to think and process."

When Rheema began the year she said, "I never thought about multiple teaching strategies but participating in this experience has given me a way to figure out multiple ways to do things." She now wants "to know multiple ways of doing things so that she can give them (students) different strategies…." She has figured out that differentiating instruction is "difficult to do effectively and is hoping that her experience this year will give her more practical ways of doing it (differentiation)." She is working to "meet them (kids) at their level, try to support them, and bring them up" knowing that the strategies involved must "work for the teacher and the kids."

Case Summary

Rheema believes that having choice in the peer observation process makes the experience more motivating and focused on learning. The visual aspect of an observation gave Rheema a way to take theory and see it practically applied. Peer observations helped Rheema look outward for help giving her things to try that she had seen work. Rheema felt strongly that her peer observations had been successful because she had connected with her own class prior to watching a peer in another class. Watching her peers work has helped Rheema better gauge her expectations for her students and herself.

Rheema has found the learning community of beginning teachers to be a place of common ground where she can get help solving her problems and gain some perspective about herself and her students. She has felt comfortable being honest within this learning community even though honesty comes with risk. She has found help in both her team meeting and the learning community valuing both gatherings.

Rheema has become a big reflector and feels that reflection paired with observation make it easier for her to shift her practice. She has learned that she must often adapt the strategies and ideas that she gains from peer observations and the learning community. Rheema feels strongly that she has received a lot of support which has countered any feelings of isolation. She is becoming more student oriented in her focus and is continually looking for multiple strategies that she can adapt to fit the students and herself.

George Bailey

George Bailey is one of three fifth grade teachers at the research site. George began his work teaching fifth grade during the 2007-2008 school year. His team consists of a teacher that is retiring this year, a teacher that is new to the school and to fifth grade but not to teaching, and

George who is in his second year of teaching fifth grade. While all of George's professional teaching experience has been at the research site, his professional work experience extends beyond his teaching experience. George is in his second career. Prior to teaching, George worked for a college preparation program preparing students for college.

George earned a Master of Psychology Degree and participated in a certification only program (nondegree) with a local college. This certification program was a few weeks long the summer prior to his employment as a fifth grade teacher. George holds a teaching certificate in early childhood which includes pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. George is 37 years old, married, and has an elementary aged daughter.

Peer Observation – If You Haven't Seen It, How Can You Do It? How?

George described peer observation as "a model of how to work with students." When talking about the role of choice in peer observation, George mentioned that "having choice in what you are observing gives you an opportunity to engage in something that's going to be beneficial to you…applies to your instruction." He has found peer observation is a way to get "help with areas you need to work on…from your own perspective." According to George, teaching is a job that you get better at as you gain experience. "By observing others…you get more experience."

Participating in peer observations has given George a way to "live vicariously through another teacher…to learn…to watch them teach." George views this type of activity as more than watching. When he participates in peer observation, he is "engaged which helps him understand, OK, this is doable." In addition, peer observations help him "see better how to deal with a situation" which makes the "shift in practice more likely because I saw it in practice."

The opportunity to watch a peer gives "more credence to it (theory)" which also makes a shift in practice more likely.

George also spoke to the idea that "you don't learn from reading all the time. You learn from doing." Peer observations have given him the opportunity to learn by seeing "theory carried out in a practical manner…actually seeing it practically applied in teaching." For beginning teachers, George feels that "the biggest concern is putting those things in practical application." Furthermore, George believes that observing peers lends "more credibility…rather than (just reading)…in a book. Teaching…it's not just textbook."

Peer observations have given George an opportunity to "see different styles and ways to get across concepts and understandings from teachers who are coming from the same perspective." This exposure to different teaching styles has "elevated his style as far as teaching goes." In addition, participating in peer observation has helped George "focus on student learning. …by engaging and watching others teach…then you ask the question of how can I get my students to learn." George knows that he has incorporated some of the strategies and styles of his peers in his practice which has "enhanced his instruction and increased student learning and performance." George definitely feels that he is seeing results related to student learning. He feels that this experience with peer observation has helped him "learn more about himself and realize …there are different ways (to teach) but is the student learning?" is still the crucial question.

Learning Community – This Experience Lends Itself to More Understanding

George has found the beginning teacher learning community to be a place of "commonality…people who are starting out just as you are, and are dealing with the same issues and often don't know how to address them… ." He has also found this group to be a source of

support, and George shares, “Meeting with peers has afforded me with the opportunity to address my reservations in a more effective and efficient manner.” This common ground within the group leads George to a feeling of “…you don’t feel you have to know as much, you don’t have to have all of the answers.” Meeting with new teachers has helped him realize he’s not the only one facing issues. Additionally, learning community meetings have helped George build relationships and build understandings.

George feels that “first, second, and third year teachers are a good mix” for the learning community and “it helps having a set time and a set place.” The learning community meetings are a priority because they are intentionally planned and scheduled. Without that intentional plan George feels that even the most motivated new teacher would not take the time to build relationships with beginning teachers throughout the building. The learning community has been an effective way for George to counter isolation. Meeting with other beginning teachers has shown George that there are:

> other teachers (who) have the same issues or concerns as you do and are dealing with those and how to address them in a practical manner. Someone else has those same issues and those same concerns. …you don’t live in a vacuum…You are not teaching by yourself.

There is strength in relationships. George has formed deeper relationships this year with some of his peers.

George has found that his team meetings are different because the “people on the team have years of experience and are not dealing with the same issues.” Therefore, the teachers on his team are going to have a different perspective about their job. All of this difference means that George goes into team meetings “with a different mindset because it is more of a mix” that has a different purpose.

Reflection – As a Teacher, I Am a Learner

George has found that his experiences with peer observation and learning community have encouraged reflection which "allows you to take that information and to digest it." Through reflection he has figured out that "…in order to be a teacher, you have to be a learner…," and he has decided to "put his energy into learning not teaching." George has found that his teaching style has become more eclectic as he has incorporated what he has seen into his practice.

When asked about what he has learned about teaching and learning because of this experience, ideas related to routines, barriers to learning, and different teaching styles are mentioned. George has learned that establishing routines are very important in a school setting because the more familiar they (students) are with something the better they become and the more acclimated they are towards learning. "Just having some type of routine that students do everyday" improves student learning, according to George.

As a second year teacher, George has learned that while he is trying to "figure out ways to enhance learning" he also must "knock down barriers that students have that impede their learning." For the students in George's class, the main barriers are "gaps in learning and behavior." George feels that "behavior is the biggest barrier to learning and they (students) engage in negative behaviors because they become frustrated" with this frustration often stemming from the gaps that they have in their learning.

Part of George's learning has centered on the concept that "there's no one fix for every student." The opportunity to observe and engage with peers in a learning community has showed George that "there's no set way" to teach. In fact George feels that "trying to teach one paramount way over another…sets yourself up for failure." Observing and engaging with peers has taught George that "there are so many techniques you could use" with students.

Furthermore, George has deduced that "instruction and learning…has so many different dimensions." George feels that he is learning different "techniques and styles that will enhance my teaching experience which will help students get it sooner." George says that he now realizes that "teaching is a constantly changing profession because it directly deals with the human behavior of learning."

Case Summary

George has found that peer observation is a way to gain more teaching experience quickly. He believes that peer observation is more than observation. It is engagement. Watching a peer at work gives credibility which makes a shift in practice more likely. George feels that watching a peer is an opportunity to see theory applied in a practical manner in a common context. The peer observation experience has elevated George's teaching style by helping him improve his skills and vary what he does. Ultimately, George believes that student learning in his classroom has increased because he has been able to focus on his own learning.

George views the learning community as a place of commonality where he can get help with problems and build relationships with coworkers. He feels that the relationships that he has built through the learning community and opportunities to observe peers has countered feelings of isolation.

The opportunities that George has had by participating in this study have helped him focus on himself as a learner. Establishing routines with students and removing barriers to learning have been two of his big pieces of learning this year. He has also come to realize that there are many techniques that can be used with students which will help them learn. Ultimately, he has come to recognize that teaching is a constantly changing profession.

Elias Clinton

Elias is one of six special education teachers assigned to the research site where he has worked all of his three years of teaching. During Elias' first year of teaching, he was assigned to collaborate with a third grade teacher. He spent the bulk of his day working in the third grade classroom and pulled his special education students for one segment of direct instruction daily. For Elias' second and third years of teaching he has been assigned to fourth grade where he has worked collaboratively with one teacher both years and pulled the special education students for direct instruction in math and reading.

Elias earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Special Education from a local university and is working on a Master of Education degree at a local college focused on emotionally and behaviorally disturbed students. Elias holds kindergarten through twelfth grade certification for special education in all content areas. His case load of fourth grade students includes children with emotional and behavioral disturbances, autism spectrum disorder, and or learning disabilities.

Prior to teaching, Elias was employed in the food service industry and with a landscaping company. Elias is 28, single, and has no family in town. He came to the area for college and chose to stay upon graduation.

Peer Observation – Seeing Things Makes Me More Open to Try Things

Elias has found peer observation to be helpful and a useful resource. "To see someone in action doing what you want to do," has encouraged Elias. He feels "you could hear about it all day and read about it, but to actually see it…someone differentiating instruction effectively, it can work." Elias believes that participating in peer observation "gives you more strategies to do that (differentiation)…" When he is sitting in a peer's room observing, he thinks, "What can I

take from this and apply to my bag of tricks or my skills that will really improve what happens in the classroom for me?" Elias believes "it's a learning process being a teacher. …no one starts off like as an excellent teacher. You have to develop those skills and watching people is one way to do that."

Choice and school culture have made peer observations powerful experiences. Elias uses words like "pertinent," "relevant," and "motivated" when talking about the role of choice in peer observation. He feels that peer observation has been successful because "we have had lots of choice of who we want to see." Elias believes that "no one knows you like you." Choice allows you to "name those areas of need in your instruction and go see something …that's …a deficit in your teaching in your mind." Furthermore, choice can be scary because choice means that you are responsible for thinking through your area of need, going out to see a peer work in that area, and make a shift in practice. You have to admit you are not perfect. Elias said, "Choice …allows you to get where you need to go because you know what you need to develop." Elias feels that choice makes the peer observation influential because you spend your time working on a needed area not "observing where you are strong …which does not do a lot of good for yourself."

The school culture has impacted peer observations. Elias' view is "it's (school culture) definitely made it work…our school culture has been very receptive to peer observations." The entire staff at the research site has participated in peer observations as part of professional development. To have teachers, administrators, or a coach walk in a classroom during instruction is not an unusual occurrence. In addition, the principal has worked diligently to create and maintain an atmosphere of respect, trust, and support. All of these factors positively impacted the peer observation experience for beginning teachers which Elias acknowledged.

Learning Community – You Can Always Learn Something From Somebody

Elias' view of team meetings and learning community meetings is that they have different purposes; however, he "kind of feels like I have an equal role in both, honestly." Elias feels that the learning community meetings are "more of a large scale, big picture" kind of meeting. During learning community meetings, "…you can kind of get thoughts and perspectives of what they're seeing, sharing what they're seeing." Elias sees learning community meetings as a time to "come together and problem solve." He believes that this time of reflecting and problem solving is good for morale in that it negates isolation which so many beginning teachers deal with. Furthermore, the time that he spends with beginning teachers in the learning community gives him an opportunity to "talk …and bounce ideas off of each other. Everyone is always bringing back new strategies they've seen in observations." The beginning teacher learning community has been a place for Elias to solve problems and gain new strategies.

Elias has found that during team meetings the talk is "about things that are a little more close to home." This time is spent talking through the specifics of what will be taught in the next week, how teachers will instruct, and the pacing of instruction. Team business is conducted. In this setting Elias is with veteran teachers who are focused on fourth grade. He has surmised that "there is not a whole lot of room for that (problem solving) in team meetings." This is more a result of function and purpose than intentional oversight.

Reflection – There Are Things That I Need to Change With My Instruction

Participating in peer observation and learning community has shown Elias that there are "things that I need to change and it is OK to make the change." He feels strongly that he has seen growth from his first year of teaching until now. His experiences with peer observation and learning community have negated the "feeling of am I the only one who's having issues with

this?" Elias has gained perspective from working with peers. "I've figured out that I'm not doing so much stuff wrong as I thought. It's more of a refining. It's been encouraging." Elias feels that working with peers has given him a "perspective of where you are and maybe where you need to be."

As a special education teacher, Elias was clear on the fact that "you have to approach it (instruction) differently for different kids," however, he believes that his "bag of tools" has increased due to his involvement with peer observation and learning community. "…I've got these different tricks I can blow into it (writing instruction)." He feels that "just getting different tools has boosted his progress." The new learning for Elias centered around the idea "that's it's going to take more than one strategy for anything." He thinks that he is now doing that.

Elias credits "watching other people who have those different strategies of teaching with helping him find strategies that work." Each time he observes a peer or meets in the learning community he believes he gains "one more tool in my toolbox and that is good for the confidence…I feel adequate to the task."

Finally, Elias believes the "different variations in instruction is what's going to help students out." Elias' goal is to "increase academic outcomes for students. …taking strategies, applying it, and increasing academic outcomes…that's what I am going for." Specifically, Elias did peer observations of writing instruction and made shifts in his instruction where he has "definitely seen a jump in that." The bottom line for Elias is "you've got to have multiple strategies so that you can approach each kid where they're at causing an increase in their academic outcomes."

