A Professional Learning Partnership: Educator Perceptions About Program Effectiveness and Impact on Rural Educators

Tara Lynn Villalobos
Marquette University

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A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PARTNERSHIP: EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT ON RURAL EDUCATORS

by

Tara Villalobos

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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A partnership model between several school districts and a liberal arts university was explored as a means of delivering quality professional development in this interpretive study. Teachers self-reported their thoughts about the effects of the professional development delivered through a partnership model, the effects on their practice, and the similarities and differences between this professional learning and other professional development opportunities they have been a part of. The researcher conducted two rounds of interviews with six educators, three from each of two districts. Data from the interviews was compiled and coded to determine common themes. Several themes emerged in support of the literature: leadership, application of the skills and knowledge developed, teacher inclusion, university involvement, coaching and mentoring, goal alignment, and sustained professional development. Three new themes emerged: lasting relationships, applied knowledge, and rejuvenation. The results of the study provide a foundation for exploring the effectiveness of a Professional Learning Partnership and its impact on rural educators. The recommendation for leaders of small, rural districts, is to collaboratively plan professional learning opportunities jointly with other small, geographically close school districts.
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Tara Villalobos

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Chapter 1

*Rural life has been and always will be a strength of this country. The challenge is how to amplify and accelerate rural reinvestment (Battelle for Kids (2016a, p. 19))*

Introduction

Education in the United States has its roots in the small school setting. Often, the novelty one-room schoolhouse is looked upon fondly—many of these original structures being preserved and recognized for their significance in history—other times, however, communities move swiftly away from this philosophy of education to consolidate and form larger schools and districts. At times this is guided by geographic boundaries or population density, other times by personnel and financial resources. Other districts, however, remain small and preserve the assemblage of small schools. Though the days of the one-room schoolhouse may be gone, one thing is certain, "Small schools are frequently the glue that binds together small communities, serving as their economic and social hub" (Jimerson, 2006, p. 5). That is, in rural communities, small school districts provide valuable services to communities that far exceed educational opportunities for students. These small school districts are the focal point of community life, enhancing social capital, contributing to identity formation, and providing cultural opportunities.

I work in one of these districts, and as such, am personally motivated to preserve the small school district and maintain its contribution to its village residents as a community hub. However, resources, societal pressures, and continued education reform place significant constraints upon the district, as well as the surrounding school
districts. These complex challenges are inclusive of the need to develop professional learning opportunities in collaboration with other small districts that are sustainable, meaningful and effective.

**Professional Learning and Professional Development**

Professional learning is the vehicle to engage and empower staff and mold new ways of thinking. Many terms have been used to describe the teaching and learning process provided to, and for, educators, including the two broad terms "professional learning" and "professional development," as well as several more focused terms including in-service, workshop, seminar, training or institute. By no means is this list comprehensive; rather, it is an effort to highlight the expansive, yet focused, nature of the topic. In this study, the terms professional learning and professional development will be used interchangeably to discuss the continuous learning process of teachers.

**Statement of the Problem**

"Rural Wisconsin is more than our state’s heritage; it’s home to almost 44% of the state’s 860,000 public school students. Rural schools share the same responsibility to the community as their suburban counterparts—to prepare all students for a successful future in a globally competitive marketplace" (Wisconsin Rural School Alliance, n.d., p. 1). Educational reform is called for each year through legislative action or initiative by the Department of Public Instruction. While teacher preparation programs are responsible for investing in the development of the next generation of educators, professional learning has become the intended vehicle through which these reforms are implemented in the existing teaching force. However, professional learning is often ineffective, not sustained, or at best, tolerated and at worst devalued by participating
educators. Though there are many reasons professional development is reviewed poorly, many of these failures can be traced back to pertinence, delivery, and focus. Over time, guidelines, or criteria have been created to define effective professional learning, yet these vary depending on the source. This research is grounded in the findings of Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey.

While a significant amount of research has been conducted, and is available, on best practices for creating and offering meaningful and effective professional learning opportunities, a dearth of information remains regarding the link between professional learning and subsequent student achievement. Even less research exists on professional learning opportunities in and for rural education communities. "[A]bout 44 percent of the state's 860,000 PK–12 public school students attend schools in rural communities" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Therefore, developing an understanding of best practices in professional learning in the rural setting is vital to ensuring that nearly half of the state’s students have access to high-quality teachers, and, therefore, high-quality education.

A review of the literature found an abundance of research concerning professional learning in urban environments and large district settings, as well as content-area specific professional development (Howley, Wood, & Hough, 2011; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Though searches highlight professional learning needs in the rural setting for administrators (Chance & Segura, 2009; Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013), expanding this to classroom teachers in the rural school setting is less readily available. Additionally, few studies focus on the learning and experiences of teachers, and even fewer provide documentation of the impact of K-20 partnerships (Smith,
Those studies that are available focus on the collaboration and development of preservice teachers (Eargle, 2013; House, 1997; Monk, 2007; Doolittle & Rattigan, 2007). Therefore, the review of the literature points to the need for continued research in the area of professional development in the rural school district setting.

Coaching and mentoring are two examples of professional development that have become more prevalent in recent years (Bickmore, 2010; Joyce and Showers, 2002; Little, 1990; Fullan, 2002, 2009; Russo, 2004; Driscoll, 2008). Unfortunately, however, it becomes difficult for rural educators who are intent on improving their practice through mentoring or coaching to fully engage in professional learning for five main reasons, both observed from my administrative experience and as supported by research. These reasons include lack of funding for substitute teachers for release time and other expenses; lack of personnel to support coaching due to geographic and/or licensure constraints; insufficient time for coaching and follow-through; lack of administrative support or attention; and conservative community values that make change difficult (Chance & Segura, 2009; Hargreaves, Parsley, & Cox, 2015; Muijs, 2015; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Since professional learning is noted to be a leading factor in teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, 2003), understanding how to extend the learning experience for educators, and minimize some of the above-listed constraints is a necessity to help rural schools function at peak levels.

**Purpose**

The primary focus of this study is professional learning offered to multiple rural districts through a K-20 partnership. First, by giving voice to teachers participating in a
professional learning collaborative, the research intends to explore the effect of professional development delivered in partnership with a small liberal arts college by uncovering—through self-reporting of changes—teacher perceptions of each of the following:

1. professional learning activities;
2. changes in teacher knowledge, skills, and practices;
3. aspects of the professional development that were effective; and
4. if the teachers perceive whether the partnership model is a more effective way to deliver professional learning than other professional learning in which they have been a participant.

Second, based on how teachers describe the professional development, I aim to reveal how a collaborative partnership impacts, or changes, the culture and instructional practices of teachers. While a team of institutions formed the collaborative partnership and a multitude of individuals was involved in the professional development experience—including district administrators, principals, curriculum directors, reading specialists, teachers, and university partners—this study will focus only on the viewpoints of the participating teachers.

**Personal Connection to Research Intention**

I have 20 years of educational experience spanning all grade levels. I began as a high school mathematics teacher, taught as an adjunct at the collegiate level, and then became an administrator for grades K–12. When I began exploring new English language arts curriculum, I became acutely aware of the high expense of quality professional development, and subsequently found interest in educational partnerships as
a means of delivering quality professional development at an affordable rate. I further wanted to determine if the partnership would carry benefits beyond financial incentives, such as the ability to change philosophical beliefs and motivation.

The motivation for this study began with my desire to assist educators in my district to update their curriculum and practices in a manner that was fiscally responsible; to provide high-quality, sustainable professional development; and allow the teachers to benefit personally, thereby increasing their motivation. Further motivation arose out of a controversial consolidation study request that one of the area districts pursued. I hoped that the collaborative nature of the professional development would dissuade consolidation supporters by demonstrating that consolidation was not necessary when collaboration and shared-services were implemented.

Linking my personal interests to broader state issues, school district administrators are required to meet an ever-increasing number of unfunded state mandates. In order to fulfill these mandates, districts must update policies, procedures, and practices; adopt new curricula and standards; and provide professional development to staff in order to effectively incorporate mandates. While all schools must find ways to incorporate each of the above, rural schools face additional challenges, such as funding, geographic difficulties, and resource availability. I desire to learn whether or not collaborative professional development will help guide rural districts in navigating change, and also assist in establishing practices that assist rural schools in making the best use of available resources.
Theoretical Rationale


Thereby, the conceptual framework for this study uses the underpinnings of Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey to examine the tenets of effective professional development practices, the educational partnership and its effect on teachers. Table 1 summarizes the key aspects of each of their research. While all three link together, when taken separately, each has a specific area of focus. Darling-Hammond supports professional learning practices that can be infused in the work-day, Fullan maintains that coaching and mentoring allow for the most significant amount of professional growth, and Guskey purports that the most effective professional learning is gained when it is tailored to meet the needs of the staff member(s) targeted.
In addition to expanding upon the studies conducted by the three researchers noted in Table 1, Chapter 2 will review the literature regarding the ways in which rural school districts implement professional development opportunities as well as the literature related to school district/university partnerships. A summary picture of best practices for professional development will be drawn and will serve to inform this study.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a Professional Learning Partnership model?
2. How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?
3. How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning opportunities they have experienced outside of the Partnership?

**Summary**

The main purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the collaborative partnership between five K8 school districts and a small liberal arts college, based on
self-reporting by the teachers involved in the study. Because educators in rural schools face professional isolation due to the geographic nature of their district; size of the district; limitations on funding and resources; and limited access to high-quality professional development, I will explore the effectiveness of this model to support small districts in providing opportunities for teachers to be supported instructionally and administratively, while preserving district resources and the K8 school district structure. Further, the study will explore whether or not a partnership model adds to the quality and experience of professional learning, if it is sustainable, and if it is a viable option to bring life and hope to small, rural school districts, as identified by the teachers participating in the professional learning. The insights and conclusions gathered from this study may benefit the districts involved, as well as provide modules to support rural school districts in general.
Chapter 2

"The purpose of staff development is not just to implement instructional innovations; its central purpose is to build strong collaborative work cultures that will develop the long term capacity for change." ~ Michael Fullan

Public education in the United States predates the nation itself, having been in place since the 17th Century. Since its origins, public education has been the focus of numerous reform efforts, though it still quite similarly resembles its beginnings. Public education has changed over time due to the addition of technology, research on teaching and learning, evolving needs of students, updates in teaching techniques, and governmental involvement. While school districts have attempted to remain proactive, often they act in response to the demands placed upon them by the laws enacted by state or federal governments. Many of these responses require a transmission of information and enactment of policies and procedures, which, in turn, have resulted in the need for large-scale professional development.

Given the importance, then, of professional development, it is imperative that it is conducted effectively and efficiently. This literature review shares with the reader the importance of professional learning in a variety of contexts, particularly the rural context—an area of educational research that lacks attention. The literature review is divided into two sections, beginning with the concept of professional learning. Professional learning is first defined and approached through the findings of three lead researchers: Linda Darling-Hammond, Robert Fullan, and Thomas Guskey. The second section looks at rural America and the professional learning within it. Much like the professional learning section, this section begins by first defining ruralness. From there,
the review of literature focuses on challenges faced by rural districts and the ways in which consolidation and partnerships have addressed these challenges. The section concludes with an exploration of four different types of partnerships.

**Professional Learning**

Professional learning is the vehicle to engage and empower staff and facilitate new ways of thinking. Throughout the ages, though the look of professional development has changed, one thing has remained constant: "Effective professional development is intensive and sustained; it occurs through collaborative planning and implementation; and it engages teachers in opportunities that promote continuous inquiry and improvement that is relevant and appropriate to local sites" (Peixotto & Fager, 1998, p. 21). And, with the many mandates thrust upon schools and districts across the nation, professional learning is viewed as the venue to improve school systems. Guskey (1994) asserted:

Never before in the history of education has there been greater recognition of the importance of professional development. Every modern proposal to reform, restructure, or transform schools emphasizes professional development as a primary vehicle in efforts to bring about needed change. (Introduction section, para. 1)

Though many terms have been used to describe the process of imbuing educators with new ideas, values, and strategies, in this study, the terms professional learning and professional development will be used interchangeably to discuss the continuous learning process of teachers.
Introduction to Researchers

While professional development has been widely researched, three key researchers are noted as forerunners. Taking a critical look at the research of Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey, we can see the intersectionality of their work. A fourth researcher, DuFour, is not heavily involved in this specific research due to his contributions to professional development focusing on the Professional Learning Community (PLC). His findings, however, will surface in Chapter Five, as an extension option for future research, discussing what was learned and implications for future professional development efforts.

Darling Hammond

Teachers generally do not experience consistent, high-quality professional development. Numerous studies criticize the one-size-fits-all professional development workshops which often do not meet the needs of individual teachers (Franey, 2015, p. 5). Startlingly, these one-size-fits-all workshops are most frequently implemented. A key finding in the Darling-Hammond, et al., (2009) research analyses of the National Center for Educational Statistics’ Schools and Staff Survey 2003-04 database and the 2007-08 NSDC Standards Assessment Inventory, indicated, "more than 9 out of 10 U.S. teachers have participated in professional learning consisting of short-term conferences or workshops" (p. 5). Further analyzing the Schools and Staff Survey Darling-Hammond, et al. found that while sustained professional development of approximately 50 hours was shown to have a positive impact on teacher skill development and student learning, less than 25% of teachers reported receiving even 33 hours (p. 5), this also happens to be significantly behind other nations. They also found that United States teachers reported
that collaboration is not focused nor does it enhance their practices or student learning. In exploring the specific relationship between the usefulness of professional development, while 60% stated content-area professional learning was helpful, less than half agreed for all other types of professional development (p. 5). Also, according to Darling-Hammond (2005), most traditional professional development programs have several design flaws: they have ignored individual needs by using a one-size-fits-all model, compartmentalized versus created collaborative opportunities for educators, focused on skill training only, and utilized short workshops over sustained professional development. In their 2009 article using research supported by the NSDC, Darling-Hammond and Richardson added that research does not support professional development that focuses exclusively on training teachers in new techniques and behaviors. Instead, they found that professional development must be related to a teacher’s specific contexts and curricula, and expects that teachers make changes in collaboration with and supported by others. (p. 49).

Supporting the work of Darling-Hammond, Jensen, et al. (2016), in a study comparing the professional development of several top-performing countries, one significant factor was found to impact the effectiveness of professional development in all cases: collaborative professional development must be built-into the day-to-day operations for teachers and administrators. Jensen et al., (2016) in their study of British Columbia (Canada), Hong Kong, Shanghai (China) and Singapore, further uncover one of the methods quite readily used in both British Columbia and Shanghai to bring specificity and meaning to professional learning. Conducting interviews with policymakers, school employees, training providers and other stakeholders, analyzing a
variety of resources including ministry and school documentation, and program evaluations and independent reviews, they explored how these countries established successful professional development programming (p. 1). They found "Universities and institutes provide support to teachers in schools on general and specific development needs," (p. 46). This concept mirrors that of Darling-Hammond and Guskey, forming one of the bases for this research and will be explored more thoroughly.

Much of Darling-Hammond’s work is based on the research of Joyce and Showers. Their 1996 article reviews their 1980 research theory and methods, before taking a crosswalk through their evolving findings. In particular, their early research tested the impact of weekly seminars on the ability of teachers to implement what they were learning. By pairing teachers with expert coaches Joyce and Showers were able to observe how coaching impacted teacher development. By "focus[ing] on classroom implementation and the analysis of teaching" (p. 12) they found that:

- teachers who had a coaching relationship...practiced new skills and strategies more frequently and applied them more appropriately than did their counterparts...Members of peer-coaching groups exhibited greater long-term retention of new strategies and more appropriate use of new teaching models over time. (p. 12)

These coaching sessions netted consistent results regarding implementation. From these results, Joyce and Showers "recommended that teachers who were studying teaching and curriculum form small peer coaching groups that would share the learning process" (p. 12). The researchers make it a point to inform readers that teaching and curriculum are necessary components beyond organization of the peer coaching process itself.
Simultaneously, they proved that providing educators a coaching opportunity following initial training leads to greater transfer of skills (p. 13). From there, Joyce and Showers explored the establishment of coaching relationships. This exploration proved fruitful and resulted in Joyce and Showers recommending that schools organize staff into coaching teams (p. 13). The duo further defined several types of coaching and elaborated on four principles of effective peer coaching. The four principles to effective peer coaching include teachers providing consent to peer coaching; omitting verbal feedback; defining coaching terms; and, expanding the coaching process to include planning, developing support materials, observing, and processing the lesson (p. 14). The two close their synopsis by stating, "When staff development becomes the major vehicle for school improvement, schools should take into account both the structures and content of training, as well as changes needed in the workplace to make possible the collaborative planning, decision making, and data collection that are essential to organizational change efforts" (p. 15).

These results led them to the conclusion that professional learning is to be a school improvement process that is both ongoing and teacher-focused. Years later, in their seminal work, the two further defined the outcomes of four layers of professional development in schools, each with successive increases in gain in knowledge, skill, and transference to classroom practices. The layers identified are the study of theory, demonstration, practice and peer coaching, and highlight coaching as a necessary component in the fidelity of implementation of skills and practices (Bickmore, 2010, p. 46; Joyce and Showers, 2002), and appear in the table created by Bickmore based on the research of Joyce and Showers below.
Table 2: Teacher Implementation of Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Activity</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Transfer of Training to Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study of Theory</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bickmore (2010, p. 46)

Adding insight, Darling-Hammond (2009) stated that effective professional development relies on several factors. She encourages professional learning that is both job-embedded and collaborative, teaches through active and sustained learning; links curriculum, assessment and professional learning decisions in the context of teaching the content; and through it, educators gain a deeper knowledge of content and how to teach it. Darling-Hammond also recommends modeling for staff to help facilitate change and lead to continuous improvement. Just as teachers model learning concepts for their students, in the case of effective professional learning, modeling is an instructional strategy in which a coach or specialist demonstrates a new teaching strategy and teachers learn the practice by observing and then doing.

Fullan

Fullan’s 1992 book regarding successful school improvement stated:
...it seems that most people do not discover new understandings until they have delved into something. In many cases, changes in behaviour precede rather than follow changes in belief (Fullan[,] 1985). We see then that the relationship between behavioural and belief change is reciprocal and ongoing, with change in doing or behaviour a necessary experience on the way to breakthroughs in meaning and understanding. (1992, p. 25)

In his 2002 book, Fullan succinctly stated that professional learning concerns the "development of habits of learning" (p. 253), which requires active engagement from those staff members involved in the process. The term "professional development" has recently been replaced by the term "professional learning" (Hilt, 2011; Mizell, 2005; Moir, 2013), in order to signal "the importance of educators taking an active role in their continuous development and [to] place emphasis on their learning" (Hilt, 2011). This process of active learning leads directly to educators’ attainment of knowledge, skills, and strategies that they can incorporate to improve their teaching practices (Little, 1997; Mizell, 2005).

In a 1986 case study of successful districtwide coordination of curriculum implementation of four school districts in East County in Ontario, Canada, Fullan (1992, p. 58) found several factors that either contributed to or inhibited said implementation process. Commitment to curriculum, leadership commitment, and visibility, widely understood procedures, workplace with high expectations and collegiality, a healthy budget, external support, and persistence were shown to drive successful implementation. At the opposite end of the spectrum, acting as obstacles to successful implementation were: teacher overload, lack of leadership and funding, turnover, and implementation
complexity. (Fullan, 1992, p. 65). Due to these findings, Fullan made three recommendations:

1. that curriculum services provide differential support and in-service training according to different levels of implementation needs;
2. that in-service training for principals be provided;
3. that the Administrative Council (consisting of all superintendents) consider how to support and monitor the programme. (p. 70)

To thoroughly compile and analyze data, Fullan collected documentation from a variety of sources; interviewed over one-hundred individuals, thirty of whom were teachers; and reviewed completed surveys from approximately sixty individuals. After interviewing subjects, he furthered his observations about implementation to: involve strong teachers, gain administrative commitment/support from the onset of the process, start slowly, and begin the process according to staff readiness.

Summarizing the work of Fullan yields the following recommendations: set manageable expectations, focus on a few projects at a time, enhance building leadership, implement ongoing professional learning, maintain follow-through, set a clear purpose and expectations, build capacity, provide staff with necessary resources, establish an environment in which risk-taking is supported, prepare administrators to support the process, gather and share appropriate data, and provide incentives and recognition for staff (p. 75).

Expanding on the role of leadership in any successful transition, Fullan’s results echoed those of several researchers. McLaughlin and Berman (1977) found that "projects having the active support of the principal were most likely to fare well" (p. 124). Their
study specifically judged principal support by asking respondents about principal attitude. From the recorded responses, the researchers found that principals were the "gatekeepers of change" (pp. 123, 145, and 189). In a summary of their research, they stated, "Unless [principals] actively supported the project, it seldom worked and was hardly ever continued after three or five years" (McLaughlin and Berman, 1977, p. 192). The researchers also believed that the principal’s actions were critical, outweighing even what they said teachers should do. Hall et al. (1980) stated, "The degree of implementation of the innovation is different in different schools because of the actions and concerns of the principal" (Hall et al. 1980, p. 26; as quoted in Fullan p. 82). Fullan described the evolving image of the principal as one that "...has shifted since the early 1980s from the principal as 'gatekeeper' to the principal as 'instructional leader'" (p. 82). He followed this by stating, "Planned changed, school improvement, effective schools and staff development all bear the mark of the principal as central for leading and supporting change" (p. 82). Concurring with Fullan’s findings, Leithwood and Janzti (1990) studied the practices of administrators in nine elementary and three secondary Ontario schools with highly collaborative cultures over a three-year period. Conducting interviews with 133 staff members, including principals, they explored strategies used by school principals to influence school culture. They found that these principals used six broad strategies to transform culture (p.22). The six strategies these transformational leaders implemented include: improved system culture; used financial, personnel, and organizational procedures to encourage cultural change; prepared staff development; communicated cultural values and beliefs; shared and distributed power and responsibility; and celebrated successes and used symbols to express cultural values (pp.
Leithwood and Janzti found that the development of a collaborative culture led to "significant changes in staff members' individual and shared understandings of their current purposes and practices; and an enhanced capacity to solve future professional problems, individually and collegially" (p. 32). Fullan (1992) summarized these findings to offer ten guidelines. Those applicable to this research include:

- focus on something important like curriculum and instruction (p. 89)
- focus on something fundamental like the professional culture of the school (p. 89)
- empower others below you...Empowerment also means additional resources, such as time, money and personnel (p. 91)
- build a vision relevant to both goals and change processes (p. 91)
- build allies with senior level administrators, peers, parents, subordinates, and individuals who are external to the system (pp. 94-95).

"In short, the school principal more than anyone else can bring successful school improvement into sharp focus" (Fullan, 1992, p. 96). Fullan stated "...staff development and successful innovation or improvement are intimately related" (p. 97).

Linking his findings on leadership to staff, though a proponent of coaching and mentoring, Fullan cautions "...against assuming that working toward increased interaction among teachers is automatically a good thing" (Fullan, 1992, p. 104). He sets the stage for three critical aspects that have potential to be problem areas if not considered carefully. These areas of caution to consider when contemplating the introduction of coaching and mentoring are: "the relationship of coaching to the culture of the school; the form and content of coaching; and the need for a more objective and balanced
appreciation of the complex relationship between autonomy and collaboration" (p. 104). Fullan shares that following these tenets may help develop new norms of collegiality (p. 104). He then expresses the importance of these norms of collegiality and opportunities for teacher sharing, stating "...teacher collegiality and other elements of collaborative work cultures are known to be related to the likelihood of implementation success (Fullan and Pomfret[,] 1977, Little[,] 1982)" (Fullan, p. 103).

Following his previous work, Fullan (2002) indicated that teachers found one-day workshops to be ineffective, and that follow-up was minimal to rare. These findings are not isolated and have received further support from Chambers, Lam & Mahitivanichcha (2008); Darling-Hammond, 2005; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Hendrickson, O'Shea, Gable, Heitman & Seelander, 1993; Kent, 2004; Sawchuk, 2009; and, Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990. Fullan (1992) recommends that leaders "...refocus staff development so that it becomes part of an overall strategy for professional and institutional reform" (p.107). To move beyond the one-day experience, he recommends involving Summer Institutes with follow-up, specialized training, leadership and team development. He also recommends, "focus[ing] on instructional improvements like the use of co-operative learning strategies, as well as on school-wide changes involving greater collaboration" (p. 108). Fullan shares that "Schools improve when they have, or come to have, a shared purpose, norms of collegiality, norms of continuous improvement, and structures that represent the organizational conditions necessary for significant improvement (Little[,] 1987; Rosenholtz[,] 1989)" (pp. 108-109). In the broadest sense, this means a shared mission, vision, and values. Looking past the visionary scope, to the process and procedure of how this occurs, Fullan suggests providing teachers with "[t]ime for joint planning, joint
teaching arrangements, staff development policies, new roles such as mentors, and school improvement procedures are examples of structural change at the school level that is conducive to improvement" (p. 109). He concludes "The centrepiece, or bridge, linking and overlapping classroom and school improvement [] is the teacher as learner" (p. 109), and that this must occur in an integrated and ongoing capacity, that meets the needs of the teaching staff (p. 111).

In his 1990 work with Bennett and Rolheiser-Bennett, Fullan recommended forming a partnership with nearby institutions to enhance the professional learning experience. A year later, he wrote with Hargreaves (1991) to recommend that leaders should create opportunities for their staff to partner with other teachers—in the same building, or in nearby districts, again, with the opportunity to enhance professional learning experiences in mind. A decade-and-a-half later, Barth (2006) echoed many of these concepts, stating:

A precondition for doing anything to strengthen our practice and improve a school is the existence of a collegial culture in which professionals talk about practice, share their craft knowledge, and observe and root for the success of one another. Without these in place, no meaningful improvement – no staff or curriculum development, no teacher leadership, no student appraisal, no team teaching, no parent involvement, and no sustained change – is possible. (p. 6)

Barth attributes his comments on collegiality to Judith Little, who stated in her 1982 research, "Staff development appears to have greatest prospects for influence where there is a prevailing norm of collegiality" (Little, p. 339). Following then, the tenets of Little (1982, 1990), Fullan (2002, 2009) recommended building collegiality by talking about
practices, sharing knowledge, conducting peer coaching and observations, rooting for colleagues, and setting high expectations. Russo (2004) concurred that professional development alone frequently falls short, and supported the need for coaching which appears to be:

ongoing, deeply embedded in teachers’ classroom work with children, specific to grade levels or academic content, and focused on research-based approaches. It also must help to open classroom doors and create more collaboration and sense of community among teachers in a school. (p. 2)

He cautioned though, that if these tenets were not followed, coaching would not be a silver bullet to effective professional development. Four years later, Driscoll (2008) stated, "Combining coaching and group professional development meets all the needs of ongoing teacher education" (p. 40). Though speaking about mathematics, his concepts surrounding coaching can be expanded to the literacy arena. He defined coaching as "closing the loop" to help teachers implement effective practices. Professional development alone does not meet the needs of teachers; however, coupled with coaching, he determined this renewed and comprehensive approach will:

- Improve teachers' content knowledge
- Actuate research-based instructional strategies in classrooms
- Build teachers' capacity to use a variety of assessments to monitor student understanding and achievement
- Engage teachers in taking an inquiry approach to teaching, whereby they come to understand; question; and where appropriate, shift their attitudes and beliefs (p. 40).
He concluded by sharing that a key coaching function is to increase teachers’ ability to identify the limits of student understanding and address their learning needs.

**Guskey**

In a 1991 article reviewing previous research on staff development, Guskey & Sparks introduced a model for program evaluation. The two found professional development to be, "a multidimensional process that encompasses all aspects of training, from readiness activities, practice, and coaching, through follow-up and support activities" (1991, p. 73). This process of active learning leads directly to educators’ attainment of knowledge, skills, and strategies that they can incorporate to improve their teaching practices (Little, 1997; Mizell, 2005). Guskey (2002a) also expanded upon Little’s (1997) work to further include that the systematic change in attitudes and beliefs of teachers positively impacts student learning. In 2005, Mizell’s work further supported Guskey’s expansion of the impact of teacher beliefs on student learning.

Guskey (2014) grouped the failures of professional development initiatives into three categories: those that fail because of time, those that fail because of investment, and those that fail due to a lack of follow through, best summarized as "purpose, cohesiveness, and direction" (p. 12). He purported that organizational support and change are the key elements that must be in place in a school (or district) for a professional learning experience to prove successful (Guskey, 2016).

In addition to the various problems cited in regard to the planning and conducting of professional development, difficulties have been associated with the lack of evaluation of professional development (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Ferguson, 2008; Garet et al.; 2000; Guskey, 1995, 2002b; Guskey & Sparks, 1991). After analyzing several lists of
characteristics of effective professional development, Guskey (2003) asserted that the lists varied widely and were both "inconsistent and sometimes contradictory" (p. 749). Guskey found that most studies evaluating the effectiveness of professional development surrounded mathematics and science and that this effectiveness could not be extended to that of English language arts due to a dearth of studies in this content area. Pre-dating Wisconsin’s Educator Effectiveness by nearly a decade, Guskey also recommended utilizing student learning outcomes to gauge the effectiveness of professional development. Applying Guskey’s findings to the current research, will then, extend the body of knowledge, even if only through self-reported data.

Guskey (2001, 2014) recommended a model for effective professional development delivery and linked this to his model for professional development evaluation. Much like a common strategy recommended to teachers for curriculum planning, backward planning for professional development reverses the order of the evaluating and planning stages. Along with the model itself resembling the teaching process, Guskey’s Backward Planning also incorporates facets of the Educator Effectiveness process that teachers in Wisconsin must follow (DPI, 2012; WI Act 166). To explain the delivery model, the origins of Guskey’s work on evaluation is first introduced and reviewed. Guskey’s evaluation process is based on the original work of Donald Kirkpatrick, who, in 1959, developed an evaluation model consisting of four levels to determine the effectiveness of professional learning in the business and industry setting. To this model, Guskey added a level in the middle of Kirkpatrick’s model that focuses on the context of staff development. That is, Guskey recommended five levels of evaluating professional development: participant reaction, participant learning of
knowledge and skill, organizational growth and support, participant use of knowledge and skill, and student response or learning (Guskey, 2000, 2002a, 2014). Because the primary goal is student learning, "planning [professional development] must begin with clarifying those outcomes. This means we must plan backward, beginning where we want to end and then working our way back to the processes that will get us there" (Guskey, 2014, p. 13). Later, Guskey articulated, "The most effective professional learning planning begins with clear specification of the student learning outcomes to be achieved and the sources of data that best reflect those outcomes" (2016, p. 36). Subsequently, in recommending a professional development delivery model, he reversed and added clarity to each of the steps. Guskey’s model involves five steps utilizing the backwards planning design. The first is to begin with the desired student learning outcomes in mind. The second step is to determine which policies and practices will lead to the desired student learning outcomes. The third and fourth steps are to ensure the organizational support necessary for successful implementation are in place, and then determine what specific knowledge and skills educators will require to fulfill the policies and practices deemed necessary in step two. The last step is to create an optimal learning environment through professional activities designed to achieve the preceding steps (2014, pp. 14 - 16).

**Professional Development Summary**

Throughout history, evidence of the evolution of professional development is clear. However, evolution does not implicitly imply improvement. Much of the research conducted on professional development has yielded mixed results at best, leaving professional learning too often viewed as ineffective due to its top-down or isolated approach and considered to have weak lasting effects on teaching. However, three
researchers have risen to the top regarding defining best professional learning practices: Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey. These three researchers have shared insights about professional development strategies that work and have a long-lasting impact. These beliefs and practices include: being job-embedded, networking, including teachers in the planning process, providing coaching or mentoring, building a collaborative culture, ensuring that professional learning is individualized and differentiated, and establishing long-term goals. All three discuss the importance and need of administrative support and guidance from both the district and building leadership. Regarding building administrative leadership, it was found that principals also need inservicing to fully support and build capacity in their staff. Fullan also reminds us, "...deep ownership of something new on the part of large numbers of people is tantamount to real change, but the fact is that ownership is not acquired that easily. Ownership in the sense of clarity, skill[,] and commitment is a progressive process" (pp. 25-26). The following table (Table 3) summarizes the specific professional development strategies that the three watershed researchers support, their critique of other professional development practices, and how their research informs the development of effective professional learning.

### Table 3: Watershed Researchers Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Darling Hammond</th>
<th>Fullan</th>
<th>Guskey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PD Strategy:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job-embedded practices</td>
<td>Coaching and Mentoring</td>
<td>Individualized and Differentiated Backward planning Establish long-term PD goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Building Collaborative Cultures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teacher inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Critical of:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short workshops</td>
<td>PD that doesn’t focus on core elements of curriculum,</td>
<td>Short Workshops Outside experts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skill training</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective PD built on:</th>
<th>Goal alignment (student/teacher/school/PD)</th>
<th>Contributes to specific gains in student learning. Leadership(^1) that promotes student learning, empowers teachers, cultivates a climate for learning, and fosters collaboration. Principals who have received inservicing.</th>
<th>Goal alignment (student/teacher/school/PD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject relevance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td>PD in the classroom</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sustained PD</td>
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<td>Sustained PD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PD in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation and assessment of learning (5 levels of evaluation)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Rural America**

When using the term *rural*, most often the idea of agriculture, the countryside or rustic life is envisioned. While this is often true, in terms of schooling and census definition, the term *rural* becomes more muddied. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, "‘Rural’ encompasses all populations, housing, and territory not included within an urban area" (2015, p. 1). Urban areas must be defined to understand what this means. The following definition originates from the Census Bureau based on the 2011 Federal Register. "The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas: Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people; Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than

\(^1\) Specifically principals and key teachers
According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), ruralness can be classified in one of three striations, defined by their distance from an urban epicenter, typically defined by NCES as an area of 50,000 or more people or cluster between 2,500 and 50,000 people. From closest to farthest, they are fringe, distant and remote. Fringe territories are those that are less than five miles from an urban area or less than 2.5 miles from an urban cluster; distant territories (5 ≤ m ≤ 25 miles from an urban area, or 2.5 ≤ m ≤ 10 miles from an urban cluster); and remote territories (m ≥ 25 miles from an urban area, or m ≥ 10 miles from an urban cluster). A complete description follows in Table 4.

**Table 4: Rural Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCES's urban-centric locale categories, released in 2006</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fringe</td>
<td>Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distant</td>
<td>Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


What, then, constitutes a rural school or district? While there are several definitions of the term *rural*, Battelle for Kids (2016a), a national nonprofit organization committed to collaborating with school systems and communities to strengthen teaching and learning, states that "...it is fairly clear that rural should never mean a place that is not
yet urban" (p. 19). Curiously, almost ten years earlier, Monk (2007) similarly commented, that when the term "...rural is simply a catchword denoting everything that is not urban or metropolitan...[it] overlooks the complexity of rural communities and school districts, as well as the considerable variation within them" (p. 156). In her research, Kemp (2016) relied upon the NCES definition for rural locales (see Table 4), and cross-referenced this with the local codes for the midwestern state studied. Lamkin (2006), added another important caveat for researchers and leaders to reflect upon: "...the issue of "ruralness" needs to be distinguished from the issue of "smallness" among school districts" (p. 17). In his research, Monk (2007), highlighted the complexities of ruralness by sharing differing statistical evidence on both the numbers of students, staff and schools classified through rural status or enrollment status.

The United States’ population lives in 5.4% of the land (Kemp, 2016). According to the NCES, 49% of the nation’s school districts were classified as rural in 2002-03. In 2007, Monk stated, "These rural districts operated 24,350 schools, served more than 7.6 million students, and employed more than 523,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers" (p. 158). Focusing solely on the specific midwestern state that this researcher is studying, 70% of the state’s population is in 5% of the land area, and 77.6% of the state’s school districts are classified as town or rural districts. Within these town or rural districts, 41% of the student population is served (Kemp, 2016). This statistic almost identically aligns to the national statistic offered by Battelle for Kids (2016b). Battelle for Kids indicates rural schools serve to educate 40% of America’s students, yet receive only 22% of federal support. What’s more, "Only six percent of published research in K–12 school settings specifically address rural issues in a rural context" (Battelle for Kids, 2016a, p.
18). This lack of research leaves many unknowns surrounding rural school districts, the staff employed by them, and the students they serve. This dearth of information required me to define "ruralness" before reviewing the professional development and other needs of a rural school district and its staff. For the purposes of this research, the NCES definition is used to identify rural status.

**Challenges and Solutions for Rural Districts**

Rural schools provide several positives to enrolled students, including small class size, high levels of student-teacher rapport, and connectedness between the district and community (Hardre, 2008, p. 74). However, for each of the strengths associated with rural schools, lurks a deficit to rural school districts, which has the net effect of neutralizing the rural school or district. "Limited resources for educational materials, professional development, and technology put rural schools at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining teachers which, in turn, contributes to educators’ sense of ‘cultural and professional isolation’" (Hargreaves, Parsley & Cox, 2015, p. 308; Bryant, 2007, p. 9). Further, "The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are examples of requirements that the federal government places on schools with seemingly little thought about the effects on rural areas" (Bryant, 2007, p. 8). The passage of these two Acts is not inclusive of the many demands placed upon school districts by federal, state and local officials. Geographic isolation, as well as inadequate fiscal resources and professional capital in rural school districts, require purposeful action to comply with these demands and excel in teaching and learning. Research highlights two key strategies for addressing the challenges rural districts face: consolidation and partnership.
**Consolidation**

The first strategy, consolidation, has been highly controversial. Consolidation is a form of school district reorganization, the other types including creation, dissolution, and the transfer of territory. "School district consolidation may be initiated by the adoption of resolutions by two or more school boards stating that they will consider consolidating their school districts" (Pugh, 2015, p. 1). In a consolidation:

...the school districts that were consolidated cease to exist. Title to all property and the assets of the school districts become vested in the new consolidated district. Claims, obligations, and contracts of the school districts become claims, obligations, and contracts of the new consolidated school district. Employees of the school districts become employees of the new consolidated district. The new consolidated district assumes the rights and obligations of the consolidating districts under the provisions of any collective bargaining agreement that applies to these employees. (Pugh, 2015, p. 3)

In short, a consolidation is a merger of two or more districts. Though a solution to limited funding and resources, this option comes at a price: lost community identity and dynamics, anxiety, and even economic disruption. Several states have reviewed at the governmental level whether or not to consolidate small and rural districts into large districts. Proponents of school consolidation cite limited offerings, high per-pupil costs, declining enrollment and teacher shortages as reasons to consolidate. Bryant (2007), also cited a lack of community social services as a burden on local school districts, as this has the subsequent effect of requiring the school to provide these offerings. According to Woodrum (2004), rural school consolidation can lead to schools that offer more
specialized services, both academic and extracurricular, in a cost-effective manner. In short, consolidation may lead to sustainability that small, rural school districts would not find alone.