Case Summary

Elias has found peer observation to be an encouraging experience that has helped him gain more teaching resources. He feels that peer observations have been such a positive experience due to the role of choice and the positive school culture. Choice according to Elias enables the peer observation experience to be relevant.

Through his interactions with the learning community, Elias has come to understand that team meetings and learning community meetings are both important and serve different purposes. Elias has experienced learning community meetings as a time for reflection, problem solving, and a place to bounce ideas around. His team meetings are focused on curriculum issues which helps him better understand what is to be taught, how it can be taught, and how it can be paced.

Participation in peer observations and learning community have helped Elias figure out what he needs to work on, given him a more accurate perspective of where he is and where he needs to be, and increased his arsenal of teaching resources and strategies. He feels confident and adequate for the task of teaching and believes that increased student outcomes are the bottom line.

Beverly Ford

Beverly Ford is one of four teachers assigned to teach first grade at the research site. Beverly is a third year teacher who has worked only in the first grade. Despite the fact that the first grade team has had a new team member each year, Beverly is still the least senior member of that team.

Beverly earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in art from a university in North Carolina. While an undergraduate, she worked for the city government as a recreation specialist in an after school and summer program for

children with mild/moderate disabilities. Beverly is finishing her Master's Degree in special education at a local college. She aspires to be a special education teacher.

Beverly holds an early childhood certificate that includes all subjects in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade and a middle grades certificate in language arts for grades six through eight. She is 24 years old, single, and does not have any family in town. She is currently teaching third graders in the after school learning program three afternoons a week and working with the school step team after school.

Peer Observation – If I Could Just Sit Back and Observe My Students

When Beverly talked about her experience with peer observations, it was very clear that she is a visual learner. "I am a visual learner…a hands on learner. …as a child I had to see it, you can't tell me. I have to have a visual for it and it's still the same for me as an adult." Beverly does read about different strategies; however, she believes that "to make her classroom more functional she has to see it." In her three years in first grade, Beverly has met a lot of students that are visual learners as well. She asserted "…a lot of my students are that way. …they actually have to do it."

Beverly has found the peer observation experience to be engaging because " I can talk to the students or talk to the teacher and actually ask questions." She feels that participating in peer observations has improved her teaching strategies, given her different ideas, and helped her to try different things. Beverly feels strongly that this type of learning is authentic.

Beverly mentioned that she has had numerous "ah hah moments during peer observations." She said that these moments "gave her the will to try it a new way and just…see how it works." One of her ah hah moments brought her to the understanding of "…that's OK if

it doesn't work for my kids and it's OK if it does work for my kids." Other memorable observations focused on seeing diverse learners in different grade levels which she found helpful.

The idea of choice is important to Beverly. Choice means options to Beverly. She explained, "…I have an option…to do this, this way or to do it that way." Beverly enjoys "talking to her peers and figuring out what they are doing in their classroom." Choice means that Beverly gets to focus on what is important to her whether it is "a content area, diverse learners, how to record data, centers, or working with students that are not listeners."

Change is another idea that Beverly spoke of, "…when I see it (multiple ways of teaching) in action and talk with peers…has allowed me to change some of my teaching methods…" Seeing instruction is the crucial piece that helps Beverly make a shift in her practice. Her view is, "When I see it implemented, I am more willing to change." Beverly feels that she wanted to change some things her first year of teaching but didn't know how. During her second year "I changed a little, but now really in my third year, I've changed a lot of things because I've seen it implemented in other classrooms."

Learning Community – It's A Good Networking Tool

Beverly has found it helpful "…just to talk to other teachers that have been in the field for the same amount of time as I have" during learning community meetings. The opportunity to talk through challenges and solve problems has been valuable to Beverly. She expressed, "we have talked more about our challenges and how some of us had similar challenges which we probably never would have known." Additionally, Beverly believes that the sharing in the learning community means that she "has learned from the peer observations of others."

The learning community meetings have given Beverly time with a mixture of grade levels whose byproduct has been to develop a more vertical perspective of the school. That

vertical look has "been kind of helpful…do I want to move up a grade level?" and brought Beverly to a better understanding of "where her students are going" as they progress through the grade levels. Meeting in the learning community has also shown her "we (members) have some of the same challenges." Talking and listening to first year teachers in the learning community has helped Beverly realize that "they had some of the same concerns that I had when I first started teaching." This realization helped Beverly to identify with the first year teachers.

During her first interview, Beverly spoke about her desire to see the format of the learning community change occasionally. One change that she suggested was having veteran teachers come in and talk about their early years of teaching. She has had this type of conversation with a few veterans in the school and feels "…it's helped me, so it may help other first and second year teachers to be able to see or talk with someone that's been… in the field of education longer."

Team meetings serve a different purpose for Beverly than do learning community meetings. During team meetings, she feels "we look more for assessing right now and planning this week or the next." Beverly mentioned that during the monthly team learning community two hour meetings that "we get more information, have more time to plan further out, share information, and look at data." Beverly feels that "we have so much going on (in team meetings) and we don't really get to talk about things (strategies and problems). That would benefit us as teachers and our students."

Reflection – Hey! I Am OK

Being in so many different classrooms has helped Beverly figure out "there really is more than one way to do things." She has really enjoyed seeing different ways to teach and differentiate instruction for students. Beverly has come to understand that some of the difference

in teaching strategies is because people are taught different ways to teach. She feels that her experiences watching her peers have also helped her "improve her communication and collaboration skills, and find new ways to assess students."

Beverly talked about her experiences with her team the first year that she taught:

> …the only reference person I had my first year teaching were the first grade teachers. We just kind of used to step in and see what they were doing. We called them 'old school teachers' and they had a different way of teaching but they had a lot of information (curriculum).

Beverly found her relationship with the veterans on her team to be a give and take relationship, "They started doing centers and my kids did a little seatwork." Beverly feels that had the peer observation program been in effect during her first year, she "would have seen more, broadened her resources, and gained more ideas about how to differentiate instruction."

Beverly has gained a new perspective about her students and herself from her experiences with peer observation and learning community. Her "students are actually learning something" since she made shifts in instruction which has given her confidence a boost. It has been encouraging to Beverly to watch her students rely on a song or movement that she taught them after viewing a peer or have parents speak of these helps as evident during homework time in the evening.

Going into other teacher's classrooms has also shown Beverly that she is "OK…they are doing the same thing that I do. I must be on the right track." The most affirming part of this experience with peer observations and learning community for Beverly has been realizing that other teachers want to come and observe her. "They say things like 'oooo, I really like how you do this and ask me about certain skills.' OK. They think I am doing something right." It has also been affirming for peers who observe to realize how much academic work happens in first grade. "Oh wow, they're doing a lot in first grade!" is a common exclamation that Beverly hears

from her peers that spend some time with her in first grade. Beverly feels that interacting with peers, observing peers, and being observed by peers builds respect and understandings among the teaching staff.

Beverly spoke at length about the level of support that she has felt at school "from everyone…other teachers, the administrators, the coach, everyone." When talking about this support, the word "ask" kept coming up, "I just ask and I will ask the same question if I still don't understand." Beverly has no problem asking. "I ask to borrow materials, how they taught something, how they collect data, how they do their graph. If I see someone copying something, I'm like ooo that's neat. Can I borrow that?" During the second interview, Beverly and I wondered if the support that she feels is due, in part, to the fact that she is a communicator and does not hesitate to 'ask.' Beverly believes that all of this support from the staff has kept her from feeling "isolated like beginning teachers in other schools." She also realizes that she is "a people person who thinks an extra lot and likes to talk a lot."

Case Summary

Beverly is a visual learner, who has responded strongly and positively to peer observation, as an instructional support. Beverly feels that she actually engages in observation by talking to students and helping out in the classroom. She values seeing instruction instead of reading about it. Her experiences with peer observation have made her much more willing to make shifts or changes in her practice which she attributes to the good match between a visual learner and a visual process.

Talking through challenges and solving problems in the beginning teacher learning community has been valuable to Beverly. She feels she benefits from the peer observations of others because of the level of sharing that is done among the new teachers in the learning

community. The vertical perspective the learning community has offered Beverly has given her a bigger picture context for teaching and learning in her school. Additionally, she has come to understand that even though the six participants are in five different grade levels, they experience some of the same concerns. Beverly feels hearing from a veteran about his or her early teaching experiences in a learning community meeting would be helpful. Like her peers, team meetings serve a different yet necessary purpose for Beverly than do learning community meetings.

This whole experience has taught Beverly that there really is more than one way to do things. That variety of instruction has exposed her to many ways to differentiate instruction. The idea of varied instructional techniques began in Beverly's first year of teaching and was brought home to her through her experiences with peer observation and learning community. Beverly has gained perspective about herself as a teacher and about her students' ability to learn which has given her confidence a boost. Finally, Beverly spoke at length about the level of support and welcome she receives at her school which she believes has negated any feelings of isolation she might have had.

Kari Speakman

Kari is one of four teachers assigned to third grade. Two of the teachers on the third grade team are veterans of third grade and have taught other grade levels as well. One of the veteran teachers spent years teaching second grade and is in her first year of teaching third grade. Kari is a third year teacher who has done all of her professional teaching in the third grade at the research site.

Kari earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from a traditional teacher education program in Kentucky. While an undergraduate, Kari owned a recreational gymnastics company and was employed as the owner and a coach. She holds teaching certification in pre-kindergarten through

fifth grade and an ESOL endorsement in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. She is currently working on her Master's degree in Instruction from a university in Michigan through a weekend cohort program. Kari is 25 years old, married, and the mother of a toddler and a newborn. Kari's husband is a doctoral student in chemistry at a nearby university.

This school year the principal asked Kari to represent the school by sitting on the Instructional Council for the school district. In addition, last year Kari was chosen to help rewrite the third grade English Language Arts curriculum guides for the school district. Kari teaches gymnastics to children in the after school program and coaches a cheerleading squad at one of the local high schools. Kari interviewed with the principal of the new elementary school in this district and will teach third grade there next year.

Peer Observation – Theory Is Just Theory Until You Watch It Work

When speaking of peer observation as an instructional support, Kari used words like "beneficial," "confidence," and "choice." Kari mentioned how unsure beginning teachers are about how to do things. As a new teacher, she felt "nervous that she wasn't doing it right." Kari feels that the peer observation experience is so positive because the teacher participating "wants to improve or notice some things" and because over time the peer observation experience builds confidence. Furthermore, the ability to "choose where you want to go observe" made the peer observation experience powerful and relevant for Kari because choice is motivating for her. "You are going to pay more attention during a peer observation, if you chose to be there."

Kari voiced words of caution about peer observation as well. She mentioned the "big thing is just making sure that both sides know it's (peer observation) for learning…not because a person is not doing something right." Kari felt like more first, second, and third year teachers in other buildings "would feel better going into it knowing that the teacher they're observing knows

it's not because they're doing something wrong." She talked about how this understanding by all participants keeps at bay feelings of superiority and inferiority and focuses the experience on learning. Kari also mentioned the need for some accountability because she could envision that some beginning teachers "would choose some place like a friend's room to go and observe just to get it over with." Her final words of caution were focused on the beginning teacher. Kari felt that it was important for beginning teachers to understand that "this experience is just to get ideas, and they don't have to do things the same way."

Peer observation helped Kari take ideas from the theoretical to the practical. Kari believes that "theory is just theory until you watch it work." Watching someone else also helped her realize that "it (this teaching strategy) really does work." She said that when she watched someone teach she "didn't mind trying it and the shift was easier to make."

Kari spoke at length about the shifts that she has made in her reading groups because of her peer observation experience. Kari realized that "she needed to tighten up in some areas…shift to more explicit reading instruction with a very clear teaching point." The peer observation experience "gave me permission to do that (change) and showed me that in some areas it worked fine." When asked about this tightening up, Kari explained that her reading groups are very structured now. She now has "times for certain things that we do in reading and explicit teaching points." She is more direct with this teaching point and said she begins her lessons like this, "Today we're learning about …" This represents a big shift in her reading instruction from the previous two years which were much more focused on high quality literature and less focused on a predetermined teaching point.

The peer observation experience has given Kari numerous realizations. First, Kari now understands that "there is no one specific way to do things and nobody is doing it exactly the

way they're supposed to be doing it." Specifically, she understands that there is no one perfect way to teach. Second, Kari realizes the she needs to "be OK with the fact that I am not like every other teacher and that none of us are the same." In addition, this peer observation experience has helped her see that she has a certain teaching style which dictates some of what she does. Kari now understands that while she is "a lot less strict with kids than in some classrooms, my room is not out of control." Kari feels the larger lesson from this is that "you don't have to do things a certain way." She specifically mentioned a teacher in the building that has a song for every skill the children are learning. In this classroom, they sing the day away. Kari had to come to a point where she could say to herself that it is fine not to sing throughout the day because that would not work for her. Finally, participating in peer observations has helped Kari understand that "you can't look at a person who's been teaching fifteen years and compare yourself to that person." Expectations vary with experience, and "you need not beat yourself up over it."

Learning Community – I Am Not the Only One That Doesn't Know What Is Going On

Kari found the beginning teacher learning community to be "a little less intimidating" than her team meeting. Specifically, she felt that it was "easier to share in learning community because the teachers have not been teaching for like six, seven, or ten years." She saw the beginning teacher learning community as being a "more reflective kind of thing with lots of sharing, reflecting, and insights." Kari felt that the meeting was structured for the purpose of being reflective and a big picture type of thinking "because it is not specifically about third grade or any grade level." Interestingly, she felt "there just seemed to be a lot more first year teachers than there are other teachers at that meeting" which is not accurate. There were actually more third year teachers in the meeting; however, the third year teachers may not have been as vocal

as the two first year teachers were. In reviewing the learning community audio tapes, it was apparent that the third year teachers helped the first year teachers problem solve during a large portion of each meeting.

Team meetings for Kari are more focused on the "immediate, lessons for the week and reporting on team business." The issues that the team resolves during their meetings seem focused on "keeping the pacing going." In this setting, Kari "feels more like a leader and feels that team meetings would help a first year teacher a lot because they (the team) know what's to be taught."

While Kari felt that her time in the beginning teacher learning community had been good, she thought that it was a probably a better experience for the first and second year teachers. Furthermore, she noted that "first year is a big difference between third and second year" and wondered if by the third year it was too late to begin such an experience. However, she did assert that "it was neat to hear the first year teachers and say I know exactly how you felt because I was the same way." Lastly, Kari offered that first and second year teachers needed a little bit more time together than once a month but not at the expense of team meetings.

Reflection – Why Would You Do Peer Observations Without Reflection?

Kari feels that the way to use what you have seen is through reflection. Her view is you "think about it afterward and think how does it apply to you as a teacher and how can you use what you've seen?" Reflection then leads to change because "You can experiment. You have the freedom to do that." This change can happen in the middle of a lesson or after the fact. In one of Kari's observations, the teacher looked at her students and said, "This isn't working…let's change what we are doing." Whenever the change needs to happen, "you have to change it up based on your kids."

Kari feels that peer observation and reflection give teachers perspective "…a sense of I'm doing what I am supposed to be doing." Kari felt strongly that it was important to "know how you look compared to the whole and to be OK with who you are."

Kari has learned a few things about teaching and learning due to her participation in peer observation and learning community. Her biggest learning is centered on the fact that "you can't just teach it one time and expect them to get it." Furthermore, Kari has learned that you have to "teach it (a skill) over and over and over and over…and even then you've gotta keep going." During Kari's first and second year of teaching, she struggled with this idea. She came into teaching with "the idea that you have one big lesson on one thing and then you just keep on going." Furthermore, she now understands that there are lots of theories and approaches in teaching; however, students "need you to change it up" in order to be successful.

This idea of balanced instruction has involved shifts in practice for Kari which she believes have been beneficial for her students. "Sometime in my second year I realized that I had to change my teaching to suit my kids." As a third year teacher participating in peer observations and learning community, Kari has been given the opportunity to see multiple teaching styles and strategies that have helped her realize it is "OK to use a combination of strategies even the old school way. So, I guess, you have to kind of go outside the box to help your kids even if it means stepping into the box."

Kari now feels more accountable that kids know what they are supposed to know. This renewed focus on student learning has caused her to shift the way she assesses and keeps track of students, and to shift her talk to students about being responsible for their own learning. Kari said she is tougher now. Students have to "prove to me that they know what they know."

Case Summary

Kari believes that choice in peer observation makes the experience more "motivating," "relevant," and "positive." She felt strongly that it was important to explain the peer observation experience to the entire staff so that everyone would understand the purpose is learning not punishment. She also expressed the need for teacher accountability in the peer observation experience. Participating in the peer observation experience has given Kari a way to see theory at work and made it easier for her to shift her practice. Her peer observation experience has also taught Kari that there is no perfect way to teach, she has her own teaching style, and she doesn't have to compare herself to a veteran teacher.

Kari has found the learning community meetings and her team meetings to be helpful. Kari sees the learning community meetings as a place to reflect, share, and gain insights. She feels that her role in these meetings is to listen and identify with the first year teachers. Kari's team meetings are focused on taking the third grade curriculum and creating lessons from it, team business, and curriculum pacing. In this setting, Kari feels more like a leader.

Kari's participation in this research study has shown her that reflection comes prior to changes in practice. She has gained perspective about herself and learned that students need multiple lessons using different strategies in order to master standards. Furthermore, she has learned that she needs to balance her teaching by using a combination of approaches. Kari now feels more accountable than ever for student learning which has given her a sense of urgency in the classroom.

Cross Case Analysis

The purpose of this study led to a set of questions intending to help us understand how beginning teachers view and experience peer observations. Specifically, the researcher wanted

to know what beginning teachers thought about peer observation and learning community and if these supports made a difference for them.

Propositions

The following propositions emerged from the analysis of the data:

- Beginning teachers can be self-directed in their own professional learning.
- Collegial, professional relationships provide instructional support to beginning teachers.
- Beginning teachers can embrace reflective practice.

Proposition 1 - Beginning Teachers Can Be Self-Directed in Their Own Professional Learning

All six participants valued choice within their peer observation experiences. They used words such as pertinent, relevant, and motivating to explain what giving them choice did for their peer observation experience. Stephanie voiced the idea that peer observations based on her needs and her decisions "put me in charge of my own learning." Rheema mentioned "…if you give them (teachers) some choice…they're more invested in it, and I think they get more from it." Furthermore, George felt that "having choices in what you are observing gives you an opportunity to engage in something…that applies to your instruction." The ability to choose was empowering and motivating to the participants.

Elias stated that choice and school culture made peer observations powerful. The researcher has found that the school site has a culture which respects teachers as professionals and trusts them to work in a professional manner. Therefore, providing peer observation experiences which were built on teacher choice was a natural fit. By giving teachers the space to make their own professional learning decisions, the researcher was in effect communicating "I

believe that you can do this, and I believe that you will do this." This speaks to their ability to solve their own dilemma and to have the initiative to follow through.

By positioning choice in the peer observation process, problem posing and problem solving were normalized. Teachers were given permission to voice problems and pose questions of practice around those problems. After listening to audio recordings of the learning community meetings, I was struck by the number of times I heard reference to problem posing and questions of practice by teachers as they shared what they were learning through their peer observation experience. Phrases like "I have been struggling with," and "so my question is" are common in the audio tapes. By empowering teachers to shape their own professional learning we are giving teachers permission to not know. In essence, we are communicating the idea that professional teachers do not always know how to reach every student, teach every concept, or handle all behavior issues and that is okay. In the words of Kari Speakman, "I'm not the only one that doesn't know what is going on all of the time."

Furthermore, this sense of autonomy has shaped these beginning teachers into life-long learners and problem solvers. Elias believes "it's a learning process being a teacher." George said that he now realizes "teaching is a constantly changing profession because it directly deals with the human behavior of learning." All of the teachers were able to articulate what they were learning during both interviews and in all of the learning community sessions.

In addition, throughout all of the transcripts every teacher spoke of change and shifts in practice. The shifts in practice imply learning. After extensive reading of the transcripts and journals, it appears that after each peer observation teachers did make shifts in their practice. This shift rate speaks to the intrinsic motivation of the participants. Ryan and Deci's (2000) findings concerning intrinsic motivation specified that providing choice, acknowledging feelings,

and giving opportunities for self-direction raised intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, Ryan and Deci found that social environments can facilitate motivation by providing ways to foster competence and autonomy. In this study, intrinsic motivation was fostered through respectful peer observations and participation in a learning community. Finally, the opportunity to learn with others that the learning community provided embraced the social constructivist conceptual framework that the study was grounded on. This problem solving, motivated learner mentality is reflected in Stephanie's words about change "OK, that's not working, move on. Let's just change it up."

Proposition 2 - Collegial, Professional Relationships Provide Instructional Support to Beginning Teachers

Participating in peer observations and in a learning community helped the beginning teachers to connect to each other and to the faculty they observed thereby building relationships that offered support which helped the beginning teachers grow professionally. This growth through community further supports the social constructivist theories of Vygotsky and Bruner.

Trust in the community is heard in the audio recordings of the learning community. Participants showed their comfort level with the group by taking risks and making themselves vulnerable. They revealed their fears and concerns by using language such as "I am battling with," "I am struggling with," "My biggest concern right now is," and "I have a student in my classroom, and I don't know how to motivate him." All participants shared concerns, asked questions, shared successes, and sought solutions during these learning community sessions. Their willingness to make themselves vulnerable may stem from their view of the learning community. Many participants spoke of the learning community as a place of commonality, a level playing field.

The beginning teachers were much more candid in the learning community setting than with their teams during their weekly team meetings. Many participants addressed this difference. Team meetings were viewed by most as a time for talking through curriculum issues. Stephanie voiced the role of team meetings as "what we are going to teach, how we are going to teach it, and big ideas about content and teaching." The common view of the purpose of learning community meetings is expressed by Beverly. "We talk more about our challenges and how some of us had similar challenges and we try to give strategies to help fix those…challenges." The beginning teachers felt that both meetings supported them in their work. They just had different purposes. The team meeting is more focused on using the veteran teachers' expertise to plan and pace instruction while the learning community is focused on solving problems. Rheema revealed her understanding of the different purposes of learning community sessions and team meetings. She shared:

> Experienced teachers are not going through the same stuff. So they are not thinking about the kind of stuff. I don't know if you would come up to a veteran teacher and say, hey, I don't know how to teach this student. I mean how lame would you be?

The researcher sits in weekly team meetings with all of the teams. It has been her observation that all of the beginning teachers understand the two distinct purposes of each group and act accordingly.

Stephanie mentioned in one of her interviews that peer observation had "opened up a line of communication" between herself and the peers that she had observed. Going into someone's classroom to observe implies communication. Typically, the beginning teacher and the teacher he or she is to observe have a conversation before and after the observation and sometimes during the observation. In essence, teachers are building connections through professional conversations about practice. Teachers that do not work at the same grade level or on the same

hall are talking about instruction. This level of support has lowered the emotional threat level in the building. It is okay for a peer to ask you questions about how you do things or come and watch you work, and it is flattering to be asked. As Beverly said, "I didn't really think anything (I was doing in my classroom) would really help anyone else."

In this study, participating in peer observations and in a learning community has given beginning teachers numerous opportunities to see and to hear what teaching and learning are like in their school. All of these opportunities to engage in observation and conversation work to negate isolation, give participants a more accurate perspective of their work and a context for instruction within the school, and support the social constructivists views of Vygotsky and Bruner. Beverly stated that participating in peer observations and learning community "let me know that I'm on the right track and that…for the most part we are going in the same direction." Several participants mentioned that their experiences in the study gave their confidence a boost. Beverly captured this by saying, "Hey, I am OK…they're doing the same thing, you know?"

Proposition 3 - Beginning Teachers Can Embrace Reflective Practice

All of the beginning teachers that participated in this study spoke extensively about the thinking that they do about teaching. Kari feels that the way to "use what you have seen is through reflection." George shared that reflection "allows him to take…information and digest it." Through reflection, he has figured out that "…in order to be a teacher, you have to be a learner." Figuring out how what you have seen or heard applies to you, implies change and according to Kari, "you have the freedom to do that (change)."

This level of thinking about practice reflects professionalism. Beginning teachers are thinking, articulating concerns, observing others, and shifting their practices based on the data they collect from other teachers. This type of reflective practice levels the playing field between

veterans and beginning teachers by accelerating the competency process. George believes that teaching is a job that you get better at as you gain experience. He stated, "By observing others…you get more experience." Rheema shared that peer observations have "helped me get up to speed…reach competency quicker. I probably didn't have to fail as many times because I had the opportunity to see someone else." Observing others teach and talking with a group about problems you are having means that you do not have to look inward quite as much for the help that you need. Instead, you can learn within a social context of peers. In this study, opportunity to observe others and to meet with peers supported the importance of the role of language and learning from others – a major theory of social constructivism.

Reflective thinking has helped these beginning teachers shift their focus off of themselves and to students which has made their teaching more responsive to student's needs. Stephanie and Rheema both spoke to the idea that their concerns had shifted over the course of the first semester. When school began they were concerned about where to put stuff and how to get through the day. Rheema admitted "I never thought about multiple teaching strategies at the beginning of the year."

By the close of the first semester, however, the focus had shifted to students. Rheema illustrated that shift when she said, "I want to know multiple ways of doing things so that I can give them (the students) different strategies and different ways to look at it." In addition, George feels that he is learning different "techniques and styles that will enhance my teaching experience which will help students get it sooner." During an interview, Stephanie explained that when she goes on a peer observation, she not only watches the teacher but she is also now watching the students. Stephanie commented:

> When you are not having to be the one worried about the teaching…you're watching the kids who are just like the kids in your classroom. Who are …not

> engaged in it at all, or don't get it, or are just kind of lost. And, when you go back in your class, then you kind of remember that.

Comments like these represent the shift in thinking from self to student that occurred during this study.

This change to a focus on students has also shifted the talk in learning community sessions to topics like differentiation and multiple teaching strategies. George has figured out "there is no set way to teach and trying to teach one paramount way over another…sets you up for failure." Elias believes that his "bag of tools" has increased due to his involvement with peer observation and learning community. Elias' new learning centers around the idea "that it is going to take more than one strategy for anything".