**Partnerships**

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) defined collaboration as partnerships working together through joint service efforts creating the "...ability to deliver services based on the total needs of clients" (p. 6). In 2009, Chance and Segura, found "The contexts of rural, small schools provide advantages for building trust and developing a collaborative approach to school improvement that makes sense to those in the community and to which teachers, students, parents, and others can become committed" (p. 11). Harmon (2017), writing for The Rural Educator, applied the findings of Chance and Segura’s (2009) work regarding collaborative approaches to school improvement to identify four types of partnerships. The first of these is a school-to-school partnership, followed by a school and university partnership, a school district-organization partnership, and finally a school and community partnership.

**School-to-School Partnerships.** School-to-school partnerships are defined as the intentional interactions among districts that lead to improvement, innovation, and subsequent change (Hargreaves, Parsley, and Cox, 2015). Hargreaves, Parsley, and Cox (2015) studied a school-to-school partnership known as the Northwest Rural Innovation and Student Engagement Network. They found that professional capital and student engagement and achievement can be increased through the sharing of resources (p. 307). Muijs (2015), examined the impact of collaboration between schools and the conditions under which collaboration in rural areas is likely to be successful. Three key findings
emerge from his research. First, there is a positive relationship between collaboration and student achievement. Secondly, three key cultural conditions need to be met to ensure success (trust, clear goals, and mutual wins). Finally, he identified the difficulties of rural partnerships related to size and distance (p. 294). From this research, Muijs further delineated six levels within the school-to-school partnership:

1. Networks where strong schools support weak schools
2. Networks where small schools share resources
3. Networks of schools to support transitions between schools (i.e. elementary to middle, middle to high)
4. Networks of schools with similar ideologies
5. Networks of schools with specialty schools
6. "Academy chains" (i.e., charter schools) (p. 296).

Hargreaves, Parsley, and Cox (2015) explained the importance of school-to-school partnerships or networks by stating:

Schools are geographically disconnected. Attracting good teachers to rural communities is extremely challenging. Keeping them in those communities is more challenging still. So too is connecting teachers across many different rural communities. One way to combat this isolation is by establishing professional networks of connected leaders that can support fellow teachers to succeed and also to stay in rural schools and communities. (p. 307).

The trio also declared the importance of establishing a mission and purpose early in the planning stage as a mechanism, "[That] helps to establish a network’s identity, build shared ownership among participants, and develop a positive network culture" (p. 312).
Beyond this, the researchers found indicators of successful networks to include: establishing shared goals and a clear needs-based focus, determining who is invited to the table, creating effective networking activities, exuding inspiring leadership, and sharing resources and costs.

**School-to-University Partnerships.** Typically, these partnerships are formal relationships that involve some written agreement and have the consent and support of the educational leader from both the primary and secondary school system(s). School-to-university "[p]artnerships hold promise for helping schools improve. They can bring expertise, knowledge, and other resources to the schools, and they can help the schools overcome a range of obstacles to building capacity for change" (Wohlstetter and Smith, 2006, p. 467). Though writing from the perspective of charter school development, the researchers make a case regarding the benefits of external partnerships. "Strong partnerships that sustain themselves over time exist when the partner organizations and the schools share common goals or have common philosophical approaches to education" (Wohlstetter and Smith, 2006, p. 467).

The benefits associated with school-to-university partnerships span from the operational level of organization, political and financial opportunities, to building-level advantages inclusive of curriculum enhancement, professional development enrichment, and student gains. Amey, Eddy and Ozaki (2007) relay the benefits to students through distance learning, however there exists a dearth of studies that investigate specifically the School-to-university partnership concerning professional learning. Rather most studies focus on pre-service teacher development (Breault, 2010; Darling Hammond, 1996; Libler, 2010; Snow et al., 2016; Teitel, 1997).
School District and Organization Partnerships. District-organization partnerships focus attention on a specific issue or provide support for a specific need. In the rural school population, several of these partnerships exist. Most are between regional education service agencies (Harmon, 2017; Green, 2013) or an organization named Battelle for Kids which is a non-profit agency "committed to empowering teachers, developing leaders, and improving school systems to realize the power and promise of 21st century learning for every student" (Battelle for Kids, n.d.c., p. 1) and one or more school districts. They are often referred to as Rural Education Collaboratives (RECs) and meet their goals by, "...collaborating with school systems to solve problems, develop and pilot big ideas that will offer new opportunities for students, and deliver resources and support every step of the way" (Battelle for Kids, n.d.c., p. 1). Through resource sharing, curriculum design, and best practices, RECs "strive to increase educational opportunity and raise the quality of education in rural areas" (Battelle for Kids, 2016a, p. 9). Battelle for Kids also states:

Many collaboratives are formed to develop common processes involving curriculum, assessment, and staff development. Some have worked to create coherence across curriculum, instruction, and assessments to meet state standards. Others have researched, identified, and implemented best practices. (Battelle for Kids, 2016a, p. 9)

Supovitz, & Christman (2003) found positive effects in the culture of schools and relationships among staff through school district-organization partnerships. They also found that instructional culture that is the relationship between teacher practices and student achievements, was impacted positively by specific instructional initiatives.
Benefits specific to rural districts cited by Battelle for Kids (2016b) include offering a "viable way to overcome a deficit mindset often held by policymakers and rural educators themselves," (p. 4); creating personalized learning opportunities; and adapting funding and policy to the strengths and needs of rural schools. Born out of necessity, partnerships can have the positive impact of reducing costs, increasing resources and talent, incorporating services impossible on their own, and ultimately providing districts with the opportunity to increase efficiencies.

Battelle for Kids (2016a) cites three RECs located in the midwest. The first, found in southeastern Ohio, is formed of 27 rural school districts, and Battelle for Kids. Named the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative (OAC), it states it is:

a group of like-minded school districts that have joined forces to implement educational innovations, share and generate resources, influence local, regional and federal education and economic policy, and build a community that encourages rural prosperity in Appalachian Ohio. The OAC was established in 2010 as a partnership between rural Appalachian districts and Battelle for Kids to design, implement and support an innovative approach to transforming rural education. (Battelle for Kids, n.d.b, p. 1)

The OAC follows suit with the traditional indicators found among RECs; indicating it serves a high number of students with disabilities and students with low socioeconomic status. The OAC also reported that limited financial and human resources create difficulties in preparing students for success after high school. Lastly, the OAC indicates the, "...Appalachian region faces challenges of an under-educated population and a lack of high-paying jobs to keep educated citizens in the area" (Battelle for Kids,
This partnership appears to have two main areas of focus: preparing students for the future and providing an online professional learning community to assist teachers in collaborating and learning with teachers that may reside in geographically restricted areas.

The second REC located in the midwest is that of the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative (IASC). Located in Minnesota, the IASC encompasses seven school districts and one community college and spans 3500 square miles. Unique to this collaborative is their governance structure, which follows a joint powers agreement, establishing its own set of governing policies and strategic plan. This collaborative has, in fact, been assigned a separate school district number in the state of Minnesota (M. Grose, personal communication, August 15, 2016), creating further differential from the study at hand. The overarching goal of this collaborative is to increase educational opportunities for students (Itasca Area Schools Collaborative, n.d., p. 1).

The final midwestern REC mentioned in the Battelle for Kids (2016a) study is the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WiRSA), which was established in 2010. While the WiRSA has hosted an annual conference for nearly the past decade to address rural school and community issues, this collaborative differs greatly from the aforementioned collaboratives in several ways, beginning with the purpose. The primary purpose of WiRSA is to advocate for rural schools at the state capitol. The second greatest difference is found by reviewing the membership roster which consists of 125 of 424 of the state’s public school districts (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2016); ten of twelve Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESAs); eleven universities or technical colleges; fifteen associate members which includes organizations and
businesses; and 19 individual parent or community memberships (Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance, n.d.). In conjunction with the varied membership categories, membership to this collaborative is also fee-based.

**School District and Community Partnership.** This type of partnership addresses challenges and opportunities in society (Harmon, 2017, p. 2; Chance, 1999). This type of partnership is "essential if the community is to implement a community development initiative that addresses challenges and opportunities in an increasingly globalized society" (p. 2). Harmon and Schafft (2009), "...argue that enlightened educational leadership that seriously takes into account the 21st Century needs of students – as well as the communities in which they reside – cannot help but interpret academic and community improvement goals as mutually reinforcing priorities" (p. 4). By working together, the community and school districts will be able to meet goals supportive of district students and staff, and the community itself. Harmon and Schafft proceed to state, "Leaders of school districts and schools in rural places need a clear vision of a mutually beneficial, collaborative school-community building process" (2009, p. 5). They incorporate the work of Chance (1999) to provide a rationale for why this process is essential:

(The) level of mutual collaboration, and the degree of intensity, found between the school and the community directly reflects on the success of both. In truth, a collaborative school and community represent a ‘greater’ community. This greater community epitomizes people who share a common core of values regarding the young people of that community and their potential future. (p. 231)
An example of this type of partnership is the Senior Tax Exchange Program (STEP), which provides an opportunity for eligible senior citizens or retirees to work in districts in exchange for a property tax rebate credit, which helps to reduce their property tax bills. Benefits to this school-community partnership span from the volunteer themselves to students, staff, and ultimately the community. Beyond tax relief, volunteers gain a sense of purpose; students gain intergenerational experience and have positive role models and support; teachers obtain assistance in extending learning opportunities and can showcase what they do in the classroom.

As is demonstrated by the above real-life example, Harmon and Schafft (2009) point out research that well-developed school district-community partnerships "show[ ] significant community economic benefits associated with public schools" (p. 5). They further tie their research to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) administrative standards, which are the standards by which educators studying to become principals and building and district leaders are judged. A list of the ISLLC Standards and Related Community Development Questions can be found in the appendix.

**Rural Education Summary**

This section defined rural territories as fringe, distant or remote in terms of distance from an urbanized area or urban cluster and specified that this study relies upon the NCES definition of the term rural. This section further identified how important rural schools are to our nation’s children and what challenges they face. Beyond these challenges, rural schools have opportunities available to navigate a changing educational landscape and create communities of success for their staff and students. These opportunities come in the form of consolidation and partnerships. Further, four distinct
categories can be used to distinguish partnerships; they are school-to-school partnerships, school-to-university partnerships, school district-to-organization partnerships, and school district-to-community partnerships. Working in a partnership can focus staff by rallying around a theme of instructional improvement. To empower staff and subsequently reach students, leaders must provide appropriate structures, strategies and supports (Supovitz, & Christman (2003, p. 8). Additionally, utilizing these collaborative opportunities may improve positive effects in school culture and relationships. Small districts and schools have a great need to nurture these collaboratives and create deep thinking about teaching, through intentional efforts and support. It is important to note that the types of partnerships are not isolated, and oftentimes more than one partnership will be observed in a single collaborative effort.

**Conclusion**

As stated, challenges exist for all schools given the extraordinary demands placed on districts and schools regarding educational reform. However, these challenges become further exasperated by adding the dimension of capacity. Specifically, rural schools and districts are faced with the additional burden of fulfilling all state, federal and local reforms, with limited human and social capital and lesser financial resources.

Starting globally, and then zooming in, approximately 50% of the world’s population lives in just a single percent of the landmass; the United States population lives in 5.4% of the land; and 70% of Wisconsin’s population lives in 5% of the land areas (Galka, n.d.). Rural school districts are defined both by their proximity to urban centers and by their population. Using the definition by the National Center for Education Statistics, there are 329 rural school districts, representing 77.6% of
Wisconsin’s districts, whereas only representing 41% of Wisconsin’s student enrollment (NCES, n.d., a). "According to the Wisconsin State Journal, rural school districts from 2000 to 2010, suffered a 7.5 percent enrollment decline and were penalized by the state’s revenue caps, which are tied to enrollment. While public school funding for rural schools declines, costs continue to increase: property insurance, transportation, and contracts for health insurance, food services, fuel purchases, water, electric and Internet." (Francois & Wittwer, 2015, p. 1). In making a case for rural schools, approximately 67% of town and/or rural district enrollment has declined, and of these, nearly 30% decreased by 10% or more. Given these startling statistics, capacity issues at varying levels must be addressed head-on, and yet there remains a gap in the research concerning how specifically rural schools and districts can maximize resources and work together to create valuable and impactful professional learning opportunities for staff.

While professional development can help to transform education, there is still much to learn about how professional development in rural districts can be optimized for sustainable and scalable growth. This includes incorporating opportunities for professional learning during the work day, creating leadership opportunities for educators and recognizing their contributions and development, partnering with universities or colleges, and adding accountability measures for educators and their peers.

The three lead researchers in the field cited found that effective professional learning is based on goal alignment at all levels of a district: from the very foundation of the district vision and mission to the individual needs of the students served by the district. Further, leadership that cultivates and empowers students and staff will be the
most impactful. Coupled, goal alignment and leadership will develop and create organic learning opportunities that meet the needs of the organization.

These researchers are supported by others, including Hirsh (2015) and Pierce (2016) who identify the need for sustained professional development versus single-shot efforts and professional learning that is both personalized and evidence-based.

This chapter examined professional learning from various standpoints to ensure the reader possesses a clear understanding of its definition; exploring why professional learning is necessary and its transformation; identifying characteristics of both ineffective and effective professional development; and recognizing challenges for rural districts and schools and advice for school leaders.

The case has been made for further research regarding professional learning in rural schools and how these institutions, and the staff employed by them, can successfully respond to policy changes, legislative initiatives and emerging research on teaching and learning. The next chapter will outline the methodology used to design and implement this study to respond to the questions posed in Chapter One.
Chapter 3

Successful partnerships develop in response to needs identified by practicing teachers for their specific classrooms and curricula. ~ Debra Tomanek, American Society for Cell Biology

Restatement of the Problem

The focus of this research is to explore teacher perceptions of the impact on teachers of a professional learning opportunity that will be offered through an educational partnership. Specifically, the research questions are:

1. How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a partnership model?

2. How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?

3. How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning opportunities they have experienced outside of the partnership?

Context

As long as educational reform exists, so, too, will professional development as the vehicle for helping institute change. In this research, the value of the Professional Learning Partnership (PLP)—hereby known as the Alajuela Partnership—is studied. This study takes place in a rural midwestern state and initially included five rural K–8 school districts, each with a population of fewer than 500 students. All five districts are located within 20 miles of each other. A small liberal arts university, located nearby, is
the sixth member of the partnership which is at the center of this research. Though each of the participating organizations has its own goals, mission, and vision, collectively they are all working to improve instruction in English language arts. While my district was also part of the Professional Learning Partnership that was studied, due to my role, and the possibility of skewing the data, educators in my district were not included in the interview portion of the study.

**District History and Movement**

Throughout this project, the landscape of the districts involved changed significantly. I share the information here to provide context to the reader. When the partnership began, five districts and the University formed the collaborative in 2015. This make-up did not last long, however. After one year of the partnership, three of the districts consolidated. This consolidation did not change the desire of the districts to work together, but it did reduce the partnership to a relationship between three school districts and the University.

I originally intended to interview the district administrators for each partner district. However, this was omitted from the study because the district administrator who had worked in two of the districts that consolidated vacated the position after being hired by a larger, neighboring district. This vacancy resulted in a new district administrator being hired by the newly consolidated district. This district administrator did not have the background knowledge of why the collaborative relationship was established.

The consolidation and the removal of my district, Miramar, resulted in two districts from which interview data was collected: Limon and Jaco. A graphic of the changing dynamics of the districts involved, Figure 1, shows the composition of the
original five districts, the districts after consolidation, and the districts that are included in this study. All teachers participating in this study are identified according to current district assignment.

**Figure 1: Districts & Buildings Metamorphosis**

**Districts & Buildings Prior to Consolidation**

**Districts:**

- A*
- B
- C
- D
- E

**Buildings:**

- (4K-2)
- (3-8)
- (4K-8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Buildings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4K-2, 3-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>4K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>4K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>4K-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The researcher’s district

**Districts & Buildings After Consolidation**

**Districts:**

- A*
- B
- C**

**Buildings:**

- (4K-2)
- (3-8)
- (4K-8)
- (5-8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Buildings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4K-2, 3-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C**</td>
<td>4K-4, 5-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The researcher’s district

** District “C” is a combination of Districts C, D, and E from above
Characteristics of the districts that were included in the study are represented in Table 5. These characteristics show the homogeneity of the districts regarding ethnicity and the relatively small size of each of the districts. Of interest is that of the districts studied, one has a low socioeconomic imbalance, while the second, more rural district, has a significantly higher level of students participating in the national free and reduced lunch program. Both districts are performing well academically, meeting Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).

Table 5: School District Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>School District B - Jaco</th>
<th>School District C - Limon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide Title</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Enrollment Net + or -</td>
<td>+157</td>
<td>-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Population</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square Miles</td>
<td>22.83</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (Caucasian)</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>14:1</td>
<td>12:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Community Dynamics

To understand the communities that the partnership is serving, several areas are explored. First, community demographics are shared, followed by political information to understand the conservative nature of the communities. Not surprising given the topic of research, each of the communities except for the University community is classified as rural. The University town is represented by "San Jose." Through the consolidation and omission of my district, only two districts are involved in the study; however, the consolidated school district spans multiple communities and is therefore cited as Limon1, Limon2, and Limon3. All communities are relatively comparable in size except for Limon2, which is significantly smaller, and San Jose, which is larger than the other communities; the populations correspond to the sizes of each community, with Miramar4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher FTE²</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>35.35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator FTE</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Pupil Cost</td>
<td>$9,539</td>
<td>$9,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F/R Lunch</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AYP (2015/16)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English language arts Scores</strong></td>
<td>Student Ach. 44.5/50, Student Growth 49.2/50, Reducing Gaps 43.9/50</td>
<td>44% Prof/Adv³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mathematics Scores</strong></td>
<td>Student Ach. 43.4/50, Student Growth 39.7/50, Reducing Gaps 40.8/50</td>
<td>44% Prof/Adv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² Teacher FTE includes Classroom Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Counselor, Speech Pathologist and Reading Specialists
³ The breakdown of data is unavailable for this district given its newly formed status.
⁴ The researcher’s district.
representing the largest school district. Each of the communities has very low poverty rates, is predominately white, and all but Limon₂ have a majority of households with two-parent families. The median household income of the original communities is approximately $70,000 with the Limon School Districts falling short of this average. All communities have average household sizes comparable to the state, with Limon₁ and Limon₃ significantly higher. Table 6 further summarizes the similarities and differences among each of the communities in which the districts researched reside.