The reflective practice that is focused on meeting the instructional needs of students represents a mature understanding of the nature of teaching. Finding ways to engage all students and to bring the curriculum to the student means that you can set aside your own needs and focus on the needs of others. Beverly expressed it this way, "It makes sense…if you have a student and you give him all of that support…and you give him other resources…then naturally he's going to succeed." Success is a great motivating force for students and for teachers.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The biggest thing that helps me as a teacher is
seeing things in action
(Beverly Ford, Participant).

Introduction

The purpose of this study led to a set of questions intended to help us understand how beginning teachers view and experience peer observations. The researcher wanted to know what beginning teachers thought about peer observation and learning community and if these supports made a difference for them. To achieve this purpose, there was a primary question. Specifically, what can we learn about supporting beginning teachers when they participate in peer observations and a learning community? To be able to answer this primary question, the following secondary questions guided data collection and analysis. These questions include:

1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning communities as instructional supports?
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and a learning community?
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?

Using a constructivist conceptual framework, this qualitative study built on research about beginning teachers, peer observation, and learning communities. Participants included six

beginning teachers in one elementary school in a small city in Georgia. Data collection occurred from August 1, 2008 to February 28, 2009. Data sources included interview transcripts from two interviews with each of the six participants. Participants were asked to keep journals to record their reflections. Monthly learning community meetings were also audio-recorded and then transcribed. The researcher also kept a detailed journal chronicling data from the inception of the study to its conclusion. The field notes and the researcher's journal helped to chronicle the study as it unfolded.

Participants were selected because of their status as first, second, or third year teachers at one elementary school and because of their willingness to participate in this study. Of the participants, two are male, four are female, two participants are African American, and four are White. Additionally, two of the participants are beginning their second careers. Thus, they are older than the typical beginning teacher and bring professional work experience from other fields with them.

Discussion

The following examines the major findings from this study within the larger context of research on induction, professional development, peer observations, and learning communities.

Proposition 1 - Beginning Teachers Can Be Self-Directed in Their Own Professional Learning

Research tells us that new teachers want structured time for professional development and that meeting beginning teachers' professional needs and retention are linked (Boreen et al., 2000; Gilbert, 2005; Guskey, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; Moir, 2003; NCTAF, 2003, 2005). The desire to grow professionally is a desire of new teachers. The participants in this study exemplified this motivation to learn. Each of the participants demonstrated enthusiasm,

commitment, and follow through within their work in the learning community and as observers. As Beverly said, “I’ve really enjoyed watching other people teach.”

The work of Glickman (1985) and Zepeda (2008a) confirms that professional development is optimal when there is understanding about how adults learn and what motivates adults. Research about adult learning informs us that adults want authentic learning that applies to their situation, is flexible in it’s structure, is given in a climate built on trust, allows the learner to participate, and acknowledges the different levels the learner brings to the situation (Glatthorn & Fox, 1996; Glickman; Zepeda). Participants within this study confirmed these principles related to adult learning and responded positively to the constructivist lens that framed the study. This is heard in the plethora of comments related to choice, relevance, and authenticity. As Kari said, “If you have choice, you want to be there and you’re going to pay more attention.” The principals of adult learning paired with a constructivist lens empowered the beginning teachers in this study to be in charge of their own learning which transformed their practices in the classroom.

The learning needs of beginning teachers vary. Allowing choice within some professional development opportunities is a way to address the varied concerns of beginning teachers. Peer observation is a learner driven tool that is tied back to teacher learning (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Zepeda, 2007). When peer observation is embedded in an action research model, teacher learning becomes self-directed because teachers are allowed to examine questions that are important to them which strengthens the link between inquiry and action.

Dietz (2008) speculates that those who do the work of teaching know how to improve that work and are in the position to make changes to practice. In this study, all participants spoke

of choice as related to peer observation. Eias mentioned, "Choice…allows you to get where you need to go because you know what you need to develop." Kari linked motivation to choice. "You are going to pay more attention during a peer observation, if you chose to be there." The findings of this study revealed that choice keeps peer observations relevant and provides the necessary motivation to make shifts in practice.

Action research broadens who asks questions and who generates knowledge because the practice of action research encourages practitioners to select their own focus, analyze their own data, and take action (Glanz, 2005). A foundational premise of action research is that teachers can self-direct their own learning (Guskey, 2000). The findings of this study imply that beginning teachers can self-direct their own learning when working within a peer observation process infused with an action research frame in a learning community setting. Furthermore, this self-directed approach to peer observation in learning community has promoted collaboration at multiple levels among teachers enhancing teacher learning which finds a research base in Glickman's (1985) work. Furthermore, this study suggests that inserting choice into teacher learning raises engagement and motivation. The data collected within the study indicates that all teachers made shifts in teaching within each peer observation cycle. In the words of George, "…seeing someone do it and engage in it, that makes you understand OK, this is doable. So you are more likely to engage after observing somebody." Choice then becomes a key component in developing professional development that fosters teacher engagement, enthusiasm and expertise and lowers teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll et al., 1997; Johnson et al., 2005).

Zepeda's (1999, 2008a) work informs us that when professional development is a daily, ongoing learning experience that is customized with immediate applications, and uses modeling, reflection, and dialogue, it has become job-embedded. Additionally, the focus of job-embedded

professional development is to improve instruction by giving participants multiple opportunities to learn and to apply that learning (Johnson et al., 2005; NCTAF, 2003, 2005). The opportunity to observe peers and to meet together in a learning community was work that was embedded in the culture of the school, defined and focused, grounded in thoughtful face-to-face interactions, taught professional habits of inquiry and analytical thinking, and focused on skill development which makes peer observation and learning community job embedded professional development that is part of an optimal induction system (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Zepeda, 2007).

In this study, participants spoke about their daily ongoing learning. Many participants spoke about their learning centered on change. Participating in peer observations and learning community gave them permission to change things that were not working in their classrooms. In Stephanie's first interview, she talked about getting an e-mail from the teacher she observed letting Stephanie know that she had changed the way they were doing centers and then explaining the changes she had put into place. This type of thinking normalized the idea of change for Stephanie who was now empowered to say to herself, "OK, that's not working, move on. Let's just change it up." Additionally, other participants said that because there was choice involved with peer observation, they were more willing to change. Beverly commented, "I have an option to do this, this way or to do it that way…When I see it implemented, I am more willing to change."

The findings of this study also revealed that participants understood that the problems in their classroom were theirs to solve and that they viewed learning community sessions as support to solve problems. For example, George mentioned that some of his learning focused on "knock(ing) down barriers that students have that impede their learning." He is thinking through

what those barriers are and working with students to remove them. Stephanie spoke in a learning community session about a problem that she was having with a student. She ended her comments with "This is my problem to solve." Beverly spoke about her willingness to ask for help to solve her problems. "I just ask and I will ask the same question if I still don't understand." They utilized the professional development opportunities afforded them and relied on their peers for input when seeking solutions to problems related to teaching and learning.

High quality professional development is individualized, flexible, respects the teacher as a professional, is focused on contextual issues, linked to curriculum, continuous, and job-embedded (American Research Association, 2005; Glatthorn & Fox, 1996, Guskey, 2000; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Zepeda, 2008a). Opportunities for beginning teachers to observe their peers and work within a learning community offer beginning teachers professional development that is high quality and job-embedded and is driven by choice which provides differentiation of learning, is focused on instruction, and respectful of the teaching profession.

For these beginning teachers in this study, opportunities to observe their peers and meet with other beginning teachers in a learning community gave them opportunities to participate in an individualized, flexible yet focused, job-embedded professional development experience. This is seen in their comments related to choice, relevance, and problem solving. For example, because the peer observations were framed with an action research approach, teachers were able to shape their peer observation experiences to best meet their own needs. These peer observation experiences were shared in learning community sessions. Rheema mentioned that one thing she liked about learning community sessions was hearing questions posed by others and what was learned through the peer observation experience. Rheema said, "It is good for me to hear about what other people are dealing with. I might not have even thought about it yet but it is

something I will probably have to deal with." George stressed that "having choice in what you are observing gives you an opportunity to engage in something that's going to be beneficial to you…applies to your instruction." The findings of this study showed that meeting the individual needs of beginning teachers can be accomplished when choice is part of the peer observation process.

The literature tells us that strong instructional leadership focused on teacher growth is essential for the implementation and existence of professional learning that builds capacity and leadership. Professional learning that is self-directed builds teacher leadership and capacity. Principals that understand this promote a school culture that empowers teachers to build their leadership potential (Zepeda, 1999, 2004b, 2008a, 2008b). The work of Williams, Prestage, and Bedward (2001) concluded that school culture shapes peer observation.

In this study, Elias mentioned in his interview, "The school culture here has been receptive. It's definitely made peer observation work." Beverly spoke about school culture when she addressed the level of support that she feels in the building from everyone. Beverly feels the freedom to ask people for help. "If I don't know, then I ask. I ask to borrow materials, how they taught something, how they collect data." Rheema stressed that teachers she observed were "very welcoming, open to ideas, and OK to talk with about my questions." Finally, Stephanie thought that the building wide peer observations that all teachers participated in were "fun." She liked the idea of everyone having the same experience posing a question, observing a peer, and talking through next steps.

The work of Glanz (2005) and Zepeda (2008a) informed us that research oriented teacher leaders work in schools whose culture permits opportunities to discuss, collect data, reflect with peers, and engage in self-study by using data to inform and to guide their work. Furthermore,

these teachers are more likely to make shifts in their teaching in schools where the culture speaks to continuous learning which means the school can adapt to change (Fiszer, 2004; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Zepeda, 1999, 2008a). Finally, school cultures that promote strong teacher leadership are also cultures that induct their teachers by implementing professional development that provides teachers with choice as part of an induction program that is embedded in the school culture.

This study revealed that opportunities for beginning teachers to participate in a self-directed peer observation process helps to shift the culture of the school by removing barriers to observation, raising the status of analysis and reflection to that of professional learning, and by making the school a place where learning is for all people all of the time. Learning for the participants in the study, occurred by putting into place monthly opportunities for them to participate in a peer observation and a learning community meeting focused on problem sharing and problem solving as instructional supports in combination with professional development opportunities that were available building-wide that included veteran and beginning teachers.

Proposition 2 - Collegial, Professional Relationships Provide Instructional Support to Beginning Teachers

Research indicates beginning teachers want regular collaboration and communication with their peers (Knapp et al., 2004; NCTAF, 2005). Furthermore, the work of Joyce and Showers (1995) informs us that when teachers are involved in reflective dialogue the transfer rate of beliefs to practice approaches almost 100%. Working with six beginning teachers who participated in peer observation and learning community has shown that beginning teachers do desire frequent, intentional time to collaborate and that this type of communication does aid teachers in making shifts in their practice. During an interview, George shared, “I feel myself

growing (in learning community meetings)." Furthermore, all of the participants spoke about how the learning community sessions helped them by giving them a place to problem solve. Elias understood that during learning community meetings "…you can kind of get thoughts and perspectives of what they're seeing…" He believed that learning community sessions were times to "come together and problem solve." Finally, George expressed that "it helps having a set time and a set place" for learning community sessions. This structure made the meetings a priority. George articulated that without structure even the most motivated beginning teacher would not be able to build relationships and solve problems with beginning teachers throughout the building. When listening to the learning community audio tapes, it became apparent that each month all of the beginning teachers were making shifts in their practice based on what they had observed, reflected on, and talked about with their peers.

The work of Glatthorn and Fox (1996) confirmed six common issues beginning teachers have which include difficulty with handling classroom discipline, motivating students, understanding individual differences of students, assessing student work, maintaining effective relationships with their students' parents, and organizing the work of the class. In this study, many of these common issues were addressed by giving beginning teachers time to observe their peers and meet in learning community. During many learning community sessions, lengthy problem solving discussions focused on classroom discipline, student motivation, and strategies to address individual differences of students took place.

During the October (2008) learning community session, much of the meeting was devoted to dilemmas posed by Elias and George. Elias had a new student that was missing big understandings in mathematics. Elias did not know what to do with this student because he was so much further behind than the rest of the class. George was struggling with some of his fifth

graders that were missing key understandings in mathematics from earlier years and that prevented them from learning grade level materials. Elias expressed his dilemma first. Different participants asked him clarifying questions and spoke from their own experiences. Then George posed his dilemma linking it to Elias' dilemma. Much discussion ensued about how to support students that are so far behind in mathematics. A few suggestions were offered to Elias and to George before the conversation shifted to a different participant.

Another example of common issues being addressed through learning community sessions occurred in the December (2008) learning community session. Much of the December learning community session was dedicated to an exchange between Stephanie and Elias. Stephanie brought a dilemma with a student to the group, "I can think of several students that I cannot reach." Elias asked her multiple clarifying questions and opened up the conversation to the group. Through his questioning, Elias helped Stephanie think through the why behind what was happening with one particular student. Furthermore, Elias volunteered to come in and observe this student during planning and meet with Stephanie to help her solve this dilemma. Finally, the two first year teachers mentioned in their interviews that their mentor teachers and peer observations had helped them resolve issues about organization while work with their team leader, coach, and or mentor helped them with issues of relationship with students' parents.

The work of Reynolds (1992) found that beginning teachers tend to focus on solving problems without trying to define or understand the problem, and they tend to see difference or diversity of students as problematic. Working with beginning teachers in this study did not support Reynolds' findings. First, the learning community audio recordings are replete with talk about problem solving which focused on defining and understanding the problem. This is exemplified through an exchange between Stephanie and Elias during the November learning

community session. While trying to help Stephanie figure out strategies to address the behavioral issues of a student, Elias asked her, "What kind of behavior are you seeing from him? Do you know why he is doing that (inappropriate behaviors)?" Then he explained what he understands about why students misbehave. Elias then offered to observe the student in Stephanie's room which led to a collaboration experience between the two teachers that was focused completely on understanding and solving the problem.

Second, a large part of each learning community session was focused on helping teachers with multiple strategies to address learning differences. Elias referred to these strategies as his "bag of tools." At no point in the audio recordings do teachers express views which reveal belief that issues of diversity are a problem. Instead, through their actions, they show their belief that reaching all students is the job of the teacher. Stephanie shared this belief when she said, "this is mine to solve." The learning community audio recordings reveal a group of people who are facilitating their own learning by engaging in a deep level of professional talk which has as a byproduct a depth of camaraderie among them that encourages shifts in thinking which impacted their teaching and student learning.

The foundation for effective peer observations is trust which is necessary if peer observations are to become a vehicle for reflective dialogue between the school staff which promotes shifts in teaching practice (Fiszer, 2004; Guskey 2000; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Zepeda, 2007). In addition, research concerning mentors suggests that when mentors become involved in lesson observation and lesson based discussions, the management and teaching skills of beginning teachers is influenced (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Luft & Cox, 2001; Oberski et al., 1999; Rogoff, 1984). This study would indicate that beginning teachers that meet together as a learning community mentor each other. Discussions in learning

community meetings build connections between participants that influence the management and teaching skills of the participants. This is evident in the exchanges between Stephanie and Elias during the October and November learning community sessions that was mentioned above and in an exchange between Rheema and Elias during the September learning community meeting. During that session Rheema expressed frustration with some of the behaviors that children were exhibiting in her classroom. She looked at Elias and asked, "Why are they doing what they are doing?" He asked numerous clarifying questions and helped her gain some insight into her students' misbehaviors.

The work of Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2000) and Johnson et al., (2005) verifies that discussions of effective classroom practices and curriculum issues become a way of doing school when teachers are provided opportunities to observe their peers. This intersection of peer observation and collaboration refines planning and interpersonal skills, and improves teaching practices and student achievement. The implementation of a peer observation process that is grounded in action research and allows beginning teachers to meet in learning community supports the findings related to collaboration and peer observation. In this study, teachers were allowed to direct their learning, reflect on their learning, and collaborate with others, which caused shifts in teaching to take place that reflected layers of understanding. Stephanie spoke to this when she said, "Peer observation put me in charge of my learning. It (peer observation) has opened up a line of communication with peers." Kari spoke to the importance of peer observation when she said she realized that "she needed to tighten up in some areas…to shift to more explicit reading instruction with a very clear teaching point" because of her participation in peer observations that were framed by action research. Furthermore, Kari felt that time to reflect on her own and in the learning community were ways to use the teaching strategies that she

observed. Kari stated, “think about it afterward and think how does it apply to you as a teacher and how can you use what you’ve seen?”

Continual professional development through a learning community is a powerful way to integrate beginning teachers into the work of the school and give them guidance for their daily work (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Johnson et al., 2005). Furthermore, learning communities are a powerful, job-embedded learning opportunity that promote collegiality and combat isolation (Johnson et al.,; NCTAF, 2003, 2005). Many of the beginning teachers that participated in this study spoke to the powerful experience that learning communities were to them. Rheema said, “(learning communities)…keep you feeling like, hey, you know, I’m doing a good job with this and not beating yourself up too much.” In addition, all participants credited their work in peer observations and learning community with negating some or all of the isolation that new teachers typically feel. Comments like Beverly’s, “I really felt welcome here and still do. I’ve never felt isolated.” were common.

Learning communities connect faculties by building relationships that foster teacher development, raise capacity, and provide instructional support (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Dietz, 2008; Grossman et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; Koellner-Clark & Borko, 2004; NCTAF, 2005; Zepeda, 1999, 2008a, 2008b). The audio recordings of learning community sessions are filled with talk that exemplifies collegial relationships such as, “How did shifting your reading groups go?” “Thanks for helping me with that.” and “I learned...” In addition, prior to the beginning of each learning community session, participants would come into the room, enjoy a snack, and talk about what was going on in their personal lives. All of this conversation both personal and professional reflects how the members of this group connected.

Because the group connected personally and professionally, they could talk about issues of practice that were important to them which often made them vulnerable. The learning community audio recordings are full of talk that shows risk such as "I am struggling with," "I am battling with," and "I don't know how to reach this student." These admissions were followed by clarifying questions from their peers which often led to strategies for that beginning teacher to implement. Over time participants' questions shifted from dilemmas about how to execute pieces of the day such as "I don't know how to implement centers." to issues that were student focused such as "I don't know how to reach this student." The two teachers that showed this shift the most dramatically were the two first year teachers.

Job-embedded professional learning is full of opportunities to reflect and to collaborate with others (Glickman 1985; Zepeda 2006). In addition, ongoing, systemic professional development is continuous, job-embedded, bundles multiple learning opportunities that work in complimentary ways, and provides opportunities for dialogue that shifts practice (Guskey, 2000; Guskey & Huberman, 1999; Zepeda, 2008a). While working with beginning teachers that were participating in peer observation and learning community, the researcher began to notice all of the job-embedded opportunities for dialogue that peer observation and learning community provide. Beginning teachers were offered opportunities to talk with others about their question of practice before, during, and after peer observations and during learning community sessions. Stephanie spoke about communicating with other teachers through e-mail before and after the observations. It was through such an exchange that the idea of change opened up for Stephanie. A week after Stephanie's first peer observation, she got an e-mail from the teacher she observed letting Stephanie know that she had changed the way she was doing centers and then explaining the change. That experience helped Stephanie understand that it is "OK to say that's not

working, move on. Let's just change it up." George and Stephanie both made comments in their interviews about how participating in peer observations and in the learning community had opened up lines of communication with their peers and given them a context for what teaching and learning look like at this school. Stephanie further commented that she feels more connected to the school and to her peers because she has been able to spend so much time observing and talking with other teachers about their practice.

Finally, because of this study, the researcher began to think more about the purpose of the professional development opportunities available at the research site and how these opportunities worked together in an intentional and systematic way. Participants all spoke about their team meetings being valuable because it was their opportunity to talk with veteran teachers about curriculum, lesson planning and pacing. Rheema noted this about team meetings, "I love my team. They always give me information when I ask." Beverly mentioned TLC (Team Learning Community meetings) in one of her interviews. She felt that "in TLC we get more information, have more time to plan farther out, and share information." Rheema mentioned that she observed her mentor as one of her peer observations. This work with her mentor helped Rheema reset her expectations about student behavior.

In addition, the entire staff is involved in book clubs. These clubs mix certified and noncertified personnel into groups which are formed around choice of topic. The clubs meet during the first part of the monthly staff meetings which has transformed staff meetings into times of learning. All of these learning experiences afforded multiple opportunities for peers to come together and build collegial, professional relationships which provided instructional support to beginning teachers. These opportunities to work in community share common byproducts with a good induction program. Specifically, beginning teachers are socialized into

learning by immersing them in a life-long culture of learning which builds their leadership capacity, and raises the quality of their teaching.

Proposition 3 - Beginning Teachers Can Embrace Reflective Practice

The literature surrounding this study informs us that teachers learn their jobs in stages with the average teacher taking three to four years to become fully competent (Hebert & Worthy, 2001). Four different career stage models were presented in Table 2.1 in the literature review (Fuller, 1969; Gordon, 2004; Huberman, 1989; Kagan, 1992). In the description column, the first stage of each career model using words like 'coping', 'survival', and 'explicit rules;'however, after participating in peer observations and learning community the beginning teachers in this study were focused on multiple strategies to improve student achievement, problem understanding and problem solving, and instructional improvement. These types of descriptors are not used to describe the beginning stages of teaching in any of the career stage models. Instead, descriptors focused on multiple strategies, student achievement, problem solving, and teacher growth appear in later career stages.

For example, in August (2008), both of the first year teachers were focused on tasks related to organization and survival. Rheema mentioned, "When I started all this, I never thought about multiple teaching strategies." Stephanie illustrated the shift in focus that she had late in the November learning community meeting by saying, "...at the beginning of the year it was how the classroom was going to work…Now, it is about multiple strategies and how to reach students." These first year teachers shifted their focus from self to student within the first semester of full-time teaching. Maybe George's theory of teaching and peer observation holds true. He feels that teaching is a job that only gets better with experience. "By observing others engage in that you get more experience…". Perhaps the combination of job-embedded

professional development opportunities like peer observations with an action research frame, learning community sessions devoted to beginning teachers, team meetings that focus on instruction and curriculum issues, TLC that gives teams time to plan further out and look at big picture concerns, and book clubs that give teachers opportunities to read about topics of interest work together to speed up competence. Additionally, a healthy school culture that respects teachers and expects them to be learners while holding them accountable for personal growth must be factored in as well.

To coach teachers to reflect is to empower the people that are the closest to students who Dietz (2008) proposes are in the best position to make changes to teaching practice. In addition, teachers that are given the chance to take part in a peer observation experience which allows self-direction , reflection, and collaboration with peers have the opportunity to work within an effective professional development model that impacts teachers and students (Martin & Double, 1998). This type of learning experience raises the self-esteem of participants which gives them confidence in their professional abilities helping teachers identify their strengths and areas of growth (Fiszer, 2004; Guskey, 2000; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004). All of the participants in this research study experienced this boost in their confidence as well as a more accurate perception of their abilities. As Elias said, "you get perspective of where you are and maybe where you need to be." Kari felt strongly that peer observation based on choice and learning community give teachers perspective about themselves "…a sense of I'm doing what I am supposed to be doing." Kari believes that this experience has helped her understand herself as a teacher to "know how you look compared to the whole and to be OK with who you are." Beverly took this idea one step further by explaining that interacting with peers, observing peers, and being observed by peers builds respect and understandings among the entire teaching staff.

One of the aims of peer observation as outlined by the work of Martin and Double (1998) is to help teachers understand and develop personal approaches to instruction. Numerous times participants spoke about how powerful it was to see someone teach and how this seeing combined with reflection enabled them to make shifts in practice. Beverly disclosed "(seeing) helps me try different things that I probably…wouldn't have tried.". This type of statement and others like it reveal the connection that beginning teachers have made between instructional improvement and student achievement.

None of the studies in the review of literature combined peer observations with an action research frame with learning community sessions devoted to beginning teachers. The findings of this study revealed that the action research slant of these peer observations further promoted student achievement by making the entire process more student focused. The primary focus of action research efforts is to bring about educational change that enhances the lives of students and professionals (Mills, 2000; Noffke & Stevenson, 1995). In this study, it appears that teachers asking questions related to their own practice coupled with time to reflect and collaborate did positively impact practitioner and student achievement. Beverly spoke to this when she said, "I think their learning is improving."

The work of Glickman (1985) and Zepeda (2006) informs us that job-embedded professional development is full of opportunities to reflect and collaborate. Action research as defined by Glanz (2005) and Zepeda (2008a) includes time to reflect on practice. In addition, a learning community provides job embedded opportunities to enhance reflection (Zepeda, 1999, 2008a). Statements by participants such as "I reflect all the time." and "I think about things all the time." indicate that time spent in peer observations and learning community fosters

reflection. In addition, participants' comments about the focus of learning community as a place to solve problems together implies collaboration.

Furthermore, excellent induction systems recognize that new teachers can be taught the professional habits of inquiry and analytical thinking or reflection (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Zepeda, 2007). Engaging in reflective activities is a way to teach beginning teachers the art of reflective practice while helping them understand their students and instruction (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1999; Adams & Krockover, 1991; Crawford, 1999). All of the research in the review of literature focused on inquiry and reflection backs the findings of this study. The beginning teachers in this study, embraced reflective practice.

Implications

To suggest that beginning teachers need instructional support is not new; however, this study sought to learn about supporting beginning teachers by giving them an opportunity to participate in a peer observation experience in an action research frame and in a learning community. Based on the findings from the research, the researcher brings forward these implications.

Peer observation and learning communities are strong instructional supports for beginning teachers but they may not be enough by themselves to fully support beginning teachers. Support structures for beginning teachers must be multi-dimensional, well articulated, and focused. Beginning teachers need time to work one-on-one with a veteran, time with other beginning teachers, and time with veteran teachers. At the research site, beginning teachers had a mentor that worked one-on-one with them in a well articulated, structured relationship. The participants had opportunity to participate in peer observations and a learning community of beginning teachers. Both of these experiences were structured and clearly communicated. In

addition, all teachers met weekly with their teams during the day to plan instruction and talk through matters of curriculum and twice monthly after school with the extended team to collaborate and communicate. Furthermore, teams met monthly for Team Learning Community (TLC) for a two hour period with the instructional coach to plan instruction on a larger scale and to further their learning. Finally, all staff were involved in a book club that was focused on a topic of their choice.