**Table 6: Community Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Jaco</th>
<th>Limon₁</th>
<th>Limon₂</th>
<th>Limon₃</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>3,790</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>2,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square Miles</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>36.41</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>102.2/sq mi</td>
<td>33.2/sq mi</td>
<td>1,103.8/sq mi</td>
<td>58.1/sq mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. Household size</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$74,875</td>
<td>$49,938</td>
<td>$50,167</td>
<td>$54,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Families below poverty line</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: % White</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
<td>99.59% White</td>
<td>97.2% White</td>
<td>98.7% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 2-parent families</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*U.S. Census Bureau (2010).*
The school districts span two counties with the University situated in a third. A review of 2012 and 2016 election data yields conservative values reflected in voting patterns. Though voting patterns are typically republican, or conservative, a majority of school district referendum questions were passed. School districts may choose to go to referendum during an election, giving citizens a choice to support their local schools. When school districts choose to go to referendum, they can ask questions of the community residents to issue-debt, or approve recurring or non-recurring referenda. Recurring referenda permanently add to the tax levy, while non-recurring referenda are short-term borrowing solutions that expire after a set number of years. As evidenced by election data, while all three counties vote conservatively, their passage of referenda indicates high community support for schools.

The Partnership

The Alajuela Partnership, a pseudonym being used to provide anonymity, consists of five school districts and liberal arts university. This partnership took shape initially to serve the purpose of providing a high-quality professional learning opportunity for teachers in the area of English language arts. This professional learning was done in the form of a recurring three-day Summer Institute occurring in the summer of 2015 and 2016, held at one of the participating districts during June. Following the Summer Institutes and during the school year itself, the reading specialists acted as coaches for the teachers involved. Though this has been a three-year process, only the first two years are being studied due to my desire to determine the perceived impact of the first two years of professional learning on educators in their classrooms. The first Summer Institute focused on a Writers’ Workshop, and the second Summer Institute focused on a Readers’
Workshop. Each Summer Institute involved direct instruction, time to practice, collaboration, group work, and journaling.

Though mandatory, the districts collectively determined to offer teachers participating in the training one of three incentives. The first incentive was using the professional learning in-service days as part of the 191-day teaching contract (to earn a full salary for districts that had flex days in contracts). The second option was a stipend (earning an hourly wage for participating in each hour of the professional learning; the actual dollar amount varied by district). The final incentive option was reimbursement for up to three graduate credits taken for the professional learning (educators wishing to earn credits for participation in the professional learning could have this fee paid by the school district). For their part, the college ensured event publicity and organized all facets of college credit and coursework, inclusive of onsite representation during the Summer Institute. Together, to overcome geographic limitations, the Alajuela Partnership members used a video conferencing tool, Google Hangouts, multiple times to organize the three-day in-service.

The mission of the college participating in the partnership, as it pertains to the partnership, is to provide customized, collaborative professional development opportunities. The college, home to fewer than 10,000 students, employs just under 500 faculty, and offers 70 undergraduate majors, 22 master's degree programs, and a handful of doctoral degrees.

The school board of the largest K8 school district, Miramar, approved of the Alajuela Partnership and acted as the fiscal agent. Membership in the Alajuela Partnership provided access to graduate programs for teachers employed by the K8
school districts, at a reduced cost. Membership also provided opportunities for the K8 district to propose courses for graduate level credit, offer credits at a reduced rate, and afford teachers access to credits counting toward either license renewal or salary increases.

**Professional Development Design**

The objective of the professional development partnership was to assist the districts in meeting their professional development goals as well as meeting the vision of the districts and enhancing student learning. In the case of this research, the direct goal was to improve English language arts instruction. This was a multi-year endeavor with the first year focusing on Writers’ Workshop and the second year focusing on Readers’ Workshop with the goal of providing educators with the information necessary to implement both Writers’ and Readers’ Workshop models for all learners for students in grades K–8 based on the work of Lucy Calkins and the Columbia Teachers College. Various topics were covered during this institute, and a variety of teaching strategies were employed. The topics included workshop and balanced literacy overview; units of study; three types of writing: narrative, informational, argument or opinion; strategy groups and partnerships; and on-demand writing assessments. The strategies used were: mini-lessons; conferring; mentor texts; anchor charts; writing notebooks and writing samples; writing toolkits; and anecdotal notes. In addition to instruction by high-quality presenters, time was provided for participants to engage in the writing of mini-lessons and to practice the art of conferring.

Year two of the partnership was, again, a three-day Summer Institute, focusing on the reading aspect of the Columbia Teachers College workshop model. Topics for this
training included: the components of a literacy block, mini-lessons, conferring, leveled texts, and the workshop environment. Due to this session being a follow-up to the year one training, it focused on specific areas of the Readers’ Workshop to help lift the level of teaching and learning for those educators who have experience with workshop.

It is important to note that although all districts were involved in the two-year professional learning opportunity, each of the districts was at a different place in the implementation process. The largest district, Miramar, was preparing for initial implementation. The second largest district, Jaco, was a few years into the process: having implemented the Writers’ Workshop three years before the development of the Alajuela Partnership and the Readers’ Workshop two years before the development of the Alajuela Partnership. The remaining district, Limon, had implemented the workshop model, but not all teachers had received training.

**Research Design**

Empirical research involves drawing conclusions based on existing data; interpretive research relies on drawing meaning from, and making connections to, information shared by people in order to surface themes from the narratives (Holloway, 1997; Malterud, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This study focused on understanding the ways teachers interpret, perceive, and make sense of the professional development offered through the Alajuela Partnership, and subsequently alter their professional practices; it, therefore, drew upon the latter research method (Holloway, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Though various types of interpretive research are possible, given the intended outcomes and goals, I feel that educator interviews will yield the most effective means of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The reason this is valuable is that
interviewing candidates will allow me to collect the perspectives and stories of the various participants, and determine teacher’s perceptions of the impact of the professional learning opportunity offered through the partnership on the behavior and practices of the educator and on the school or district culture.

I will explore the Alajuela Partnership through the lens of Darling-Hammond and Fullan to determine the perception of job-embeddedness, teacher inclusion, networking, and sustainability. Additionally, questions specific to the research of Kirkpatrick (1994) and Guskey (2000) assessing all five levels of professional development evaluation will be explored to assist me in determining the success of the Alajuela Partnership in the eyes of the interview subjects. Fullan’s research on goal alignment and leadership presence and support will also be evaluated as part of the interviews. Research on rural teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of these partnerships will be studied to address the gap in existing research and to provide insights into how rural districts can successfully respond to policy changes, legislative initiatives, and emerging research on teaching and learning.

**Participants and Selection**

The participants in this study were teachers from the Alajuela Partnership districts, and each volunteered to be in the study. Distribution across both districts and grade level bands was assured. Due to the size of each of the participating school districts, and the limited pool of potential research participants, I worked to purposefully identify criteria in which research participants would be randomly selected by their district administrators. Three criteria for inclusion in the study were defined. First, teacher representatives at each grade band level were desired (K–1, 2–4, and 5–8). Second, all teachers recommended for inclusion in the interviews must have participated
in both the Writers’ and the Readers’ workshop training. Lastly, the teachers must be English language arts teachers, as this is the foundation of this professional learning.

Three teachers from each district were selected as participants in the research.

The first criterion, teacher representation across grade levels, was selected to monitor the difference in presenters at the institute and therefore potentially different experiences for participating teachers, as well as different needs or focuses of the various grade level bands. The second criterion, participating in both trainings offered, enabled me to draw conclusions about the consistency of the professional learning, ensured the educator had the time to learn, process, implement and reflect on their teaching following the training, and accounted for teacher consistency to draw both achievement solutions and administrative commentary. Finally, since the professional learning revolved around the implementation of the Columbia Teachers’ College Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop curricula, it followed that teachers being interviewed as part of this study must be English language arts teachers.

To ensure random selection of participants, I provided a list of criteria to the district administrators of each participant school district. In turn, the Jaco district administrator supplied me with an Excel file containing a list of ten potential participants, each identified with a number between one and ten and their corresponding grade level. I then used a random number generator to select a candidate from each of the three grade band levels. I emailed the Jaco district administrator requesting contact information for the corresponding candidates and subsequently received it and contacted each participant.

The process with the Limon school district was not as simple. One of the Limon administrators emailed me a list of four names and their corresponding contact
information; these were the only four candidates in the district that (nearly) met the criteria I had laid out. Because there were only four potential candidates, I contacted each of them. Three of the referred candidates responded indicating an interest to participate in the study; the fourth candidate did not respond to any of the three attempts at contact. This is a struggle with a rural district; with the three criteria established there was difficulty finding suitable candidates. Because of the size of the district, I had to change the criteria in order to find enough representation from the Limon School District. Of the three candidates who responded to my contact, there was no one to represent the 2–4 grade band. This required me to alter the criteria and incorporate a reading specialist who works with grades 2–4, but brings a different lens due to her role.

Once all six candidates had been determined, I contacted each of the candidates through email. The email reviewed the purpose of the study and how it will be reported, the selection criteria and the IRB consent form, potential research benefits or drawbacks, and confidentiality. I then arranged an individual, initial meeting with the six selected participants. The interview meeting included a review of the study details; explained their role in the study; reframed my position in terms of the study, versus my profession; and gained consent.

Table 7 below provides the reader with background information about each of the interview participants. This information is intended to assist the reader in developing an understanding of each participant, and the similarities and differences among them. All participants were white females with an average age of 47, and median age of 49.5. The average number of years of teaching was 15, median years of teaching was 14; and the average years employed by the same district was 12, with a median of 9 years of
employment in the same district, indicating extremely high district loyalty. Half of the candidates possess or were working toward an advanced degree. Further, though the state in which this study took place recently approved of lifetime licenses, a majority of the candidates interviewed previously had the option to take six credits or complete a Professional Development Plan (PDP) for license renewal, while two only had the option to complete a PDP. Only one educator in this study utilized the Professional Learning Partnership option for credits toward licensure renewal or salary advancement, while a second coached and mentored those teachers who did take the credit option through the partnership. Lastly, five of the six interview candidates participated in an additional workshop training at Columbia University Teachers College in New York prior to participating in the professional development studied here. The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) offers four summer institutes annually, two in reading and two in writing. "Each of these is led by world-renowned teacher-educators from the Project...Institutes include keynotes, small and large group sections, and sometimes involve work in exemplar schools" (TCRWP, 2017, p. 12).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Candidate Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Band Level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Current District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>License Renewal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Self-Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership Credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia Teachers College Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have worked with the educators in the various districts previously through professional learning, as well as through grant and consortium work. In this sense, the educators participating in the study have some prior knowledge of who I am. However, I do not personally know, nor could I identify the staff beyond the administration and reading specialists.

⁵ Did not take this for credit, but supported teachers who did use the credit option through the partnership.
Data Collection Procedures

I will conduct two sets of semi-structured one-on-one interviews to unfold the stories of each of the interview subjects. The first interview will be held in person. Interview candidates will be given a choice of how to participate in the second interview: in person, via "Google Hangout," or by telephone. Each of these interviews will be voice recorded and transcribed.

The first interview will be highly prescriptive and contain a greeting, context and information regarding the purpose of the study, and a series of interview questions developed to gain insight into the research questions. I will also leave time for follow-up questions on any compelling or vague statements made by the interview subjects. The second interview will include a greeting, overview of the interview, opportunity for the interviewee to ask questions, follow-up on the previous interview by me, time for the new set of interview questions, and a review of the process at the conclusion of the interview.

Though the theme of the questions will remain focused on the research questions, the type of interview questions introduced will vary according to the role of the person being interviewed. This will allow me to draw conclusions regarding the evaluation of, and what constitutes, effective professional learning (Guskey, 1995, 2003, 2016; Guskey & Sparks, 1991; Kirkpatrick, 1994). Taken together, the intent behind all of the interviews is to validate perceptions and effectiveness of the professional development, and assist in making determinations about its impact on the educators. Interview subjects will also be asked to indicate their perceptions of the effectiveness of ongoing professional learning, which will take the form of coaching. Open-ended questions will be included to gain specific feedback regarding the professional development.
First Interview

All interviews will be held in a location that is convenient to the interviewee and helps to put them at ease and make them comfortable. This will most likely be in a school setting. Approximately two hours will be allocated for each interview. Questions will attempt to identify the educator’s perceptions about the impact of the partnership on their teaching. Questions will be aligned with the theories of each of the professional development researchers. Darling-Hammond’s research on job-embedded practices, networking and individualized professional learning will be addressed; Fullan’s theories on coaching and mentoring will be analyzed; and Guskey’s tiers of evaluation will be utilized to ensure that the professional learning is embedded and individualized.

Potential questions will include:

- A series of questions to collect demographic data;
- Perceptions of the professional development program: Perceived effectiveness of the partnership; What elements were least/most effective;
- Goals the teacher had for the professional learning and if/how the professional learning met the teachers’ needs as an educator;
- How the professional learning provided through the partnership impacted the teacher’s teaching;
- Differences between previous professional learning opportunities and the professional learning offered through the partnership;
- Ideas for improving the professional development offered through the Alajuela Partnership;
- Transparency of the partnership;
• Alignment to district goals.

Second Interview

A second interview was held with each of the interview subjects 1.5–2 months following the first interview based upon the candidate’s availability to meet. The purpose of this interview was to verify the accuracy of notes and responses from the first interview and to follow-up or seek clarification on any looming questions. I, again, included questions about Darling-Hammond’s theories regarding job-embeddedness of professional learning, networking and sustainability and Fullan’s theories regarding teacher inclusion. Additionally, I evaluated the professional learning using Guskey’s five levels of evaluation, but included specific questions from the research of Kirkpatrick, which was the basis of Guskey’s five levels.

I shared the transcript via a Google document with each of the interview participants so that the transcript and notes could be reviewed at their leisure before the second meeting. The ability to review the transcript afforded the subjects the opportunity to confirm the information attained, or to comment on its accuracy, leading to edits by me. All second interviews were held in a location that was convenient to the interviewee or via Google Hangouts. As in the first interview, approximately two hours were allocated.

Potential questions included:

• Follow-up questions from the first interview.
• How do teachers report the ways rural partnerships affect professional growth?
• How do teachers perceive district leadership impact this partnership?
How does this partnership and the professional learning offered through it support district goals?

Did the educator grow professionally due to the partnership’s professional development?

How valuable is the partnership?

If/how the educator’s behaviors changed due to the partnership’s professional development.

The impact of the partnership’s professional development on building and district culture.

Perceptions of teacher involvement in the professional development process.

Value of continuing professional development.

Sustainability of professional development.

Impact of leadership on professional development supported by the partnership.

Goal alignment and the partnership.

Embeddedness of partnership learning and networking in the teacher’s daily instructional and professional routines

Evidence of Quality

Throughout this study, I worked to establish trust with the interview subjects to ensure honest and truthful interview responses. I conducted a member check or received informant feedback by sending each interview candidate their transcripts for review. I
listened to suggestions the interviewees had to offer and incorporated these as appropriate. I hoped to gain insights regarding strengths and weaknesses of the partnership, in addition to the impact the partnership professional learning had on each of the involved educators, as well as the perceived impact on each of the districts.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In reviewing and analyzing the data, various steps were employed. A transcription service was used to help accurately transcribe each of the interviews and the agency agreed to confidentiality and non-disclosure. Upon transcription, I used open coding initially and then theory-based coding to determine emerging themes. The data was reviewed until no new additional data was found that could be categorized any further whilst still adding meaning (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/2017). I analyzed the data both within the participants, as well as across the participants, recognizing that the data analysis and study itself, is complicated due to rural issues such as human capital and finding individuals who met all of the criteria for participation.

I checked the study data against the themes originating from Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey to guide the data analysis process. Fullan’s (2001) findings on leadership and collaboration extending from professional development; Darling-Hammond and Richardson’s (2009) focus on the impact of professional development related to context, support, and system change; Guskey’s (2014, 2016) expansion on repetition, sustainability and follow-through of professional development, and linkage to student learning outcomes, all of which lead to purpose, cohesiveness and direction (2014, p. 12). These and other emergent themes will subsequently create a narrative describing the experiences of the participants, their motivation and thought-processes and
perceived impact on their teaching. The stories will be woven together based on commonalities and differences noted in the coded documents.

**Limitations**

The following are limitations for the proposed study:

1. Due to the type of data collected, it is assumed that respondents engaged in honest dialogue with me.

2. Sample Size and Comparability: Five districts were involved in the Alajuela Partnership at the onset. This involvement changed to three districts after consolidation occurred among participating districts. Further, partnership data was not collected for use in the study from my own district due to the potential conflict of interest. This lack of inclusion further decreased the sample size, but also removed the opportunity to draw comparisons about how the partnership impacted districts at different stages of Workshop Implementation.

Even with the above-listed limitations, the findings from this study may lead to solutions to rural issues of human, social, and financial capital, and become a guide for those individuals charged with planning impactful professional learning for staff, or creating collaborative opportunities for professional growth and development.
Chapter 4

This study followed the paths of two districts, Limon and Jaco, participating in the Alajuela Professional Learning Partnership, a partnership that included a third district not studied, and a University that served as the higher education member of the partnership. The Alajuela Partnership was the entity responsible for planning the Summer Institute, the vehicle used to train teachers in the operations of the Lucy Calkins Columbia Teachers College Readers’ & Writers’ Workshop. A total of six candidates were interviewed; three from each of the two districts. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a partnership model?
2. How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?
3. How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning opportunities they have experienced outside of the partnership?

This model is represented in the graphic below:
Chapter 4 will introduce each of the six candidates interviewed and organize the interview findings by responding to each research question. Each research question will be addressed by identifying relevant themes that emerge and are supported by direct quotes from the interview candidates. Each theme will be discussed and further supported by extracts from the interviews in order to represent and tell the story of each of the interview participants. It is important to note that while all significant themes will be reviewed, not all the themes that emerged are directly relevant to addressing the three research questions. They are included here because they were significant to the candidates and helped to shed light on the perceived value of the Partnership. Examples
of themes that could apply to any professional development, but will be discussed as themes that were significant to the interview candidates include quality of leadership, relationships formed among Partnership colleagues, sustained implementation, and coaching. A summary for each research question will be included and an overarching summary will conclude the chapter.