Peer observations and learning community are strong instructional supports when the culture and climate of the school honors practitioner research that is teacher directed. Kari mentioned that in some schools the peer observation experience would not be successful because going to watch a peer was an admission of failure. The principal at the research site modeled a leadership style that valued teachers and honored teacher learning. The principal encouraged teachers to think and to try new things, respected teachers as professionals, cared about her staff both professionally and personally, and held high expectations for teachers. Because she had been the principal of this school for ten years, she has had time to build leadership within her staff that "lives" her values. Additionally, she has also tuned into staff morale and has worked to keep morale high. This principal is comfortable with empowering teachers to make choices that guide their own professional learning. Working in a school for a leader that trusts and respects teachers and their work makes taking professional risks palatable for the teaching staff.

Peer observations and learning communities are strong instructional supports when the right amount and type of accountability is present. Each month the learning community met so that the members could share their question of practice, what they learned from their peer observation, and what their next steps were. This accountability piece put the right amount of gentle pressure on participants to follow through with their observations without making the

process feel mandated or pushed down. The researcher was careful to mandate little other than the expectation that each participant would observe a peer each month, work within the action research model, and attend learning community meetings. The researcher intentionally did not mandate forms that were to be used to observe peers, charts to fill out describing who participant's observed nor did she question people about whether they had done their observation that month, or go to observations with participants. Instead, the learning community acted as a palatable accountability piece for the community of beginning teachers by applying positive peer pressure on the group to live up to the expectations of the study.

Peer observations and learning communities provide avenues for teachers to learn about themselves professionally. All of the participants spoke about the perspective they had gained by participating in peer observations and learning community. That perspective was multi-faceted. First, participants realized that they were doing a good job in their own classrooms. Rheema and Beverly both said in their interviews that after observing their first peer, they realized they were doing similar things in their own classrooms so they must be OK. Second, several participants mentioned that observing across the building gave them a better perspective about what teaching looked like across the grade levels in the school as a whole. Stephanie mentioned that this vertical look gave her a better idea of where she fit into the big picture of teaching at the school. Several participants mentioned that observing building wide opened up and encouraged communication across the entire faculty. Finally, observing other teachers gave participants opportunities to observe other teacher's students. Rheema and Stephanie believed that this helped them better understand their own students. Rheema talked about being more confident to gauge expectations for her students because of peer observation. Stephanie mentioned that watching other teachers work with unmotivated or misbehaving students gave her

ideas about how to handle those same types of students in her own classroom. Beverly said that watching other teachers handle disengaged students affirmed her own practice because those teachers use the same types of strategies that Beverly uses.

Peer observations and learning communities help participants develop new ideas about teaching and learning. All of the participants talked about the value of gaining multiple strategies to teach students because through this process of peer observation and meeting in a learning community they all began to understand that it is their job to bring the learning to the student. Many of the participants talked about differentiating the curriculum for a student or devising behavior plans to help a student. Kari talked about her new understanding related to the idea that you have to teach students things over and over again. One big lesson won't do. George talked about working with students to remove barriers to learning.

In addition, all participants reported content driven learning as well. Kari tightened up the structure she used in her reading groups. Rheema and Stephanie learned how to run literacy centers while teaching guided reading. George observed mathematics classes in the grades below him to better understand how to approach mathematical learning in his grade level. Elias learned to use Touch Math with the new student that came in that was so far behind while Beverly learned songs that teach content from her observations. As Elias said, "You can always learn something from somebody."

How peer observations and learning communities affect students is unclear because all of the data that the researcher has is anecdotal; however, all participants felt strongly that students were positively affected. Beverly spoke about watching her students implement strategies while doing independent work that she taught them that came from a peer observation. Elias mentioned that his students' writing had gotten a lot better because he now knew to do some

things differently. Because of her experience with peer observation and learning community Kari felt that she was holding her students to a higher accountability level for their own learning and they were meeting that expectation. Rheema and Stephanie felt that just watching their students during centers was evidence that peer observations and learning community had positively impacted their students. As Stephanie explained, "Everything I know to do I got from my peer observations."

Finally, several of the participants talked about how the opportunity to observe their peers gave them some teaching strategies that worked to try with their own students. In other words, they did not have to fail as much by figuring this out on their own through trial and error. Perhaps students were positively affected by this lessening of failure on the teacher's part. Maybe students did as well as they did because their teacher brought tested strategies in the classroom instead of untested strategies.

The final implication is that there is more to be learned from a study that is broader in scope. This qualitative study was limited to six elementary school participants in one school in northeast Georgia. This study could serve as a baseline for future research that includes a larger number of participants across elementary, middle, and high school in several school systems throughout the state. By expanding this study to multiple school settings across kindergarten through twelfth grade the perspectives of many more teachers could be examined noting similarities between teachers of elementary students, middle school students, and high school students.

Another feature that could be added to this study is the perspective of principals and instructional coaches. Throughout this study, the researcher kept the principal apprised of the learning that was happening within the community of beginning teachers; however, the

researcher did not interview the principal to gain her perspectives related to peer observation and learning community. Numerous instructional coaches in the school district have asked the researcher about the study and what was being learned about peer observations and learning community as instructional supports for beginning teachers. Typically, these coaches would ask interesting questions and make insightful comments. It would deepen the findings of a similar study on a larger scale to include the perceptions of the instructional coaches that were facilitating the learning communities and peer observations for the beginning teachers in their schools.

Recommendations from this Study

Considering the findings and implications of this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations for principals.

1. Begin Peer Observations in Your School

Action research framed peer observations and learning communities provide instructional support for beginning teachers; however, few teachers ever participate in a peer observation. At the minimum begin the process of peer observation in small nonthreatening ways in your school for the entire staff. Involving teacher leaders in this process will bring cooperation and clout to this new experience. Scheduling the observations and providing time to debrief them will bring accountability to the process ensuring that peer observations happen and reflection follows. If question posing is foreign to the staff, it might be appropriate to frame the observation with a guiding question that is the same for everyone. Perhaps this question should reflect building instructional priorities which are tightly focused and observable. For example, a guiding question could focus on what student engagement looks like in that classroom or on teacher questioning.

2. Ensure That the Professional Development in Your School is Multi-dimensional

Action research framed peer observations and learning communities provide optimal instructional support for beginning teachers when they are a part of a multilayered approach to job-embedded professional learning. Step back and look at the professional development opportunities that your district and school offers. Is the purpose of each piece clear and well articulated? Are there opportunities for teams to plan collaboratively? Do beginning teachers and veteran teachers meet together for some of their learning? Is leadership being built within the teaching corps? Do beginning teachers have opportunities to work with a mentor to improve instruction? Do beginning teachers have opportunities to work with other beginning teachers? The researcher has found that when professional learning is viewed as multi-layered with each layer serving a distinct purpose and focused on change, the learning of the entire faculty is enhanced.

3. Examine the Culture and Climate of Your School

This study suggests that culture and climate in the work environment impact teaching and learning. Examine your leadership practices noting those that promote trust, respect, communication, and build relationships and those practices that do not. How can you strengthen the culture and climate of your school by intentionally enhancing some of your practices and discarding others? What kind of professional learning do you need in order to improve the culture and climate of your school to one that will support a structured peer observation and learning community process?

4. Work With Someone to Implement Multi-layered Professional Development in Your School

Finally, if possible, work with an instructional coach, a professional development coordinator, and or teacher leaders to implement this multi-layered professional development

plan that includes peer observations and learning community sessions for beginning teachers. Dispatch the instructional coach to intentionally build relationships and rapport with these beginning teachers as individuals and to work to bring the group together as a community of learners. The researcher in this study intentionally framed her approach through the conceptual lens of constructivism and with what is known about adult learning which fit neatly into the existing culture and climate of the school. Her focus for the two years prior to the study was to build collegial relationships among staff and to raise the status of teacher as learner in the school. She maintained the momentum of the study by incorporating it into her daily work and into the daily work of the school.

Concluding Thoughts

What have I learned about supporting beginning teachers when they participate in peer observations and learning community? First, I would say that I never fully appreciated the power of linking inquiry with action in the classroom. Giving a beginning teacher time and permission to pose a question of practice, observe a more knowing other, and then make changes in their practice is powerful. Throughout the seven months of this study, I have seen teachers make shifts in practice that were big and small but always initiated by themselves and always at the end of every single peer observation cycle. As an instructional coach for the last seven years, I have led a lot of professional development at the district and school levels. I have never experienced a type of professional learning that always ends with a shift in practice until now.

Second, I would say that it is better for students if their teachers are in schools that allow teachers freedom to direct some of their own professional learning, to work collegially, and to offer time to reflect on their practice. In this study, the reaction to choice within the peer observation process was overwhelmingly positive and acted as a motivating force for these six

beginning teachers. They wanted data to help sort out their question of practice and, because the question was of their own making, they wanted to make shifts in their practice. In addition, working with others in a professional manner focused on instructional problem solving was well received as evidenced by the fact that attendance at learning community meetings was very good. Finally, reflective talk in interviews, journals, and learning community meetings was awe-inspiring. Because the peer observation had such a relevant focus, these six participants were thinking about their practice all the time and talking about their learning with me and with the community of learners.

Third, I have witnessed how pulling beginning teachers out of their classrooms and pushing them into the classroom of a peer to observe paired with sitting together monthly to eat a snack and talk about questions of practice combats the isolation that most teachers feel. The combination of observing others and sitting in a learning community gave teachers instructional support and perspective. All six participants walked away from this study with multiple teaching strategies, more content knowledge, and feeling comfortable with their own teaching style and better able to gauge the job that they are doing everyday in a classroom all by themselves.

REFERENCES

Adams, P., & Krockover, G. (1999). Stimulating constructivist teaching styles through use of an observation rubric. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 36*(8), 955-971.

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2004). Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers. Washington, DC. Author

American Research Association (2005). Teaching teachers: Professional development to improve student achievement. *Research Points: Essential Information for Educational Policy, 3*(1), 1-4. Author

Anderson, G., Herr, K., & Nihlen, A. (2007). *An educator's guide to practitioner action research second edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Anderson, N., Barksdate, M., & Hite, C. (2005). Preservice teacher's observations of cooperating teachers and peers while participating in an early field experience. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 32*(4), 97-117.

Andrews, B., & Quinn, R. (2005). The effects of mentoring on first-year teachers' perceptions of support received. *The Clearing House, 78*(3), 110-116.

Arnau, L., Kahrs, J., & Kruskamp, B. (2004). Peer coaching: Veteran high school teachers take the lead on learning. *National Association of Secondary Principals Bulletin*, 88(26), 26-41.

Baker, D., & Smith, T. (1997). Trend 2: Teacher turnover and teacher quality: Refocusing the issue. *Teachers College Record, 99*(1), 29-35.

Bell, M. (2001). Supported reflective practice: a programme of peer observation and feedback for academic teaching development. *International Journal for Academic Development, 6*(1), 29-39.

Billingsley, B. (2004). Special education teacher retention and attrition: A critical analysis of the research literature. *Journal of Special Education, 38*(1), 39-55.

Bogden, R., & Biklen, S. (1982). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods.* Boston, MA; Allyn and Bacon.

Boog, B., Coenen, H., & Keune, L. (Eds.). (2001). *Action research: Empowerment and reflection.* Dutch University Press.

Boreen, J., Johnson, M.K., Niday, D., & Potts, J. (2000). *Mentoring beginning teachers: Guiding, reflecting, coaching.* York, ME: Stenhouse.

Bright, G., & Vacc, N. (1996, April). Peer observation and feedback as a component of self-study of teaching by instructors of elementary mathematics methods. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.

Broughman, S. P., & Rollefson, M. R. (2000). Teacher supply in the United States: Sources of newly hired teachers in public and private schools, 1987-88 to 1993-94. statistical analysis report. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Brown, J., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher, 18*(1), 32-34.

Bruner, J. (1966). *On knowing essays for the left hand.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (1977). *The process of education.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2006). Stayers, leavers, lovers, and dreamers: Why people teach and why they stay. New York, NY: Bank Street College of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED491764).

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1990). Research on teaching and teacher research: The issues that divide. *Educational Researcher, 19*(2), 2-11.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in community. *Review of Research in Education,* 24, 249-305.

Constructivist theory – J. Bruner (n.d.). Retrieved May 2009, from http://tip.psychology.org/bruner.html. Author.

Crawford, B. (1999). Is it realistic to expect a preservice teacher to create an inquiry-based classroom? *Journal of Science Teacher Education, 10*(3), 175-194.

Crotty, M. (2003). *The foundations of social research meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Curry, M. (2008). Critical friends groups: The possibilities and limitations embedded in teacher professional communities aimed at instructional improvement and school reform. *Teachers College Record, 110*(4), 733-774.

Dalellew, I., & Martinez, Y. (1988). Andragogy and development: A search for the meaning of staff development. *Journal of Staff Development, 9*(3), 28-31.

Dana, N., & Yendol-Silva, D. (2003). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Solving the dilemmas of teacher supply, demand, and standards: How we can insure a competent, caring, and qualified teacher in every classroom. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2003). Keeping good teachers: Why it matters, what leaders can do. *Educational Leadership, 60*(8), 6-13.

deMarrais, K., & Lapan, S. (Eds.). (2004). *Foundations for research Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dewey, J. (1930). *Construction and criticism.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think a restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process.* New York: D.C. Heath and Company.

Dewey, J. (1939). *Intelligence in the modern world John Dewey's philosophy.* New York: The Modern Library.

Dewey, J. (2004). *Democracy and education.* Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

Dietz, M (2008). *Journals as frameworks for professional learning communities.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Dockerell, W., & Hamilton, D. (Eds.). (1980). *Rethinking Educational Research.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Eick, C. (2002). Job sharing their first year: A narrative of two partnered teachers' induction into middle school science teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 18(7), 887-904.

Eisner, E. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice.* Ney York, NY: Macmillan.

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2003). What new teachers need to learn. *Educational Leadership,* 60(8), 25.

Firestone, W. (1993). Alternative arguments for generalizing from data as applied to qualitative research. *Educational Researcher, 22*(4), 16-23.

Fiszer, E. (2004). *How teachers learn best: An ongoing professional development model.* Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.

Fisk, C., Prowda, P., & Beaudin, B. (2001, April). Are we keeping the best and brightest? A study of beginning teacher attrition in Connecticut. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Researchers Association, Seattle, WA.

Fullan, M. (1996). Turning systemic thinking on its head. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77*(6), 420-423.

Fuller, E. (2003). Beginning teacher retention rates for TxBESS and Non-TxBESS teachers. Unpublished manuscript, State Board for Educator Certification at Austin, TX.

Fuller, F. (1969). Concerns of teachers: a developmental conceptualization. Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, University of Texas at Austin.

Gemmell, J. (2003). Building a professional learning community in preservice teacher education: Peer coaching and video analysis. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Georgia Department of Education (2004). *Georgia teacher evaluation program evaluation manual.* Georgia Department of Education. Author.

Gilbert, L. (2005). What helps beginning teachers? *Educational Leadership, 62*(8), 36.

Giroux, H. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals toward a critical pedagogy of learning.* Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers.

Glanz, J. (2005). Action research as instructional supervision: Suggestions for principals. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin. 89*(643), 17-27.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Glatthorn, A. (1987). Cooperative professional development: Peer-centered options for teacher growth. *Educational Leadership, 45*(3), 31-35.

Glatthorn, A. (1992). Teachers as agents of change: A new look at school improvement. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Glatthorn, A., & Fox, L. (1996). *Quality teaching through professional development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Glickman, C. (1981). *Developmental supervision: Alternative practices for helping teachers improve instruction.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Glickman, C. (1985). *Supervision of instruction: A developmental approach.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Gordon, S. (2004). *Professional development for school improvement.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Greenwood, D., & Levin, M. (1998). *Introduction to action research: Social research for social change.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Grissmer, D., & Kirby, S. N. (1997). Teacher turnover and teacher quality. *Teachers College Record, 99*(1), 45.

Grossman, P., Thompson, C., & Valencia, S. (2001). District policy and beginning teachers: Where the twain shall meet. Albany, New York: National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, & The University of Washington: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S. (2000). What makes teacher community different from a gathering of teachers? An occasional paper. Albany, New York: National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, & The University of Washington: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1981). *Effective evaluation Improving the usefulness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Guskey, T. (2000). *Evaluating professional development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Guskey, T., & Huberman, M. (Eds.). (1995). *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hall, J., Johnson, B., & Bowman, A. (1995). Teacher socialization: A spiral process. *Teacher Educator,* 30(4), 25-36.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principals in practice (2nd ed.).* London: Routledge.

Hammersley-Fletcher, L., & Orsmond, P. (2004). Evaluating our peers: Is peer observation a meaningful process? *Studies in Higher Education, 29*(4), 489-503.

Hammersley-Fletcher, L., & Orsmond, P. (2005). Reflecting on reflective practices within peer observation. *Studies in Higher Education, 30*(2), 213-224.

Hanushek, E. A., & Pace, R. R. (1995). Who chooses to teach (and why)?. *Economics of Education Review, 14*(2), 101.

Hebert, E., & Worthy, T. (2001). Does the first year of teaching have to be a bad one? A case study of success. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*(8), 897-911.

Holloway, J. (2001). The benefits of mentoring. *Educational Leadership, 58*(8), 85-86.

Huang, H. (2002). Toward constructivism for adult learners in online learning environments. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 33(1), 27-37.*

Huberman, M. (1989). The professional life cycle of teachers. *Teachers College Record,* 91(1), 31-37.

Ingersoll, R. (1995). Teacher supply, teacher qualifications, and teacher turnover: 1990-91. schools and staffing survey. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences.

Ingersoll, R. (1997). Teacher turnover and teacher quality: The recurring myth of teacher shortages. *Teachers College Record, 99*(1), 41.

Ingersoll, R. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Education Research Journal, 38*(3), 499-534.

Ingersoll, R. (2003). Is there really a teacher shortage? A research report. University of Washington: Seattle, WA. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Ingersoll, R., Bobbitt, S., & Quinn, P. (1997). Teacher professionalization and teacher commitment: A multilevel analysis. statistical analysis report. Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences.

Joftus, S., & Maddox-Dolan, B (2002). New-teacher excellence: Retaining our best. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Johnson, S. (2001). The aging of America's teachers. *Harvard University Gazette.* Retrieved November 5, 2008 from http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2001/10.04/13-njteachers.html.

Johnson, S., Berg, J., & Donaldson, M. (2005). Who stays in teaching and why: A review of the literature on teacher retention. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University.

Johnson, S., & Birkeland, S. (2003). The schools that teachers choose. *Educational Leadership,* 60(8), 20.

Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1981). Transfer of training: The contribution of coaching. *Boston University Journal of Education, 163*(2), 163-172.

Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1995). *Student achievement through staff development (2nd Ed.).* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Kagan, D. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Education Research, 62*(2), 129-169.

Kardos, S. (2004). Supporting and sustaining new teachers in schools: The importance of professional culture and mentoring. Harvard University: Cambridge, MA.

Kennedy, M. (1979). Generalizing from single case studies. *Evaluation Quarterly, 3,* 661-679.

Kennedy, M. (1991). An agenda for research on teaching. National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, Michigan State University, East Lansing: MI.

Kim, B. (2001). Social constructivism in M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. Retrieved May 2009, from http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/.

Kincheloe, J. (1991). *Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment.* Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.

Kise, J. (2006). *Differentiated coaching: A framework for helping teachers change.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Knapp, M., Elfers, A., Plecki, M., Loeb, H., Boatright, B., Cabot, N., et al. (2004). Preparing for reform, supporting teachers' work: Surveys of Washington state teachers, 2003-04 school year. The University of Washington: Seattle, WA. Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession.

Koellner-Clark, K., & Borko, H. (2004). Establishing a professional learning community among middle school mathematics teachers. Proceedings of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education, 2(28), 223-230.

Kurtts, S., & Levin, B. (2000). Using peer coaching with preservice teachers to develop reflective practice and collegial support. *Teaching Education, 11*(3), 297-310.

Lam, S. (2001). Educator's opinions on classroom observation as a practice of staff development and appraisal. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 17(2), 161-173.

LeCompte, M., & Preissle, J., with Tesch, R. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research (2nd ed.).* Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Learning and teaching: Piaget's developmental theory (2005). Retrieved May 2009, from http://en.wikibooks.org. Atherton.

Lev Vygotsky (n.d.). Retrieved May 2009, from http://starsfold.khi.is/solrunb/vygotsky.htm. Author.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Loeb, H., Elfers, A., Knapp, M., & Plecki, M. (2004). Preparation and support for teaching: A survey of working conditions for teachers. University of Washington: Seattle, WA. Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession.

Loeb, S., & Reininger, M. (2004). Public policy and teacher labor markets what we know and why it matters. The Education Policy Center, Michigan State University.

Luft, J., & Cox, W. (2001). Investing in our future: A survey of support offered to beginning secondary science and math teachers. *Science Educator, 10*(1), 1-9.

Martin, G., & Double, J. (1998). Developing higher education teaching skills through peer observation and collaborative reflection. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 35*(2), 161-170.

Maxwell, J. (2005). *Qualitative research design An interactive approach (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice Examples for discussion and analysis.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mills, G. (2000). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, Prentice-Hall.

Moir, E. (2003). Launching the next generation of teachers through quality induction. New York, NY: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED479767).

Mulholland, J., & Wallace, J. (2001). Teacher induction and elementary science teaching: enhancing self-efficacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*(2), 243-261.

National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). Retrieved February 29, 2008 and April 4, 2009, from http://nces.ed.gov. Author.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2002). Unraveling the teacher shortage problem: Teacher retention is key. Washington, DC: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Author.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2003). No dream denied: A pledge to America's children. Washington, DC: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Author.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2005). Induction into learning communities. Washington, DC: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Author.

National Development Plan (2002). Retrieved May 2009, from https://www.cs.tcd.ie/crite/lpr/teachinig/constructivism.html. Author.

National Education Association (2003). Status of the American public school teacher 2000-2001. Washington, DC: National Education Association. Author.

Noffke, S., & Stevenson, R. (Eds.). (1995). *Educational action research: Becoming practically critical.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Oberski, I., Ford, K., Higgins, S., & Fisher, P. (1999). The importance of relationships in teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 25*(2), 135-150.

Odell, S., & Ferraro, D. (1992). Teacher mentoring and teacher retention. *Journal of Teacher Education,* 43(3), 200-204.

Parsons, R., & Brown, K. (2002). *Teacher as reflective practitioner and action researcher.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods. (2nd ed.).* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ragin, C., & Becker, H. (Eds.). (1992). *What is a case? Exploring the foundations of social inquiry.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Rauch, K., & Whittaker, C. (1999). Observation and feedback during student teaching: learning from peers. *Action in Teacher Education, 21*(3), 67-78.

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008). *The sage handbook of action research: Participatory inquiry and practice (2nd ed.).* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Reynolds, A. (1992). What is competent beginning teaching? A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 62*(1), 1-35.

Richardson, V. (2003). Constructivist pedagogy. *Teachers College Record 105*(9), 1623-1640.

Rieber, R. & Robinson (Eds.) (2004). *The Essential Vygotsky.* New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Rochkind, J., Ott, A., Immerwahr, J., Doble, J., & Johnson, J. (2007). Lessons learned: New teachers talk about their jobs, challenges and long range plans. Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda.

Rodriguez, A., & Berryman, C. (2002). Using sociotransformative constructivism to teach for understanding in diverse classrooms: A beginning teacher's journey. *American Educational Research Journal, 39*(4), 1017-1045.

Rogoff, B. (1984). Introduction: Thinking and learning in social contexts. *In B. Rogoff & J. Lave (Eds.), Everyday Cognition: Its Development in Social Context.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ryan, R. & Deci, E. (2000). Self determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55(1), 68-78.*

Sanders, W., & Horn, S. (1998). Research findings from the Tennessee value-added assessment system database: Implications for evaluation and research. *Journal of Personnel and Evaluation in Education, 12*(3), 247-256.

Schön, D. (1991). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action.* Aldershot, Haunts, England: Ashgate Publishing.

Shortland, S. (2004). Peer observation: a tool for staff development or compliance? *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 28*(2), 220-228.

Shweder, R. (Ed.). (1980). *Fallible judgment in behavioral research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, C., & Varma, V. (Eds.). (1996). *A handbook for teacher development.* Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing.

Stake, R. (1981). *Case study methodology: An epistemological advocacy.* Proceedings of the Minnesota Evaluation Conference, Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Research and Evaluation Center.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strong, M., & St. John, L. (2001). A study of teacher retention: The effects of mentoring for beginning teachers. University of California: Santa Cruz.

Tabachnick, B., & Zeichner, K. (1999). Idea and action: Action research and the development of conceptual change teaching of science. *Science Education, 83*(3), 309-322.

Theorists Related to Vygotsky (n.d.). Retrieved May 2009, from http://vygotsky.np.co.nz/files/BRelated.htm. Author.

Van Soelen, J. (2003). *Honoring the voices: Perspectives of veteran teachers regarding instructional supervision.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens.

Veenam, S. (1984). Perceived problems of beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research,* 542), 143-178.

Wang, J. (1998). *Learning to teach mathematics: Preservice teachers, their collaborative teachers, and instructional contexts.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, East Lansing.

Ward, B., Dianda, M., van Broekhuizen, L., Radio, J., & Quartz, K. (1992). Support component of the California new teacher project: Third year evaluation report (1990-1991). Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Los Alamitos, CA.

Williams, A., Prestage, S., & Bedward, J. (2001). Individualism to collaboration: The significance of teacher culture to the induction of newly qualified teachers. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 27*(3), 253-267.

Wilson, S., Darling-Hammond, L., & Berry, B. (2001). A case of successful teaching policy: Connecticut's long-term efforts to improve teaching and learning. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. Seattle: WA.

Wong, H. (2002). Induction: the best form of professional development. *Educational Leadership, 59*(6), 52-54.

Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research design and methods (2nd Ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zemke, R., & Zemke, S. (1995). Adult learning: what do we know for sure? *Training*, 32(6), 31-34.

Zepeda, S. (1999). *Staff development: Practices that promote leadership in learning communities.* Larchmont, NY: Eye On Education.

Zepeda, S. (2004a). *Instructional leadership for school improvement.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Zepeda, S. (2004b). Leadership to build learning communities. *The Educational Forum, 68*(2), 144-151.