The Candidates

Chapter three introduced a table describing information about each of the six candidates interviewed for this research. The table is reprinted below to provide the reader with a reminder of the backgrounds of the interview participants including the characteristics of each participant, as well as the similarities and differences among the participants. Following this table, each of the six candidates is further explored in depth.

**Table 7: Candidate Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Candidate 1: Lucy</th>
<th>Candidate 2: Bella</th>
<th>Candidate 3: Beth</th>
<th>Candidate 4: Lizzy</th>
<th>Candidate 5: Aria</th>
<th>Candidate 6: Betty</th>
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<td>Limon</td>
<td>Jaco</td>
<td>Jaco</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>Years in Current District</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Lucy

Lucy was the only interview candidate to be a second career educator and at age 58, the elder of two quinquagenarians involved in the study. Lucy completed the Summer Institute trainings while also teaching summer school for her home district. In order to make-up the institute time missed due to her teaching of summer school, Lucy collaborated outside the institute’s scheduled hours with colleagues regarding the Summer Institute objectives. After graduating as a nontraditional student from an education program with her teacher’s license, Lucy began her teaching career as a

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6 Did not take this for credit, but supported teachers who did use the credit option through the partnership.
substitute teacher before being hired by what is now the Limon School District. Her
teaching experience has been predominantly at the middle school level and primarily
math, though she teaches language arts given the multiple hats worn in a small district.
Lucy has been teaching less than the median years for the group of educators studied.

Throughout both interviews, Lucy used phrases that indicated her appreciation for
work in her building and feelings of genuine team spirit within and among her teaching
colleagues. She also expressed frustration for a lack of leadership, lack of professional
development opportunities offered at her school, and difficulty in finding the time and
fellow colleagues with whom to collaborate due to the district’s small size. Lucy also
indicated that she did not feel there was a significant amount of parental support and
related this to the need for teachers to do more to motivate students.

Lucy’s overall perceptions of the professional learning partnership were positive.
She indicated that it was rejuvenating, presenters were knowledgeable, and she enjoyed
the opportunity to talk to people outside of her coworkers about a common theme. Lucy
offered a few minor recommendations to improve the Summer Institute: who to sit with
and when to hold the institute. Her comments follow, "Have the eighth grade teachers sit
together. Don’t let us sit together with our friends...force [us] to be with [ ]our grade
level and get outside of [ ]our normal work group." Lucy also stated, "I would like this
more in the end of August when I am really pumped, I am ready to get back to this now,
and when I go into the classroom it is all fresh in my mind."

Lucy’s main critique revolved around the need for more input from teachers in
planning the Summer Institute. She also offered a second measure relating to ownership
and accountability, and perhaps extension to sustaining the professional learning:
Another suggestion too would be perhaps asking everyone to bring something that they want to share to get, because we go there and we get the presenter’s ideas and sometimes we may have something that we think is pretty cool, and it would be nice to share. Maybe that is something we could do during the in-service throughout the school year. It’s just something that you think others might not be aware of, that might be helpful. (Lucy, Interview 2)

Lucy shared that in implementing the Lucy Calkins workshop model, the foundation of the Institute professional learning, she did not have any pushback from parents.

**Bella**

Bella was the only interview participant who did not meet the original participant criteria. Bella was a reading specialist for the Limon School District. The original criteria called for the interview candidates to be English language arts teachers, however the Limon School District was so small that it did not have an individual at each grade band that met the criteria. Due to the fact that Bella worked with teachers to implement English language arts curriculum, and also had contact with each of the grade bands due to her work as a K–8 reading specialist, she was deemed a suitable replacement for the study. Her inclusion also sheds some light regarding the perception of intermediate level leaders in the district.

At 46, Bella falls just short of the mean average age of those included in the study. However, she exceeds both the mean and median for years of teaching and years in the current district. Her entire professional teaching career has been in the Limon School District. Bella possesses a master’s degree which is not uncommon for someone
in her role. Though Bella did not opt to participate in the partnership for credits, she did coach several teachers who did.

Consolidation seemed to impact most of Bella’s responses. She used it as a lens through which she answered each question. While all staff members were affected by the consolidation of the Limon parent districts, Bella’s responses as an interview candidate in the study indicated that she was having a difficult time with the consolidation as she was uncertain of her role. She shared that there were mixed emotions from the staff about the consolidation, and stated that while people are mixing more and are eager to have meetings and collaborate, administration has not shared the district goals or the learning goal(s) for the newly formed district. She further implied that there seemed to be no accountability to participate in meetings or professional learning opportunities. She felt disillusioned about how decisions were made, both within her district and regarding the Alajuela Partnership, and how input was not gathered from pertinent parties.

In regard to the professional learning partnership, Bella stated that she felt the presenters were well-versed, and that the base needs were well-met. Speaking for both herself and her colleagues, Bella shared excitement about the opportunity to create and collaborate when she commented, "I really like the way it rolled out. I got to listen to real teachers, see things, make things together, share, be in like the student seats, kind of working, that was I think really beneficial." She felt the partnership was helpful and her only negativity expressed was in regard to the planning stages. She shared that she felt as a reading specialist she should have played a larger role in planning the Summer Institute for the Partnership. She did admit that she did not speak-up or volunteer to contribute, but had used a wait-and-see attitude.
Beth

The final candidate from Limon, Beth was slightly older than the median age of the group, at 53 years of age. In terms of employment history, Beth fell exactly on the average in terms of years of experience and district loyalty. Though she did not possess a master’s degree at the time of the study, she did have 21 post baccalaureate credits.

Like Bella, Beth spoke from a lens of consolidation as she felt this created a context for her responses about professional development, collaboration, and culture. She expressed feelings that the first year of the blended district went smoothly. She shared her appreciation for having new colleagues with whom to share ideas; her big takeaway was that she was no longer operating as an “island.” She identified literacy and improving student literacy outcomes as district goals. She shared that one area the district could improve would be to add coaching opportunities to its structure.

Beth’s account of the professional learning partnerships was positive overall. She shared sentiments regarding the comfortable atmosphere, friendly attendees, and specific focus of content. She also thought that the presenters were well-versed, and had credibility due to their current, or past, role as teachers. She specifically commented on the effectiveness of the partnership given its ongoing status that provided teachers opportunities to work together on a continuous basis. During her second interview she stated, "I think it was well organized and I don’t think I would change anything because as far as where I was in my learning with workshop and follow-up on my learning, I felt like everything flowed and that my needs were met."
Lizzy

The fourth candidate in the study, Lizzy, was the first interview candidate representing the Jaco School District. Lizzy represented the most senior teacher in the study from the Jaco School District. This is in terms of both age and service. Lizzy was 54 at the time of the study, and had been teaching for 30 years, 28 of those in the Jaco School District. Of the six people interviewed, Lizzy was the least interested and cooperative. The first interview with Lizzy went "smoothly"; however, during the second interview, she appeared uninterested and distracted. This caused many of the answers to be minimal and not as in depth as I would have preferred. Since Lizzy was blindly selected and agreed to be part of the study, her story has remained included.

Lizzy’s comments indicated that she felt that her district was initially far beyond the other districts participating in the professional learning partnership. She shared that her district, Jaco, sent her to several training opportunities regarding the Lucy Calkins Workshop practices and philosophies within a one-hour radius of her district prior to the creation of the Alajuela Partnership. She used this as a reference point for why Jaco was originally ahead of the other districts. She added that since the partnership has been in place, the districts are now much closer. She indicated that her district collaborates well and maintains a growth mindset culture for their staff and students. She repeated throughout the interview process, "We believe that everybody can grow and learn."

Lizzy expressed the highest levels of criticism of the partnership, ranging from accountability to student presence to content covered and coaching. For Lizzy, the benefit of the partnership was to confirm that teachers are staying true to the [Lucy Calkins] units of study. She was disappointed that not everyone was present for the
training as this limited the amount of collaboration, and she shared hope that administration would work to get everyone to the training, stating, "...have a stronger arm on getting everybody here," during interview one. Similar to Lucy, she discussed seating arrangements and offered the advice of "mixing it up," in order to minimize the following:

...talking, and laughing, and joking, and maybe it’s not going the way that you want it to or maybe that they will fall into some type of a complaining pattern that because now they are all there together. (Lizzy, Interview 1)

She also expressed a desire for more coaching from the reading specialists. She specifically cited a desire to have students present at the institute in order to practice, and obtain feedback, on student conferencing. Her specific comments indicated a desire to evolve the Summer Institute to be more similar to Columbia University’s Readers’ & Writers’ trainings:

This was like the Columbia Teachers College, or having a peer that is actually our coach to watch, like somebody you are not going to feel intimidated by, and maybe not even somebody who is necessarily in your district that you could pair up with and give feedback to. (Lizzy, Interview 2)

Amidst her criticisms, Lizzy did find value in the Summer Institute stating, Well I found [sharing resources] really valuable because it was something somebody was already using and you knew it was working and also you were given what they were using so you could change it up to fit what you see as valuable. (Lizzy, Interview 2)
Aria

Aria, age 31, was the youngest of the interview candidates. She subsequently fell below the mean and median for both teaching experience and years in the same district. The least experienced teacher, she was not, however, the newest member of the Jaco team involved in the study. Aria has worked her entire career, five years, in the Jaco School District. The first year she worked with four-year-old kindergarteners, and has worked in first grade since then.

Like Lizzy, Aria felt that the Jaco staff worked well together. She shared that the staff was like a large family and were open to asking questions. This has led to high levels of collaboration. The collaboration occurred both informally by individual arrangement and formally through weekly professional development meetings focused on technology, literacy, or math. She added that the district’s administration was responsive and planned professional development based on teacher need and teacher request. She shared that the Jaco School District mission and goals revolved around helping every learner continue to learn and succeed.

Aria’s sentiments indicated that through the partnership, collaboration with other districts and other first grade teachers has increased. She stated that she now felt like she could approach any of the first-grade teachers in the other districts, freely sharing ideas. Aria indicated that the hard part about planning for the partnership was that each district was at a different starting point, and so her perception was that some of the information was repetitive. Conversely, she shared that because of the partnership she has been able to build her own skills and feels she now successfully reaches a wider range of student abilities. She has enjoyed the opportunity to work with others and values the increased
professional development time in order to implement the workshop model with fidelity.

Aria felt that teacher inclusion was a strength, stating:

> I think what has been happening has been very beneficial and I feel like our class and our ideas and needs have always been taken into consideration. It might not always be completely feasible, but is looked into and has tried to make work with everybody who is participating. (Aria, Interview 2)

A recommendation from Aria was for the planning team to include more work time throughout the Summer Institute so that the teachers have time to, "...dig-in and get started."

**Betty**

The final candidate from Jaco, and from the study, is Betty. At 39, Betty fell under the mean and median ages, just under the years of teaching experience, and at four years in Jaco, was the newest interview candidate included in the study from either district. This allowed Betty to see the study from a perspective that others did not have: she most recently served in another district. Her experiences helped her to draw conclusions about the quantity and quality of professional development at her former districts, current district, and through the partnership.

Betty was positive overall both in terms of her district, and the partnership. Betty’s comments originated with positive commentary about her district’s and building’s leadership, indicating that the administration was supportive and made her feel appreciated. She also felt that the administration was approachable. She shared that Jaco holds monthly English language arts meetings, led by the reading specialist, that center on implementing the language arts strategies explored in the Summer Institute. Betty
also openly discussed parents in her district, stating that they have been very receptive to the Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop.

Betty shared that collaboration with teachers outside her district had typically been poor. However, she indicated that the professional development offered through the partnership was different in that it encouraged staff to collaborate, share ideas and documents, and established consistency between grade levels and schools. She offered insights about the organization of the partnership and appreciated how it accounted for the needs and insights of teachers. Betty was also the only interview candidate who extended participation in the partnership by taking three credits during each of the two summer programs. This afforded her additional insight into coaching and mentorship with several of the reading specialists. Her final comments indicated that she felt an increase in confidence in teaching and has refined her skills as a result of the partnership.

Betty’s recommendations for the Summer Institute included more work time, continued inclusion of resources, and more choice after the initial day of training. She stated:

Just having that worktime I think is nice. But we need the information to be able to sit and get the ideas first on what we can work on. (Laughter) Like to have those Jennifer Serravallo books available. I don’t know what I would have worked on if I didn’t have the resources available so I guess just taking people where they are at and then taking it further. So if you are new to it, getting those people together...I was thinking about Mondays because [the San Jose University Presenter] did a great job but I feel like maybe half the room would have benefited more from having somebody else take it to the next step...then whoever
felt like they are new to this and they want to learn...I think she did try to take it a step further, and there were some things I was able to take away from this so maybe more choice in the breakout sessions... (Betty, Interview 1)

Betty expanded on this during the second interview stating:

...get more of the information on the first day and then having the next two days more flexible with choosing what sessions we wanted to attend and choosing what we wanted to specifically work on that would benefit us. (Betty, Interview 2)

**Findings**

Six candidates from two districts were interviewed over a period of three months. Each was asked standard questions with follow-up questions posed when clarification or additional information was needed. The responses were audio recorded and then transcribed to initiate the process of addressing the three research questions:

1. How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a partnership model?

2. How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?

3. How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning opportunities they have experienced outside of the partnership?

The findings are presented in three sections, with each section corresponding to one of the three research questions. Within each section the themes emerging from the data analysis were identified. Some themes appeared in more than one section, an example
being *collaboration*, which was raised in all three questions. A number of themes, such as spiraling, focus, coaching, relationships, and administrative leadership, are discussed here despite the fact that they are not specific to the Alajuela Partnership and therefore do not directly address the three research questions.

**Question 1**

*How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a partnership model?* The focus of this question is the partnership model and how teachers described its effectiveness. The Alajuela Partnership was developed among five districts and a local college. The purpose of this partnership was to provide high-quality professional learning opportunities for teachers in the area of English language arts. In order to determine how the partnership was perceived, I focused on how the interview subjects described the effects of the partnership. This is addressed through three themes that emerged: administrative leadership, university ties, and the planning of the professional development series.

**Administrative Leadership**

Of utmost importance in the effect of the professional development delivered through the partnership is that of leadership provided by the district- and building-level administration. In itself, leadership, and its subcategories, are not themes that are unique to the Partnership—all good professional development requires leadership. However, collaborative leadership between and among the districts and University is specific to the research questions as it relates to the Partnership. The comments regarding this type of cross-district leadership were minimal, however those that did surface were split between being positively and negatively viewed. Both Lucy who stated, "I wouldn’t say it was a
positive, it was more like if you teach reading, this is where you need to go…it was just like this is what you need to do," and Bella who commented that goal alignment in her district was lacking, as was creating a positive environment around this professional learning, felt that leadership within their district left something to be desired. However, Bella also stated that leadership across the districts left her feeling cultivated and empowered, and stated, "lots of thought and considerations and looking for the University…went into it." Beth too, shared mixed reviews, indicating that overall she felt that the administration created a positive environment surrounding the professional learning, but noted that there were several administrators with varying roles, and with a new leader, came a new vision (Beth, Interview 2).

Additionally, leadership is critical in any situation that involves change, or "newness." In this case, the new concept was the partnership between five districts and a University in order to offer impactful professional development. In this situation, leadership was needed in order to set and inspire a vision that created staff buy-in, ultimately leading to sustainability in the model. This leadership was described by the interviewees as including: a focus on goal setting, support for teacher needs and requests, coaching, provision of resources, and a variety of personal characteristics including: empowerment, positivity, communication, approachability, collaboration, and caring. To dissect this, we first turn to the leadership traits that impacted the partnership model in the eyes of the participants.

**Leadership Traits.** Effective leadership has a way of "bringing everyone together" in order to be successful (Lucy, Limon, Interview 1), whereas a lack of leadership leads to a lack of goals. According to Fullan’s research, leaders that empower
staff are likely to promote, support, and offer effective professional development. This section will address leadership traits noted by the interview subjects. Leadership itself is not unique to this model; however, collaborative leadership between and among the districts and University is specific to the research questions as it relates to the Partnership. Unfortunately, because planning occurred among the University representative, administration, and reading specialists, the teachers interviewed for this research did not make strong connections to the leadership across the districts. The connections that were made are addressed minimally above, and again in the planning section.

Echoing Fullan’s research, Lizzy stated during her second interview, "...when the administration and other schools are devoted to a training and give the teachers time that in and of itself will make me and other teachers more devoted to keep working on...honing our skills, and doing better work with teaching it." Attributes like this were seen in both skill and behavior traits when interviewees discussed their leaders. According to interview data, the two specific behavior traits expressed most frequently by interviewees included coaching and empowering behaviors.

**Table 8: Leadership Traits Observed by Candidates**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Trait Description</th>
<th>Lucy</th>
<th>Bella</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Lizzy</th>
<th>Aria</th>
<th>Betty</th>
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<td>(Positive, supportive, appreciative, &amp; caring)</td>
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These are some of the same traits discussed at length by Fullan (2002) who stated, "At the heart of school capacity was principal leadership that focussed on the development of teachers’ knowledge and skills, professional community, program coherence, and technical resources" (p. 1). Of all of the traits valued by the interview candidates, two-thirds of the candidates from Jaco indicated that those behaviors indicative of a coach, as well as those revolving around overall positivity, and lastly the willingness to provide resources were the top three characteristics valued. The others noted above however are also of importance.

According to Kirtman and Fullan (2016), in order for a model to be effective, and change to occur, many of these traits must be displayed regularly. The leader must be the lead learner, show care for his staff, remain non-judgmental, and create opportunities for
collaboration. In these aspects leaders in the Jaco district created a sustainable vision of professional development delivered through the partnership model. While leaders in Limon were not credited with these same skills, one of the staff members interviewed from Limon was both aware of leadership traits associated with leading a successful partnership, and wished that her leaders possessed these skills. One specific comment came from Bella during her first interview when she replied to the question, "Describe leadership in your school?" with the following, "Right [now] it seems to be lacking from my point of view, it is going to come…" Beth too reported that leadership could improve:

   It could improve. Again, I am saying that only because there were so many different roles and so many different things we were hashing out. We started PLCs last year and that was the first time we had a true organized PLC, and I think that trying to organize that and the things we talked about, it tended to get a little too broad. I think that is going to tighten up this year now that we have a year under our belt...Again, last year was a big learning curve for everyone, and coming in with a brand new administrator as well. It wasn’t trying to get all of these new people to fit, it was on top of that a brand new administrator, you know. (Beth, Interview 2)

While most of the time a leader is thought to be someone who is in charge, or possesses a title, a leader is defined as someone who has influence over others (Weber, 2012, p. 16). Distributed leadership is distributing leadership responsibilities and practices according to expertise (Goksoy, 2016, p. 298), helping to build capacity leading to change and improvement. Through the interview process, Aria recognized this
distributed leadership, capacity development of teachers, and indicated that it lived in her
district, "We also have a lot of staff members who kind of take up the leadership role and
work together as well to make sure that everybody is continuing to help grow all the
students at Jaco."

Mission & Goal Setting. An important theme that links directly to the work of
Fullan and was mentioned numerous times, was the importance of a strong mission in a
district, and that the mission is directly aligned with professional development efforts. In
this case, the Partnership mission has to have a linkage between, and to, the district
mission.

The teachers from Limon varied in their descriptions of the district’s mission and
goals, in both general terms, and specifically as they related to the Partnership. All three
interview candidates expressed uncertainty as to what exactly the leadership team had set
as a focus for the year. The candidates stated the following:

Beth: ...our goals have always been literacy and improving student literacy
outcomes and we continue to do that. That’s what drove us to using the
reading and writing workshop format. We were looking at our data and
just always feeling we could be better. You know, the kids were making
gains, but never at the levels that we felt we were keeping up and so
literacy has always been our goal and focus.

Lucy: ...I think we have really done a good job with bringing everyone together,
and I think it was a very successful year, especially for the students...so
that’s really all that I can say about what our vision has been, and saving
money.

Bella: I haven’t heard from our administration what the goal is...I’m the Title 1
Planner...for this whole school year, I’m like I need to put down what was
our learning goal for the whole district, and his response was just to get
through the school year...that is not quite acceptable. We have to have
something, and so we are working on that...It seems to be lacking from my
point of view, it is going to come, it’s just we need some time...to work it
all out. There is just so much, and the kids came, and we still didn’t have
an administrator...I don’t know what our building or district goals are...
Bella (Interview 2): It didn’t really have a true goal. I mean the goal was I guess he wrote down to solidify procedures and functions of things. That is not a goal of what I am looking for as a school goal...I don’t know...what [administration] is exactly expecting.

District goals, when focused and held by administration as central to the operations of the school, had far-reaching implications within, and among, the staff. Guskey’s research indicates that when district goals are clearly articulated throughout the system, and owned by all, professional development offered to support the goal is effective. From the teacher interviews, goal alignment was confused. As it related to curriculum, goals were tangible: improve literacy outcomes through the workshop format and look at data; however, as it relates to an overarching goal for the district was not as simple and there was confusion regarding procedures, expectations, and learning outcomes. This had an impact on teacher ownership. Because the Partnership goal concerned literacy instruction, which aligned with the Limon District goal, the professional learning that ensued was supported; however, simple feelings and notions about being employed in the district were not always positive.

Reviewing both the research and interview commentary, it is clear that as Fullan’s research on effective professional development indicated, the effect of this specific professional development delivered through a partnership model had varying levels of effectiveness based on district and building leadership that empowered teachers and cultivated a climate for learning. As the teachers from Limon did not cite their leaders as establishing a vision or goals for the staff to rally behind, the vision and goal setting of the Partnership itself may be responsible for the growth that occurred. The Alajuela Partnership established its purpose and vision as providing personalized professional
development opportunities for growth and training purposes in order to improve instruction in English language arts.

**University Ties**

The University’s involvement in the partnership ranged from hiring the facilitators, to collaborating with district personnel to design the courses for credit and ultimately facilitating the classes. In addition, the University was responsible for publicizing the event, welcoming all educators to the summer sessions, and providing name recognition.

The University appointed a representative who played a key administrative role in coordinating and arranging the partnership on the University’s behalf. This full professor possessed knowledge of current educational theory and best practices, possessed degrees in both literacy and curriculum, and specialized in literacy discourse and academic coaching. The message relayed and supported by the University was one of supporting the Alajuela Partnership vision and assisting the Partnership in meeting districts’ collective needs. The responses regarding the involvement of the University varied, and ranged from a lack of understanding of University involvement, to excitement that this was something the educators valued and would be able to apply in their teaching. This is noted in Lucy’s comments when she stated, "Well the University didn’t affect me at all. I did not take [the coursework] for credits so I’m really not aware of anything there."

Lizzy’s understanding was not aligned with the goal of the professional development:

[The purpose of the Partnership was to create a ] collaborative community so that we can help each other and have, be support for each other, but also so that when students reach the high school level that they are coming in at a similar
spots...also to help teachers because you are getting your credits, and helping your licensing, and you have if you have the [San Jose] University, but then it would be helpful if [San Jose] is also then picking up on what we are doing and using that in their student teaching program so that they stay up-to-date.

Finally, Aria surprised me when she stated, "Just being able to work with other school districts that are similar is very helpful whether or not there is a university involved or not." While these comments indicated that the Partnership was not as clear to the participants as intended or the types of interview questions asked did not elicit specific responses, Betty’s comment, "[B]ecause of the San Jose requirement and that was very beneficial...something clicked more with reading, I felt like I was more effective as a teacher," validated the University’s involvement.

**Credits.** The most common and obvious responses from the interview candidates about the University’s involvement was the opportunity for credits offered by the University. While 26 educators from the partnership participated in the University’s option for credits, in this study only one interview candidate took the credit option. A second member of the candidate pool selected to be interviewed, Bella, the reading specialist, worked side-by-side with educators participating in the University courses for credit as part of their credit requirements. When she stated, "I have never taken classes for credits because I am under the new rules that credits don’t do anything, and I have two degrees now," Lucy shared that as a non-traditional teacher with two degrees, she never took classes for credits because her license renewal did not depend on earned credits, but depended rather on the creation of a Professional Development Plan (PDP) which was reviewed on a five-year cycle. Lizzy echoed similar sentiments, stating, "I
didn’t do anything with [the University] because...I have a Master’s [Degree] so I don’t need credits.” Lizzy did add that she took advantage of this opportunity while working in a previous district, and commented that the impact of the University’s involvement was dependent on if “you are in need of credits or not.” Betty spoke at length about the opportunity for credit from the University. She shared her need to get six credits for license renewal:

It was great for me, I love having the opportunity to get credits as that is a great option to renew my license. I feel happy that I could do that at a reasonable price, and it was actually something that I could actually use in the classroom...I feel like going to [San Jose University], was definitely worthwhile credits that I took as opposed to six credits that I really didn’t need or care about...I just feel like this is something that I could actually apply to my teaching, which was great.

(Betty, Interview 2)

The feedback regarding the option for credits was mixed, and Betty was the only interview candidate to participate in the option for credits, but she was not alone in her participation in the coursework. A review of the course rosters at San Jose University indicated that 37% of the educators from Jaco and Limon were enrolled during the first year the Summer Institute was held; and nearly 21% of educators enrolled in coursework for credits during the second year the Summer Institute was held. Representing ⅙ of the interview candidates, Betty comprises approximately 17% of the research group. While less than the average percentage of teachers enrolled at San Jose for credits, if another teacher from the research group had enrolled, the involvement percentage would have been 33%; close to year one, but significantly above the involvement level of year two.
The enrollment information is displayed in numerical fashion below as part of Table 9, and helps to visually inform the contribution of credits for teachers through the Alajuela Partnership.

Table 9: Participants Enrolled in Institute at San Jose University

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<tr>
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<th>Year 1 - Writing</th>
<th>Year 2 - Reading</th>
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<td>Number of Credits</td>
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<td>Number of Educators Registered</td>
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Beyond the scope of actually obtaining credits, Betty talked about the applicability of the coursework involved with attaining the credits. She shared that, "...doing a full cycle of working with my mentor teacher and having her observe me was helpful, and getting feedback throughout the year…" confirming that the University coursework was designed to intentionally provide ongoing feedback throughout the year.

Bella spoke from a different lens. While she indicated that she did not take the option for credits within the framework of the professional learning as she had already completed the required number of credits needed to renew her license, she worked throughout the year with the teachers who did take the credit option. This affirmed the concept that teachers found value in having the university as a component of the partnership. However, Bella also shared that she had not been given guidance in how to assist teachers with their coursework when she made the following comment:

I have heard nothing from the University about what my true role is. Like, so we
will do it like this, and let’s see if you get credit or you can call and ask them because I’m not getting anything from them and I didn’t feel like it was my place to call for them because I’m not looking for credit, I’m not getting anything out of this. (Bella, Interview 1)

Perhaps the most insightful comments came from Aria when she stated, "...just being able to work with other school districts that are similar is very helpful whether or not there is a university involved or not." In follow-up to her comments, I asked what the main contribution of the university was in her opinion; Aria confirmed it was the support of credits for teachers.

**Planning the Partnership**

A third theme emerging from the data that helps to explain the ways in which the university partnership model was valued by teachers was related to the planning of the partnership. Planning itself is not unique to professional learning; what makes it unique to the Alajuela Partnership is that it occurred across each of the districts in tandem with the university. Planning for the Summer Institutes began a full year in advance, though it ramped up about six months prior to the institute itself. Early planning was inclusive of securing dates, locations, and speakers so that information for the following year’s institute could be advertised prior to the close of the current Summer Institute, which allowed individuals to reserve these dates well-in advance. Later, planning revolved around the substance of the institute. In planning for the Summer Institutes, representation from district- and school-level leadership— inclusive of district administration, principals, curriculum directors, and reading specialists—met monthly. Representatives from the university were also part of the planning committee and
attended most of the meetings, especially those where the agenda indicated discussions involving the speakers, publicity, and coursework and credit opportunities.

While representation from each of the Partnership districts appeared equitable, Bella provided a unique perspective as part of the planning team. While strands of Darling-Hammond’s themes can be felt throughout, including the personalization and opportunity for involvement, what arises unique to Bella are her comments that indicate a lack of teacher empowerment by leaders. It is important to note that based upon her own statements in her first interview, some of this may specifically be in reference to her own sense of self-worth and contribution, or lack thereof, and differs from how she felt the teachers were included in the process, which will be addressed in the next section.

Bella: It was a little awkward this year with the planning just because I was there for the original planning and it was already planned and then it became...in my face like well this is "Miramar" and "Jaco’s" institute, and the other districts are just invited...So that kind of left a little...not a bitter taste, because I love the girls...I didn’t take it personally...it was just, "why am I wasting my precious time here then." It just got awkward.

Bella: In the last week of school we got that email from [the curriculum director] that this is when the institute is and these are what it is covering, and just email me if you can’t make it and that’s all we knew. But in the past it was, I don’t know, I talked to people, and I don’t know somehow I think I was in charge of finding out who was going and who wasn’t going. Maybe I just don’t need to know that anymore. I don’t know. I don’t know what’s my business anymore, so I’m like, just walk the straight and narrow because we all, no one wants to be in trouble, right?

The final comment that was heard from the teachers in terms of planning was in regard to the timing of the professional learning. Both Beth and Betty discussed their initial desire during the first round of interviews to have the institute held in August instead of June. However, during the second interview, both educators indicated that June was “nice.”
Beth: Honestly it was nice to have it and have some time to reflect on all of the Things that we talked about, and I went back and re-read some things, so it [gave] me a little time to calmly sit back and think about it rather than thinking about school and being in workshop.

**Teacher inclusion.** Including classroom teachers in planning professional development is a practice recommended by Darling-Hammond for effective professional development. As such, teacher inclusion is not unique to the Alajuela Partnership, it is however an area that uncovered findings important for future work and therefore is subsequently noted here. The Alajuela Partnership engaged four reading specialists and no classroom teachers on the planning committee. The reading specialists possessed teaching contracts and were assumed to represent the needs and values of the teachers who would be involved in the training. In addition, the reading specialists brought the expertise and perspective of topics most critical to the success of the institute: overview of workshop model, conferring, text complexity, creating toolkits, mini-lessons, units of study, mentor texts, anchor charts, strategy groups, and anecdotal notes.

Teachers were not included in the planning meetings for two main reasons: planning team size and timing of meetings. Recommended committee size lies between two and seven members (Margolis, 2011). Inclusion of teacher representatives from each district would have more than doubled the size of the committee, thereby far exceeding the recommended committee size. Coordinating meetings between the university, districts, and presenters was also challenging. Most of the meetings were held during the school day in order to accommodate the various schedules, which would have necessitated guest teachers had classroom teachers participated in these meetings.

While the teachers themselves were not a physical part of the planning meetings, they were involved in several capacities. Beyond the planning meetings, administration
and specialists held learning walks to determine professional learning needs, and surveys were sent to teachers to identify what their self-targeted areas of growth were. Learning walks are brief, non-evaluative classroom visits that provide principals, specialists, and teachers with opportunities to reflect on teaching and learning practices (Fisher & Frey, 2014). In this case, the learning walks were completed by administration and specialists, but findings were processed as a group to help determine next steps in the professional learning process. The appendix contains the walkthrough tool for both Writers’ and Readers’ Workshop. Classroom teachers were a part of the learning walks in two aspects: first, the teachers were observed in order to note areas of strength as well as areas of professional need; second, the teachers were part of the debriefing process, communicating their collective thoughts on what would assist them in being better equipped in their lessons. Throughout the institute itself, the speakers asked for formative feedback in order to modify content if necessary throughout the week. Teachers were also given pre- and post-institute surveys to determine high need areas as well as how the professional learning impacted them, its relevance, and what more they were looking for. Sample questions included:

1. What was the most challenging issue for you during the writing block this semester? What could be done to help meet this challenge?

2. In what area in reading (in regard to the Reader’s/Writer’s Workshop) would you like more ideas/strategies?

3. What Reader's Workshop areas would be most beneficial for further discussion and professional development?
4. Are you interested in participating in a book study with your colleagues? (during inservice, before/after school) If you are interested in participating in a book study, what theme would you be interested in? (conferring, small group, grammar, or comprehension)

5. Is there anything specific you like time to develop or work through during our summer professional development?

6. Would you value independent or grade level work time as a part of the summer professional development?

7. We have discussed developing lab classrooms for literacy and math which would serve the purpose of becoming an opportunity for teachers to frequently observe and reflect upon teaching practices. Would you be interested in hosting a lab classroom in your room? In doing this you would team teach with the Reading/Math Specialist to share lessons.

In terms of teacher inclusion in the planning process, candidates had the following to say:

Beth: We were asked what were some of the things we felt we needed to work on, or some things we felt were real areas we maybe felt we were lacking or needed more [of] and I think that helped to drive some of the professional development on where it was going, which makes good sense, to be able to get everyone’s input...we were included. I think it was well organized and I don’t think I would change anything because as far as where I was in my learning with workshop and follow-up on my learning, I felt like everything flowed and that my needs were met.

Betty: I thought the feedback that we were [able] to give ahead of time was good. I think that throughout our time there, I felt like we were asked how is it going? What do you need? I feel like they catered to what our needs were. I don’t know that there needs to be more teacher inclusion.

Aria: I like to have input into it and also have time to work on what we have learned...I think what has been happening has been very beneficial and I
feel like our class and our ideas and needs have always been taken into consideration. It might not always be completely feasible, but is looked into and has tried to make work with everybody who is participating.

Lucy: Because we were asked, we took a survey, and that is probably where they got feedback from.

The final comment that was heard from the teachers in terms of planning, Lucy shared her wishes for future surveys, which included questions regarding the timing and format of the training. While Beth and Betty discussed their initial desire to have the institute held in August instead of June, they later indicated June was their preference, and at no time expressed interest in having this be part of the survey. Their main rationale being that there were pros and cons with each time offering, and that the educators themselves would most likely select different time frames for the institute based upon their own personal needs.

As the only interview candidate who did not readily agree with the level of teacher involvement in the planning process, Lizzy, was the outlier of the group. Ultimately, she offered another critique of the planning stage when she echoed similar sentiments as Betty and Aria after further questioning:

Lizzy: I don’t think we did [help in the planning process]. We just brought our supplies. We just brought our books along, we didn’t really plan it.

Me: Did you participate in the survey that was given out?

Lizzy: Probably, if we had a survey I most likely did it.

In reference to staff involvement other than herself, Bella stated the following:

Me: How did teachers help in the planning of the professional development?

Bella: They have taken surveys, and more surveys, and more surveys. They have taken a lot of surveys.

Me: Do you feel like the feedback from the surveys was listened to in the
development of the training?

Bella: Yes, to a point. Sometimes things come up as we are meeting as specialists even, like things that weren’t on the survey, that seem to be the up and coming thing, like interactive notebooks and things like that, that wasn’t on the survey. You know, but the teachers love the make and take things, they like that, they don’t want to just sit and get.

In terms of her own involvement, Bella turned the direction of the conversation to the lack of communication from her administrator, and therefore lack of understanding of her role in the planning process. She commented about when the communication subsided and her response to it:

Bella: I actually really believed we were going to talk about it, but then all of a sudden by the end of the week then our administrator left and so then no one ever pulled us together and maybe it was my job and I dropped the ball, but I didn’t know it was my job. There is just that oddness then, but the institute itself was good. (Interview 1)

Bella: The only frustration I had was with the planning. Like even today, I was like ‘should I be helping in some way shape or form?’ Instead I’m just sitting back, relaxing, and enjoying my time. I don’t know. (Interview 1)

After reviewing comments from all of the interviewed candidates, it is evident that the goal of incorporating Darling-Hammond’s suggestion for teacher inclusion in the planning process was met with limited success: Bella and Lizzy, two out of six of the interviewed candidates expressed concerns. The lack of teacher inclusion in the planning process was not isolated, and led to further issues with individualized and differentiated professional development called for by Guskey. Relying upon teacher feedback to indicate strengths as well as areas of professional development need, accounted for this professional learning to be customized, but not at the level it could have been, had teachers been included beyond the taking of surveys. Additionally, while it was intentionally designed for Bella to be the representative for the Limon district, it was
never really clear about what her role was (at least to her). Using Bella’s comments about her own involvement as a reading specialist unveil additional areas of concern about the Partnership. The two critiques that emerge are: 1) who has jurisdiction over whom and, 2) who can tell whom what to do? Must guidance originate from the school district, or can the Partnership usurp the district to provide direction?

**Accountability.** Accountability in relation to this research is defined as: teachers actively participating in the Summer Institute in order to fulfill or further the goals of the Alajuela Partnership as identified by their attendance and level of participation displayed at the professional learning. As evidenced by numerous comments from the interview participants, requiring all workshop participants to be present at all sessions should have been addressed during the planning meetings. While accountability is not unique to the Alajuela Partnership, it is noted as this theme emerged as the candidates interviewed surprisingly requested accountability for their fellow colleagues in terms of participation in the institute. Two candidates indicated that attendance matters; they counted on other educators being present at the training, and when they were not, it impacted their own growth, or that of the staff they supported.

**Lizzy:** Usually we are aware if our partner is coming or not. [This summer] we didn’t get together as actual fifth grade teachers and look at our unit together and talk…I couldn’t do my own unit specifically… if everybody that was in a certain grade level had to be here, for example, my partner, was not even here. I think a lot of the goal was to be collaborating only I really didn’t have somebody from my school there.

**Bella:** It seems like we have a lot of teachers absent…some of the teacher’s that are really new to the workshop are here. So they are hearing little bits, and I think they are able to find someone they feel comfortable with to talk to and go to. I would love to help them, but I’m only one person and I’m not always available so for me it is helpful that they have someone else [to go to] also.
While the educators were not using the term “collaboration,” both Darling-Hammond and Guskey confirmed through their research that an indicator of professional learning success is one in which collaboration is present. Bella commented on accountability as it relates to collaboration when she stated: "[One teacher] said yesterday wasn’t very helpful and chose not to come today." When asked if their district held teachers accountable she stated, "I have no idea.” In the same vein, Lizzy stated, "I guess the advice would be to somehow have a stronger arm on getting everybody here…. We just see if it works with our schedule.” This type of response indicates that the teachers are interpreting the message sent by administration to be that the training is not of high value.