Zepeda, S. (2006). High stakes supervision: We must do more. *The International Journal of Leadership in Education, 9*(1), 61-73.

Zepeda, S. (2007). *Instructional supervision: Applying tools and concepts.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Zepeda, S. (2008a). *Professional development: What works.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Zepeda, S. (Ed.). (2008b). *Real-world supervision: Adapting theory to practice.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed.) (1991). *Action research for change and development.* Brookfield, USA: Avebury.

Zwart, R., Wubbels, T., Bolhuis, S., & Bergen, T. (2008). Teacher learning through reciprocal peer coaching: An analysis of activity sequences. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies, 24*(4), 982-1002.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT LETTER

November 15, 2008

Dear Beginning Teacher:

I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Sally Zepeda and Dr. Denise Glynn in the Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled "What Can We Learn From the Perspectives of Beginning Teachers Regarding Observation as an Instructional Support?" that is being conducted. The purpose of this study is to focus on learning through peer observation in community.

Your participation will involve bi-monthly peer observations, two semi-structured interviews, and participating in a learning community with other study participants. The peer observations and learning community meeting should only take about three hours of your time each month. There will be two interviews with each interview lasting no more than 60 minutes. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

The findings from this project may provide information on how schools can better support beginning teachers. There are some minimal risks associated with this research. They include being candid with the researcher about professional growth areas and being observed by the participants. None of these activities will impact your annual evaluation.

,

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (555) 555-5555 or send an e-mail to bolens@clarke.k12.ga.us. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing and returning this form, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Susan H. Bolen

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "What Can We Learn From the Perspectives of Beginning Teachers Regarding Observation as an Instructional Support?" conducted by Susan Bolen under the direction of Dr. Sally Zepeda and Dr. Denise Glynn in the Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia (542-4323). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to implement peer observation in learning community supports to first, second, and third year teachers. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1) **Participate in bi-monthly peer observations which will take about 90 minutes per month.**
2) **Participate in a learning community with the researcher and other study participants which will take about 60 minutes per month and will be audio-recorded.**
3) **Participate in two interviews that will last no more than 60 minutes each and will both be audio-recorded.**

The benefits for me are that I will receive instructional support from the community for one semester which will enable me to grow professionally. The researcher hopes to learn more about professional development activities that foster professional growth in beginning teachers.

There is no psychological, social, legal, economic, or physical discomfort, stress or harm that might occur as a result of participation in this research. Participants will be involved in practices that involve teaching and learning.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

_____ _____
Researcher: Susan Bolen Date
Telephone: 555 555 5555
Email: bolens@clarke.k12.ga.us

_____ _____
Participant's Signature Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Participant Profile

Name

Pseudonym

Teaching Assignment

Previous teaching assignments

Other employment

University work

Certification

Marital status

Family

APPENDIX D

THE AUDIT TRAIL

The Audit Trail

Learning Community Data

1. Each learning community session was audio recorded. The researcher then reviewed the research questions for the study and listened to the audio recordings transcribing verbatims that tied directly to the research questions.
2. After the verbatims from all learning community sessions were transcribed, the researcher spent one evening reading through the data and sent the verbatims electronically to all participants.
3. The researcher went transcript by transcript noting codes and writing those codes on index cards.
4. When all codes were on index cards, the researcher sorted the index cards into groups and left them for a few days.
5. Then the researcher read through all of the stacks of index cards resorting them and labeling each stack with a sticky note.
6. The researcher copied each label into her journal listing all codes under each label.
7. She then read through and studied the lists and labels over the course of a week.
8. Then the researcher began pulling themes and connections out of the data.

First Interview Data

1. The researcher read through all of the transcripts over the course of one evening and sent an electronic copy of the transcript to each participant.
2. Over the course of a week, the researcher read the transcripts one at a time noting codes and copying them on index cards.

3. When all codes were on index cards, the researcher sorted the index cards into groups and left them for a few days.
4. Then the researcher read through all of the stacks of index cards resorting them and labeling each stack with a sticky note.
5. When all codes were on index cards, the researcher sorted the index cards into groups and left them for a few days.
6. Then the researcher read through all of the stacks of index cards resorting them and labeling each stack with a sticky note.
7. The researcher copied each label into her journal listing all codes under each label.
8. She then read through and studied the lists and labels over the course of a week.
9. Then the researcher began pulling themes and connections out of the data.
10. The researcher then compared and contrasted themes and codes from the learning community verbatims with the themes and codes from the first set of interview data.
11. One set of themes and codes was formed.
12. The researcher then met one-on-one with a professor, her husband, and a peer seeking feedback. She also sent these themes to her major professor asking for feedback.
13. The researcher then made adjustments to the codes and themes based on the feedback she was given.
14. The researcher formed the questions for the second interview.

Second Interview Data

1. The researcher read through all transcripts one evening and sent each participant an electronic copy of their transcript.

2. The researcher then pulled together the participant's journal and both of their interview transcripts.
3. The researcher read through one participant's data noting codes on post-it notes which were stuck on a piece of chart paper.
4. When the researcher finished reading through all of a participant's data, the researcher sorted the post-it notes onto three chart papers labeled: peer observation, learning community, and miscellaneous.
5. Then the researcher sorted the sticky notes on each chart into groups.
6. After all of the notes were grouped and sorted on the three charts, the researcher labeled each group.
7. Then the charts were hung at eyelevel and the researcher began writing the findings for each participant noting common themes.
8. The researcher them compared and contrasted themes and codes from the learning community verbatims with the themes and codes from both sets of interview data.
9. One set of themes and codes was formed. These were termed propositions.
10. The researcher then wrote about these propositions.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Guide
November 2008

1. What are your thoughts about peer observation as an instructional support?

2. What are your thoughts about learning community as an instructional support?

3. What have you learned about yourself by participating in peer observation? Learning communities?

4. What have you figured out about teaching and learning due to your experiences with peer observation and learning communities?

5. What is your perspective on how participating in peer observations and learning communities has impacted your students?

Interview Guide
February 2009

1. Tell me about the role that choice plays in making peer observations relevant.

2. Talk to me about the role of reflection when participating in peer observations and a learning community.

3. Tell me more about how participating in peer observation and learning communities counters isolation.

4. Many participants mentioned that peer observations were beneficial because of the way that the process was presented in our school. These same participants cautioned that peer observations set up in a school where observers were considered lacking in skill or failing would not work. Tell me more about this.

5. Tell me about how participating in peer observations and learning community has given you permission to fail.

6. Everyone made reference in their first interview to the idea of gaining perspective from their participation in peer observation and learning community. Tell me more about this.

7. Most participants spoke about the difference in their team meetings and the learning community meetings. Compare and contrast your role/behavior in team meetings with your role/behavior in learning community meetings.

8. The learning community meetings are a place where most of you said you gained support and were more open with the group than you are with your team. If applicable, tell me more about this.

9. All participants mentioned that the experiences gained in peer observations and learning community has given their confidence a boost. Tell me more about the confidence boost that this experience has given you.

10. Many participants commented that they have learned through their experiences with peer observation and learning communities that a teacher cannot teach one way for all kids. Tell me about this.

11. Everyone made reference in the first interview to the fact that they had gained/were gaining multiple teaching strategies and tools from their participation in peer observation and learning community. Tell me more about that.

12. Many participants spoke to the idea that there are many ways to teach. Their peer observation experience had shown them that. Tell me more about that.

13. Tell me more about how peer observation and learning communities opened up new ideas and thoughts related to teaching.

14. Tell me more about how watching people teach helps you make the shift from the theoretical to the practical.

15. Tell me more about how participating in peer observation and learning communities has helped you focus on student learning.

16. Several participants mentioned that participating in this study has given them permission to change things in their classroom that were not working. Tell me more about this, if applicable.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW TWO PROBES

Probes Used in Interview Two Aligned to Each Research Question

Probes to Address Research Question 1

- Tell me about the role that choice plays in making peer observation relevant.
- Talk to me about the role of reflection when participating in peer observation and learning community.
- Tell me more about how participating in peer observation and learning community counters isolation.
- Many participants mentioned that peer observations were beneficial because of the way the process was presented in our school. Tell me more about this.
- Tell me more about how participating in peer observation and learning community has given you permission to fail.
- Tell me more about gaining perspective from your peer observation and learning community experiences.
- Most participants spoke about the differences in team meetings and learning community meetings. Compare and contrast your role/behavior in team meetings with your role/behavior in learning community meetings.
- The learning community meetings are a place where most of you said you gained support and were more open with the group than you are with your team. Tell me more.

Probes to Address Research Question 2

- All participants mentioned that the experience gained in peer observation and learning community had given their confidence a boost. Tell me more about the confidence boost this has given you.

Probes to Address Research Question 3

- Many participants commented that they have learned through their experiences with peer observation and learning community that a teacher cannot teach one way for all kids. Tell me more about this.
- Everyone made reference in their first interview to the fact that they had gained/were gaining multiple teaching strategies and tools from their participation in peer observation and learning community. Tell me more about this.
- Many participants spoke to the idea that there are many ways to teach. Their peer observation has sown them that. Tell me more about that.
- Tell me more about how peer observation and learning community open up new ideas and thoughts related to teaching.
- Tell me more about how watching people teach helps you make the shift from the theoretical to the practical.

Probes to Address Research Question 4

- Tell me more about how participation in peer observation and learning community has helped you focus on student learning.
- Several participants mentioned that participating in this study has given them permission to change things in their classroom that were not working. Tell me more about this.

APPENDIX G

COMMON CONCEPTS AND QUOTES RELATED TO EACH RESEARCH QUESTION FROM THE LEARNING COMMUNITY TRANSCRIPTS

Common Concepts and Quotes Related to Each Research Question From the Learning Community Transcripts

Research Question	Concepts	Quotes
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports?	relevance	"choice" "take little nuggets and make them yours." "I have to see it." "Engage in it." "being in there… not sitting back."
	Change in Practice	"now I need to decide" "change is hard" "I switched…" "redo" "you have to try it" "Now or next year
	Sharing	"good for me to think about" "place to bounce ideas"
	Vulnerable	"I've never had to…" "I struggled this week" "The thing that I am battling with" "My struggle is" "How do you conceptualize that?"
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	perspective	"You can do this" "I can do this." "Perspective on how my work is going."
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and a learning community?	change	"Teaching and learning are constantly changing." "teaching and learning are not fixed" "permission to change my ways"

Common Concepts and Quotes Related to Each Research Question From the Learning Community Transcripts continued

Research Question	Concepts	Quotes
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	shift in focus	"all about the kids" "I've got to find a way to motivate him." "I need a strategy to help him learn."

APPENDIX H

INDIVIDUAL CASE CODES

Case: Stephanie Bradshaw

Research Question	Codes
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports?	"based on my needs" "opened up a line of communication" "seeing how it works" "get a lot of support" "solving problems" "seeing it all work" "could have felt cut off"
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	"I have to solve this problem." "I think I am addicted to change." "a little more confident" "try new things" "can change things" "I really think about things"
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and learning community?	"shift from what read, to what you saw to what you do" "abstract to concrete" "feel a little more confident" "safe to try new things"
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	"figured out where the kids are coming from" "focused on are they learning better now" "more face time with students" "really helped them"

Case: George Bailey

Research Question	Codes
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports?	"choice" "practical" "different styles" "from theoretical to practical" "helps areas that need work" "model" "problem solving"
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	"you have to be a learner" "put energy into learning" "so many techniques… focus on what fits you" "I can do this."
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and learning community?	"teaching is a constantly changing profession" "knock down barriers" "routines matter" "no one way"
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	"focused on student learning" "I'm seeing results" "instruction is enhanced thereby students learning is increased"

Case: Elias Clinton

Research Question	Codes
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports?	"motivated" "its been encouraging" "useful resource" "gives you more strategies" "helpful" "problem solve" "choice"
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	"there are things I need to change" "ok to make a change" "learning process to be A teacher"
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and learning community?	"definite growth" "have to develop teaching skills" "more open to try things when I see it" "need more tools"
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	"applying strategies increases academic outcomes" "definitely seen a jump" "different variations…help them"

Case: Beverly Ford

Research Question	Codes
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports?	"choice" "need the visual" "see the different levels" "mixture of grade levels" "fix those challenges" "networking tool" "helpful"
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	"my biggest thing was change" "seeing helps me shift" "helpful just to talk" "choice made it more likely" "I'm on the right track."
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and learning community?	"have to ask" "more than one way to do something" "collaboration" "communication" "support helps everyone"
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	"the learning is improving" "improved learning environment" "they have different ways to learn now"

Case: Kari Speakman

Research Question	Codes
1. What are teacher perspectives about peer observation and learning community as instructional supports?	"see it – oh it really works" "beneficial" "choice" "gave me permission to Change"
2. What are teacher perspectives about what they have learned about themselves in this process?	"my room's not out of control" "more than one way" "I am not as strict…" "I have a certain teaching style" "Be ok with who you are."
3. What understandings do participants develop about teaching and learning based on their experiences with peer observation and learning community?	"when you see it, the shift is easier" "feel more accountable that kids know" "you have to have a balance" "combination of strategies"
4. What are teacher perspectives about how these experiences have affected their students?	"seem to be learning better" "learning more" "tightened up" "very clear teaching point"