**Collaboration and Professionalism of Participants.** Repeatedly, two of the interview candidates indicated a higher level of professionalism was exhibited throughout the Alajuela Partnership as compared to other collaborative professional development opportunities. These comments regarding professionalism share a similarity with accountability as the behavior of participants is often impacted by the expectations administrators set, thereby making it closely related to accountability. These comments also answer research question three, but are addressed here in question one due to being an effect of the professional development offered through the Partnership. While this theme may not be unique to the Alajuela Partnership, at least two of the interview participants found it to be unique when compared to their other collaborative professional development opportunities. Lizzy and Betty shared these sentiments at different points during their interviews and were direct in their approach to describing the behavior tendencies of their peers:
Lizzy: A lot of our training has been very good, except for when we get together with the high school teachers. I thought the attitudes weren't very good.

There was a lot of negative talk and eye-rolling coming from the teachers from other districts...when you get together with the high school.

Betty: I don't feel like I always get as much from the colleagues that aren't at Jaco. When we do the district ones, I feel more like the schools are kind of like the people that know each other are talking to each other and not always exactly on topic. I remember one where our administrators said, ‘Go sit with another school and don't sit with people you know,’ and I purposely sat with people I didn't know and then they ended up literally just talking to each other and texting the whole time laughing, which was a little frustrating.

When asked to confirm where this was, Betty indicated it was in collaboration with the high school. Betty further referred to inservices throughout the year that were planned in conjunction with other districts.

Betty: ...I feel like our school will come with ideas and then the others don't always follow through with so it is just like they get ideas from us but we don't always get ideas from them and I guess it is just that mindset of being professional and sharing and if everybody could be on board with that I think [they would be more effective].

Lizzy: I really don't want to get together with them because they're going to come with an attitude.

Bella and Betty, however, also noted the negative feedback associated with the behavior of the Alajuela Partnership participants revolved around when the collaboration occurred. Bella stated, "...they complain about it being summertime." However, she was quick to add, "...but when else can you g[e]t it in? Do we all want to take an evening class? Not really! You know, there is no perfect time." Betty’s comments echoed that of Bella’s, but were framed in a manner that suggested she was positively impacted by the other participants in the Alajuela Partnership when she stated,
I might not be motivated to do this at home. I [am] more efficient and not
distracted here because I am with people who are focused and it was just a great
experience and definitely worthy of my time. (Betty, Interview 1)

Together, these comments seemed to indicate that the poor behavior was a reflection of
who participated in the professional development, and that when the professional learning
was held was of importance. The opportunity to work together in a directed fashion
mitigated the poor behaviors, at least in some cases. All six candidates noted the value of
collaboration within the Partnership:

Lucy: ...for people to collaborate with so that you have someone else at your
grade level or content area that you can talk with. And I think for literacy
that can work very well because we are all, we are all doing Calkins with
this workshop.

Beth: It is nice to talk with other teachers, and, and see where people are at. As
they are using workshop, I really like collaborating with others. I like
taking the time separate and away from the students, to kind of reflect, and
think about what I am doing, and why I am doing it. Um, I like, I like
getting the information, and usable information, that has been really
important for me to. Again, taking the things that I can use that is not in a
binder on a shelf.

...we are all kind of in the same, we all have a general understanding of
workshop, we all understand it’s, it’s constantly growing and changing,
and again the more we can collaborate, not just with our own district, but
with other districts, that helps each other as well. So, it makes sense...

Lizzy: [The purpose of the Partnership was] to have a collaborative community so
that we can help each other and have, be support for each other, but also
so that when students reach the high school level that they are coming in at
a similar spot.

Aria: [the most positive aspect of being a participant in this professional
learning] is being able to collaborate with other first-grade teachers,
especially being a small school where it is just me and one other
first-grade teacher. Um, having other teachers, especially teachers in the
area who have students who are growing up in this area, not students who
are from another part of the country.
Aria: ...it has been a collaborative environment for a couple of years now so we are able to kind of build that trust and build relationships with the other teachers

Betty: ...[the Partnership has been] a good opportunity to hear from other reading specialists, not just I mean [the Jaco reading specialist]’s got great Information, but then there is other people like um [University Presenter 1] and [Miramar Reading Specialist], and who else having [the University Presenters] come is wonderful. I think that just getting feedback from all different people who have different maybe strengths and what they know. Um, and then also just time to collaborate with other schools and grade levels that we don’t normally have time for or it’s harder (laughter) during the school year to get together.

Interview 2

Beth: ...it is always valuable to be with others, and I think even more now we are collaborating more often, and I have to say our collaboration has more of a focus on how to do that too when we are meeting about certain topics, we are staying on topic and I think that has been a value as well. Sometimes you sit down and you just start talking about everything and meetings kind of goes everywhere. We kind of lose our sense, and especially with the workshop that we had this summer, my colleague, my cohort and I, we really stayed focused on what we wanted to do with each of the units and creating checklists, and things like that and that was all part of this, like keeping our focus on a topic and being better organized and I think that all came from the trainings that we had.

Aria: ...the collaboration, especially being with a small school district, or being in a small school district, being able to talk with other teachers who are doing similar work in their classrooms is very beneficial and has really helped me grow.

Betty: I feel like in the summer when we are all together we are hearing about best practices and things that we can try out and teachers are really open to sharing what they do at their school, you know we exchange emails and contact information, and I don’t know that it always gets, we say that we will continue the collaboration throughout the school year with the other schools, but that doesn’t necessarily always happen. But when we are together in the summer it is easy because we are all right there

Betty: I think giving us time to collaborate, work together throughout the school year. You know if we asked for time to work with another grade level or with one of our coaches, we were given that time, you know, as best as we can to do that, and time to observe other classrooms...
These quotes are included as a means of identifying that all classroom teachers interviewed, during one or both interviews, cited the collaboration that emerged within the Partnership. The main reasons provided for this collaboration being so powerful included the opportunity to have another educator employed in the same grade level working from the same curriculum base to share ideas with, to create learning experiences that ensure students enter high school at similar levels of knowledge, and to share human capital and resources.

While only two of the candidates discussed the "poor behavior" observed at other collaborative inservices, and two more discussed what they observed of others or within themselves, five of the six candidates discussed the professionalism displayed by their peers during the professional learning facilitated through the Alajuela Partnership. Most of their comments revolved around the establishment of relationships which led to high levels of honesty, trust, communication, and collaboration. Specifically noted were the following statements:

Betty: I do feel like throughout the time at the school, where we were actually meeting, everyone was checking in and was like, ‘is there anything I can support you with’, and ‘anything I can do’ or ‘do you need anything?’ and I thought that was good, you know, everybody was willing to help out.

...the collaboration has been nice, to sit with our grade level, people from other schools, and share ideas, we have been sharing documents and talking about what we are doing and everybody seems willing to share. It’s just nice.

Aria: I think it is good to know that other teachers are realizing the situations or the struggles that I have as an educator are also apparent in other classrooms and to brainstorm ideas to help alleviate those and just to share ideas and to take ideas from each other as to what has been working well with the other schools.

To help everybody continue to grow and to be able to share ideas because what I am doing in my classroom might help somebody else and vice
versa. Sometimes I might have a problem or a student who I just can’t quite figure out and somebody else may have had a similar experience with that so it is nice to be able to share not only within our building, but with other people and other teachers in the area because we all have similar students and similar needs, but we also have a wide bank of knowledge that we can pull from now.

Bella: Getting to work with colleagues that are doing your same job at another district, and to share ideas, what’s working, what’s not working, and problem solve a little bit.

Lucy: [The presenter] mixed us up, [we had] different partners, so the ability, the opportunity to talk to people outside of your coworkers about something that you have in common is very positive.

Beth: ...the more we can collaborate, not just with our own district, but with Other districts, that helps each other as well. So, it makes sense that, especially since our Districts are all feeding into [the same high school].

It has always been more positive. Again, just people are very warm and like to share their ideas and, and their frustrations, and their triumphs, you know, I think we were all pretty open. I have never felt you know that I couldn’t be myself and express my concerns or, I look forward to the trainings, I do.

Lucy and Beth’s sentiments around the professionalism and relationships of the participants spanned both of the interviews. During their second interviews, they stated the following:

Lucy: [I am] hoping in the future that there will be more collaboration with the grade level teachers in other districts...we should be forced to sit with other people in our grade level because our comfort level is sitting with the people we know, and...we should be branching out.

Beth: We are developing even more of a relationship now, like a working relationship, and we are feeling, it has been a year now, and I feel that we are more comfortable talking and being honest about our feelings and how things are working, and the changes we want to make, and I think because of the Professional Development it has encouraged us to talk in more concrete terms.

The culture has always been we are dedicated to our students and making the best learning experience possible...There is just a fresher perspective or a different perspective from having other teachers there and their
experiences and that is a change I see, and I think it is a good one.

Aria’s statements are shared last as they provide linkages and show the relationship between the professionalism that developed and emerged from the perspective of the candidates interviewed, and the vehicle for the development of those relationships: the sustained delivery, or the benefits of longitudinal professional learning.

Aria: Before at Jaco, I felt like we were very open and we had a lot of collaboration going on, but as far as collaborating with other districts and other first grade teachers there wasn’t as much and it was more each school kind of had their own, teachers were kind of doing their own things and it turned now in the last couple of years where it has been more collaborative, like I feel like I can go to any of the first-grade teachers now and I am willing to share my ideas and they are willing to share theirs.

I love it because it is a very collaborative atmosphere where sometimes when you go to other Professional Developments, it is very closed off and people aren’t necessarily willing to share because they haven’t kind of built that relationship with the people where we have been doing this now for a couple of years and so it is always nice to see familiar faces and to kind of build that trust that I can kind of share what I am doing and not feel afraid to do it and vice versa other people can be willing to share and willing to take other people’s ideas and let people have them, where sometimes you go other places and people aren’t always as willing.

**Question 1 Summary**

**How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a partnership model?** The teachers from Jaco and Limon, while approaching this response from different perspectives, ended up noting very similar effects during their interview responses. While all themes that emerged are shared, only some are directly linked to the research question. These are: university ties, mission and goal setting, and planning in a cross-district collaborative. Those that are discussed, but not unique to the Alajuela Partnership are: administrative leadership, teacher inclusion, accountability, and professionalism and collaboration. Primarily, the
candidates noted differences in leadership style which impacted the effects of professional development through the partnership model. While the interviewees indicated components of the partnership and the professional development offered through it were a success, effects differed pending the leadership within the district, and candidates offered insights for the planning team to consider. Accountability and professionalism were areas found to be significant to the teachers, which were overlooked during the planning process. The most constructive feedback for Partnership members were twofold: to increase planning participation from the use of surveys and include teachers on the planning team, hereby acknowledging the professional development research of Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey; and secondly, for administration in each district to maintain higher levels of accountability for staff in order to positively impact everyone participating and fully impact the district and Partnership goals. Further, while the teachers noted the professional development impacted their teaching, leadership within the building either extended this learning throughout the year by embedding it into their daily practices, or they did not. Lastly, above anything else, university involvement was seen mainly by the interview candidates as an opportunity to earn meaningful credits at an affordable rate.

**Question 2**

**How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?** The focus of the second research question is the way in which the professional development opportunity affected the candidates teaching practice. Before this can be addressed, teaching practices must be defined. This was done by reviewing the *Framework for Teaching*, the guiding document for the state’s Educator Effectiveness
system. Of particular relevance in defining teaching practices are the first, third, and fourth domains which are: planning and preparation, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 2013a). Further defined, the planning and preparation portion of teacher practices refers to the knowledge of: content and the structure of the discipline, prerequisite relationships, content-related pedagogy, and resources; and, designing coherent instruction and student assessments. Instructional teaching practices refer to the ability to communicate the explanation of content to students; engage and group students in appropriate activities using appropriate instructional materials and resources; use assessments to monitor student learning, and provide feedback to students. Lastly, teacher practices include reflecting on teaching; participating in a PLC to form relationships with colleagues, participating in school and district projects, being involved in a culture of professional inquiry, and providing service to the school; growing and developing professionally by enhancing content knowledge and pedagogical skill, and being receptive to feedback. Complete descriptions of the four domains are presented in the appendix as reproduced from Danielson, 2013b.

A number of themes emerged from the data with leadership again emerging as a significant component to not only the success of the partnership but also the impact of the training on teacher practices. Candidates describe these effects in the four themes that emerged: collaboration, coaching, skill development, and rejuvenation.

**Collaboration**

Teaching practices are more than just what takes place in the classroom. According to Danielson (2013b) teaching practices include supporting the ongoing learning of colleagues though shared ideas across professional learning communities
which contribute to improving the practice for all. Upon interviewing the candidates, I recognized the use of descriptive words such as networking, mentoring, and coaching. These words appeared to be used interchangeably to define and describe the notable changes in relationships that formed between staff members during the institute. As such, I chose to separate collaboration and coaching (or mentoring) into two distinct themes with this section focusing on collaboration. While most of the feedback received from the interview candidates was positive, two comments in particular resonated as neutral. Lizzy (Jaco) stated, "I don't know that it was anything better or anything worse, because I feel like we always have a culture of collaborating." Betty (Jaco) also shared, "I don't personally feel like I do much networking outside of my school...but if someone reaches out and says that they would like to work with you and collaborate, I would be more than happy to do that." Betty also indicated that she felt that through the relationships that formed, "...other schools are willing to share with us at the summer professional development opportunities." Betty’s final comment is the link that makes collaboration specific and unique to this Partnership; collaboration itself is not unique, however, the collaboration between and among teachers of differing districts, which began due to the Partnership is key.

While Lizzie's comments indicated a district in which relationships had already been established, other interview candidates such as Lucy (Limon) revealed that prior to the partnership she, "...had no one to collaborate with." The positive feelings of collaboration were further expressed by Aria from the Jaco District when she stated that through the partnership she has been able to, "...brainstorm ideas together, share ideas, dig-in to what the workshops should look like, and really just focus on that aspect of it."
From her vantage point, "...collaboration was the key part." Bella (Limon) too, in her comments, honed in on this very concept. She shared that the second grade teachers across the districts began to, "...call each other or email, or keep in touch." She also shared that some of the teachers in the Limon District had begun attending after-school professional development meetings held by the reading specialist in the Jaco District since the partnership had begun. She excitedly commented that the teachers made plans to start planning units together, make modifications together, and planned to get into each other’s classrooms and share what is working. Lucy also noted how she, her reading specialist [Bella], and the Jaco reading specialist had begun collaborating, and speaking the same language. In turn, Bella noted camaraderie among the teachers, and how the Partnership created opportunities to "bounce ideas and share our expertise," as well as simply knowing you are not alone on this journey. She stated that she has noticed, "middle school people are mixing more with our elementary people, whereas in the past, that wasn’t quite so...our staff is dying to have meetings and talk."

Beth’s (Limon) summary of how the partnership impacted collaborative practices is perhaps best of all, when taken in conjunction with Lucy, Aria, and Bella who shared the need for, benefits, and effects of collaboration. Beth, coming from a district with one teacher per grade level, and little-to-no opportunity to collaborate with peers teaching at the same grade level, tells of the effects of increased collaboration through the partnership. Beyond enhanced relationships that led to higher levels of communication, she, Aria, and Betty, described moving from peer-to-peer collaboration to that of something more: the development of camaraderie and collective spirit.

Beth:  The opportunity to work with others and to develop a working relationship with other teachers, to draw on their experience, and to have that
connection and be able to share your concerns and share your successes. All of those things came through with the partnership, the shared knowledge that we have and talking about goals and things where we want to go with the kids and with their student learning it's a real advantage to have a lot of other teachers and other staff to share...the opportunity to work with others is on two levels: One with the level being those in the [Limon District] and the second level being the whole broad group of people [at the institute] to connect with.

Aria:  I think you get to know that other educators and those people that you are working with and the whole collaboration, whereas the one shot kind of deal is you are just there and you don’t really form really strong relationships with people like I wouldn’t feel as comfortable having them in my classroom and sharing everything that is going on, but I feel like with these past couple of years I feel willing to share the struggles and celebrations that are happening in my classroom and be willing to listen to other teachers and their ideas of what might happen and what they have tried.

It is amazing to have other people with an outside lens be able to look at the work you are doing, and who have experience in schools and with the materials to say, ‘hey, that is a great idea, or try it this way, or here is another way that we have seen teachers use that…’ just having someone else’s ideas to help grow yours is very beneficial...we have our literacy coach at our school, but to be able to talk with other literacy coaches, because everyone comes with their own knowledge and ideas, and things that they have seen or tried...

Betty:  It’s not like my class, and [another teacher’s] class...it’s our kids, you know we are all working together to help all second graders, or even give ideas, I think everybody is just willing to help different grade levels to help bring grade levels together to help all kids be successful...It helps us all being professional and wanting to do the best that we can for the kids and our learning...giving us time to collaborate, work together throughout the school year...if we asked for time to work with another grade level...we were given that time...the teachers are on board with bettering themselves and growing as educators and wanting to do what’s best for the kids, and share new ideas...

Betty’s quote on collaborating with peers to impact teaching in the classroom resonates with question two in terms of how increased collaboration has been an effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on her practice.
Coaching

Closely linked to collaboration, but with the additional component of expert influence, is coaching—one of Fullan’s high leverage professional development strategies. Candidates described the ways in which mentoring and or coaching available due to the partnership, impacted their practices. Within the partnership itself, coaching was integrated as part of the three-credit option for those working toward obtaining three credits. In these instances, the reading specialist was designated the coach. As the only candidate to participate in the three credit option which included coaching, Betty stated the following:

Betty: ...doing a full cycle of working with my mentor teacher [coach] and having her observe me was helpful, and getting feedback throughout the year, and also working with the other schools.

I do feel like throughout the time at the school...everyone was checking in and was like, ‘is there anything I can support you with’, and ‘anything I can do’ or ‘do you need anything?’ and I thought that was good, you know, everybody was willing to help out and then yeah with [the reading specialist] too, we did ours typically more in the fall and then throughout the year if I wanted to be like, ‘oh, I am just still feeling a little bit unsure about this’. She is always willing, I feel like she is stretched a lot at our school, and I feel bad for that. But I don’t get the feeling that she can’t ever, she will be like ‘oh, can we meet after school real quick or during lunch, she is more than happy to figure out a time, even though she is spread kind of thin.

...the mentorships that I have had with [the reading specialist] has been effective because she’s you know observed me in my classroom and then giving me feedback and that cycle and then I have observed her, which helps me a lot. And, then coaching, again with [the reading specialist], and even just kind of learning from each other, from my teaching partner in first-grade we worked together a lot with planning and sharing ideas so.

External to the partnership, coaching was an established practice in the Jaco district and was limited in the Limon district. In the Limon district, while staff were supportive of each other, interview evidence showed that they were not as far along in the
coaching model as Jaco. Lucy noted that from her vantage point, her district did not support the mentorship or coaching that had been made available through the partnership, having stated it was, "non-existent," and that "...a coach really needs to come into your classroom, and we don’t have a coach." She was not the only staff member to feel this way. Beth’s comments follow.

Beth: ...from a coaching aspect, that is one thing I feel our district is lacking, we don’t have a specific literacy coach. We have reading specialists that can help but I think they are learning and growing with the model as well, and so that just presents a different spin on it...[The reading teacher and/or specialist] don’t come in and do lessons with the group, they don’t come in and do mini-lessons, so to try to give support in that is hard...they are learning along too...it would be difficult to coach when you are still getting your understanding.

I think they were involved in the Professional Development, but as I said like they are learning along too. So it is hard, I think it would be difficult to coach when you are still getting your understanding. They don’t come in and do lessons with the group, they don’t come in and do mini-lessons, so to try to give support in that is hard.

In Jaco, the picture painted by the interview candidates was entirely different. Lizzy, Aria, and Betty share their comments below:

Lizzy: ...our reading, um, language arts "coach" and she will do some training here and there if we have questions.

...when the training is over, our coach is always available to us…

Aria: ...once a month we do have a day dedicated to literacy development and a day dedicated to math development, and then we also have our literacy coach who comes around and is willing to work with us throughout the school year in whatever areas that we would like to continue to focus on.

The [reading specialist] helps whenever she is needed. She runs the Monday morning, or the Monday afternoon, literacy meetings and plans activities for the whole staff as far as to move our whole staff, but if there is anything grade-level specific, class-specific, or student-specific she is there to offer ideas and helps coach us through how to work through it.

We have a literacy coach who will work with us on improving our
instruction and then just aids and things to come into the class to help every student get what they need.

Betty: You know if we asked for time to work with another grade level or with one of our coaches, we were given that time, you know, as best as we can to do that, and time to observe other classrooms

I feel like they [our coaches] are excited for us, to want to keep learning, and to be the best we can be.

[the reading specialist] is always willing to meet when, you know, I need support or a mentor to have her come in my classroom and I can kind of see how she would do like a guided reading group or something if I feel I need some support with that and get some feedback on my teaching.

The strongest examples of mentoring and coaching due specifically to the partnership also originated from Aria who revealed the following:

Aria: It is amazing to have other people with an outside lens to be able to look at the work you are doing, and who have experience in schools and with materials.

We have our literacy coach at our school, but to be able to talk with other literacy coaches, because everyone comes with their own knowledge and ideas, and things that they have seen or things that they have tried...to have other people's opinions about [how things will work out], to share [with], or to try [something] a new way.

Bella was less sure of her answers throughout the interview process. At times she echoed sentiments from the perspective of the person who should be providing the coaching, and at other times spoke to the effect that teachers were receiving appropriate support, indicating a disconnect between her own thoughts and those of the teachers, as well as within her own thoughts. It is important to note that the coaching of Bella is at a different level than that of the other participants due to her role. Further, it is equally important to note that she took advantage of the opportunity to obtain coaching and support from the facilitators. Her comments follow:

Bella: It [the coaching] is lacking. I need some help with the coaching part of it.
I am taking a coaching class through [a professional agency]... I really would like to have a mentor...a little coaching for myself to give me that little insight.

Me: Are you receiving the appropriate amount of support, in terms of coaching, feedback, or sharing?

Bella: For myself no, but I think if I was a classroom teacher I could say sometimes, ‘yes.’ Sometimes I know they feel like ‘no.’

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Bella: We don’t have a formal mentorship, but we are working on it. Like, some people who I guess I am more comfortable with or who are more comfortable with me, we talk way more often, like off the clock. I don’t know it just kind of comes up like even at lunch or wherever, where other people, it’s like, let’s not talk about it. Or when we do make a plan to talk about it like they are very, I don’t know, they have all the right answers, but yet I don’t see them walking the walk like they just don’t want to be bothered by it. It’s hard for me personally to mentor them. But I have always heard to start with the easier ones, the ones that you know want it. You know some people, they just want to do what they know is best I guess, per se. It’s not always so wrong, but it is the 21st Century let’s collaborate a little bit more.

I need to break up my job more to do more coaching with the teachers...I need some help with the coaching part of it. I am taking a coaching class...

Me: When I asked about the Professional Development in terms of coaching, you said you thought it was lacking, or that maybe you needed some help with the coaching part of it. Could you expand on that, like what help were you thinking, or what were you looking for, or how could that be done?

Bella: I really would like to have a mentor. I have taken a class in the past, I have read books, so I get the gist of what I am trying to do, but I think it’s just a little coaching for myself just to, you know, give you that, I don’t know, that little insight.

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Me: How are you making the new practices fit within the context of your classroom or work?

Bella: ...coaching, team-teaching, and intervention groups
Reviewing the above, it is clear that while the districts are at different points, the partnership has helped to continue, or grow, a culture of coaching in both districts. However, the difference between the two districts is vast, and the Partnership may choose to consider additional strands for the coaches as part of the Summer Institute, or work to develop a clear mission that is supported and or adopted by both the Partnership and the districts in order to provide the best opportunity for the skills learned to be practiced and indoctrinated in each building.

**Knowledge and Skill Development**

While overall the commentary received on collaboration and coaching was prevalent the candidates also focused on other aspects of the partnership that impacted their practices. Some looked at tangible changes including the creation and development of toolkits while others had alternative reflections. Collectively, the growth of knowledge and development of skills are not unique to the Alajuela Partnership as the goal of most professional development is to assist with the acquisition of skills and knowledge, however, it is discussed here as growth of both knowledge and skill development was noted by all participants.

Both Aria and Betty shared that the Partnership gave them the opportunity to, "...dig-in to what the [student] workshops should look like, and really just focus on that aspect of it," (Aria, Interview 1); "I don’t know that I could have learned it on my own...I read [professional] books over the summer, but those don’t help nearly as much as having this time to work with other teachers and coaches, and being able to collaborate and actually create things I can use" (Betty, Interview 1). Betty went on to address several ways the partnership affected her knowledge and skills:
Betty: My goal is to further develop my knowledge. I feel like it is always a work in progress and I haven’t felt like I have perfected the art of either one even though I have taught it for a while, I feel like it is always a good reminder too of what I should be doing. You know there are so many different parts to it. It’s not just one thing, it’s the mini-lesson, the guided reading part, the conferring aspect, the strategy groups. There is so much, so I feel like it has been so nice to have time to focus, to hone in on each summer and further my knowledge...I really feel like I can utilize [the Institute] because I don’t feel like at home I would do that (laughter) and to have my teaching partner there and other second grade teachers there as well is really nice to have that time to work and apply what I have learned...I have met the goals for refining my toolkit, even kind of getting to look ahead at next year’s class list, even though it could change, but just to kind of have a general idea now of who is coming in and how I can help them next year with reading and writing that has been kind of nice too and to look at their writing samples and so.

Aria provided several examples of the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership on her practice including:

- Understanding how to provide more detailed feedback, and the impact on student growth
- How to note-take and keep conferring notes with the students
- How to build progressions to help the students see where they were at and what the next step was
- Focus on conferring and small groups; how to develop a plan before going into conferences and small groups on what she wants to accomplish with those individual students, as well as having an overall goal for lessons and the unit; this has really helped her focus on what she can do to help those students focus as well as the whole class (Aria, Interview 2)

In general, she discussed her ability to "focus on the student growth" and "...really tailor my instruction to reach students and help them grow."
Beth referenced the toolkit she made during the institute and then moved on to some workshop specifics, citing that she would, "...try to use the language better," and, "try to get the time down." She discussed specific strategies she intended to practice in order to ensure this occurred. She also referenced the make-and-take journals and rubrics that she will use with her students, indicating both were very valuable. Beth honed in on what she learned and related it to the research of Hattie (2009), talking about the zone of proximal learning and how using the conferring strategies presented will help to increase the effect size and subsequently enhance achievement.

Lucy spoke about how her practices have changed due to the Partnership. She shared specifically, "I remember the small groups and how you do conferences with everyone." She talked about how this had been a time-consuming process, but through participating in the Summer Institute she learned, "...how to have a small group...conferencing with each one of them individually, and letting them do a little bit of work." She also noted very specific practices modeled for the teachers at the Institute:

[The presenter] came up with a really neat idea that I like about creating a flawed writing. She talked about how she did it, and then we had an idea to start with one of the examples and then mess-up the organizations, so that when you show it to your students, you can show them what it looks like, and how to reorganize it to make it look like it makes sense. I felt like that was really cool...so I was very pleased with that, and just getting me thinking about it and ideas I have. (Lucy, Interview 1)

Likewise, Beth, walked away with some very practical strategies. She succinctly stated, "It has changed my teaching," and then talked about organization, grading, record
keeping, workshop management, and increased standards and goals. She also indicated that the Institute:

changed the way I think about reading and learning...I feel this method is the best, and I see the best results with [it]. Workshop helped change my philosophy about reading as well...Just how children learn to read, I thought that was a good mind shift, a difference in my thinking and I like that. (Beth, Interview 2)

Beth further admitted:

The kids read far more than they have ever, they write more than they have in the past...from a personal standpoint, I understand the curriculum. I am more deeply involved. I have a better, a deeper understanding of the curriculum, the student development, reading development. I think I understand reading instruction far better than I ever did in the past. I feel more involved with it...I’m a better teacher. I’m writing the lessons more than following something sort of prescribed. You know like I said my experience in the past was a manual and this is very different and it allows you to be more involved in it and more personal....

(Beth, Interview 2)

Bella spoke about common language and skill development as a way to get everyone on the same page by working with an expert when she stated, "...they are all at different levels, so they are all hearing the same thing, at the same time, so that their questions too can be asked...They like to hear it from somebody else who they view as an expert." She further expanded on what she heard from the teachers not only in Limon, but across all of the districts involved in the Partnership, "I am hearing from the teachers, ‘Oh, this is very helpful,’ and ‘That’s a different way than what I was doing,’ or, ‘I forgot
about that…” (Bella, Interview 2). Bella additionally shared that she arranged to meet with the presenters separately in order to gain more insights that would allow her to be a more impactful coach in the Limon district.

The following table summarizes the overarching knowledge and skill development areas observed by the participants.

Table 10: Skill Development

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Perhaps most telling of the candidates’ insights into how the Partnership affected their practices was the confidence they exuded following the Summer Institute. While
each candidate expressed possessing more knowledge and skills that would lead to better facilitation and higher quality instruction due to the Partnership and Summer Institutes, Betty elaborated:

...now I have created materials that I could leave with kids, anchor charts, and strategies that I can actually leave with them that are created ahead of time and are really well organized now with tabs, and I can easily find them and it is a lot more user friendly. (Betty, Interview 2)

The type of learning noted by each of the teachers, refers to teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers’ content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh, 2009). Though occurring during the summer, these outcomes very similarly mimic that of job-embedded professional learning. From the evidence provided by all of the interview candidates, their knowledge and skill development was impacted by the professional development offered through the Alajuela Partnership, however, this is not distinct to the Partnership as the goal of most professional development is for participants to walk away with more knowledge and/or skill than they came in with.

Rejuvenation

The final area covered in this section, noted by two of the six candidates is the concept of rejuvenation. When expanded to include excitement and happiness, this concept was verbalized by four of the interview participants. Though a search of the literature yielded limited information, a 2016 article by Trust, Krutka, and Carpenter, that referred to professional learning networks via social media “as inspiring persistence and
engendering rejuvenation” (p. 24), two alternative concepts to rejuvenation are presented: happiness and positivity. Shawn Achor, a happiness researcher, stated, "We become more successful when we are happier and more positive" (2010, p. 15). Achor also posited that "the single greatest advantage in the modern economy is a happy and engaged workforce" and that "...happiness raises nearly every business and educational outcome: raising sales by 37%, productivity by 31%, and accuracy on tasks by 19%, as well as a myriad of health and quality of life improvements" (2011). Another set of researchers found similar findings: "...happy people appear to be more successful than their less happy peers in the three primary life domains: work, relationships, and health" (Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener, 2005, p. 825). According to these same researchers, "happy people are [ ] better able to achieve the values and goals they have been socialized to believe are worthwhile" (p. 822), happy individuals are also better decision-makers (p. 831), better at creating social networks (p. 833), possess the ability to complete complex mental tasks and recall information (p. 839). Most applicable to professional learning and application of knowledge and skills is that:

 even in a negative mood—happy people will generally perform better on many tasks because of the skills they have learned and resources they have accumulated because of their frequent experiences of positive moods in the past. (p. 843)

A final set of researchers, Hom and Arbuckle (2005), in their study of children, found that being happy produced a significantly higher goal and superior performance than when sad. While this research is specific to children and not adults, when taken in conjunction with the other research, it provides a compelling case for the emotional state of being on performance.
Throughout the interview process, candidates used words such as *reenergized* and *camaraderie* to talk about the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership. These emotions lead naturally to positivity and happiness.

Lucy: ...first off [it] kind of, it rejuvenates you and also, it just gave me some ideas on what I can do to make it work better for me...

It re-energized me to be a go-getter, and I can really tackle this...I taught Language Arts for a few years, and then was off for a year doing math...So it was kind of on the backburner for me, so I just am fully into it and am reenergized for it and for bringing in the small groups and things I haven’t done in the past...the training rejuvenates and reminds you...All of a sudden you start veering from it a little bit and you try different things and getting back; it does help.

I am kind of disappointed that I couldn’t be here for more...oh this is going to be really cool!

Bella: The teachers became more knowledgeable and like for myself...it rejuvenated me to see someone else get excited. You know for someone like myself—got more excited again.

I am excited about their reading and their writing

Beth: I have been really happy with the trainings, the way they have been presented. I like that we have you know, whole group, you are kind of doing the same thing, you are doing mini-lessons of things that we all have the big questions on and then you are having the smaller groups of the things you might have specific questions with depending on where you are in your experience with workshop so that was, that was very helpful as well.

Betty: I was optimistic and it is kind of what you put into it. I figure I am never going to complain. I feel like it is my attitude and if I want to be productive and work hard, and use the time wisely I can choose to do that and I feel like I did so I am happy with that.

I’m just excited to try new things. We collaborate a lot...it is just fun to create things together and we are going to try this next year and just have new things to do that are exciting
Out of the group, Beth appeared indifferent stating, "I don’t know that it has changed my motivation, but it has helped me stay focused. It helped me to determine the important things [laughing] to pay attention to."

The interview candidates expressing rejuvenation as a result of the professional development provided through the Partnership is important as researchers have pinpointed professional-development opportunities as a "major culprit in teacher attrition" (Castro, Kelly, and Shih, 2010, p. 622). Rejuvenation is an important resilience strategy (p. 628), and for at least some of the participants, this professional learning created an opportunity for rejuvenation and an important support system. Of additional importance is that this occurred at various levels throughout the organization, as noted by Bella who fulfilled the role of both teacher and also reading specialist, and across districts, due to cross-district collaborative opportunities.

**Question 2 Summary**

*How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?* The majority of teachers interviewed indicated that the Professional Learning Partnership impacted their practice. The responses included those surrounding collaboration, coaching, skill development, and rejuvenation. Of these, collaboration, coaching, and rejuvenation can be directly linked to the unique aspects of the Partnership; whereas, knowledge and skill development are connected, but are also present across professional learning opportunities and are not necessarily unique to the Alajuela Partnership. The differential is present because this Partnership exists across districts thereby creating unique opportunities for collaboration and coaching to occur between colleagues across districts. Further, rejuvenation is significant as all but Beth expressed a
sense of this from the opportunity to work together to learn and collaborate due to the professional development offered through the Partnership.

In order to fully analyze these areas of impact, referencing Charlotte Danielson’s *Framework for Teaching* was included, focusing specifically on three domains: planning and preparation, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Using Danielson’s Framework for teaching gives us a clear idea of how professional development activities strengthen practice, how collaboration contributes to improving practices, and furthermore how professional learning integrates with changes in planning and instruction. This professional learning was targeted during the Summer Institute and led to changes in collaboration, coaching, and skill development. Collaboration was found to have increased through the partnership, while the amount or quality of coaching varied by partnership district. It was further identified that both coaching and skill development varied depending on the role held in the district. In this facet, Bella shared that while the needs of the teachers were met, hers as a specialist were not; in turn, she sought additional support. Skill development was a reported area of significant growth for all interview candidates, though the self-reported areas differed with the exception of the creation of toolkits. Though a search of the literature did not yield anything linked directly to rejuvenation following, or as a result of face-to-face professional development, it is important to note as rejuvenation was described by two of the six candidates interviewed as positively impacting their practice, with two more echoing their sentiments about happiness and excitement, while one of the candidates provided a neutral response regarding their demeanor.
Question 3

How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning opportunities they have experienced outside of the partnership? The focus of this question is the comparison of the perceptions of professional development experiences outside of the Partnership with those perceptions of the Summer Institute, offered through the Partnership. In order to gauge the effectiveness of this professional development the candidates were asked to share how this partnership varied from other experiences they had participated in previously. Responses revolved around a few reported professional development endeavors. Some of the candidates talked about their experiences in New York at a national level conference; some spoke to the Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESA) located in the state, of which there are 12; and many referred to professional development hosted individually by their own districts or in collaboration with other area districts. They shared that not all professional learning opportunities are the same. Overwhelmingly, when compared to other collaborative professional development opportunities the Institute rated higher across the board. The ways in which the educators rated the effectiveness of the professional learning opportunity depended on several factors. Repeatedly, what arose from the interviews in this study were the following themes: credibility, focus (grade level and subject matter) and sustained, lasting relationships, and spiraled professional learning. Of these four themes, two directly related to the Alajuela Partnership—lasting relationships and credibility—while spiraled professional learning and the focused and sustained nature of the content and of
the Institute were common to all good professional development and not unique to the Partnership, but were important enough to the interview participants to mention.

*Credibility*

In contrast to the professional development offered in each district or through CESA, the teachers involved in the study attributed part of the success of the Alajuela Partnership and its foundations to the qualified presenters/facilitators and those who planned the Institute.

**Facilitators.** With over fifty years of combined educational experience, the facilitators for the Summer Institute were proven experts in their field. They were public school educators, each employed in the state the Partnership was located, as a reading specialist, curriculum coordinator, and assistant superintendent of schools. These educators were hired by San Jose University in order to teach specifically for the Alajuela Partnership; the trio of presenters has since been hired by the University to provide similar professional development for other educators in the state. While these other professional development opportunities have not been researched, it is important to note that good presenters are common to all effective professional development.

Lucy attributed much of the success of the Institute to the expertise of the presenter having stated, "The presenters were of a higher caliber...Definitely was very knowledgeable. I think that at [a regional educational organization] sometimes you get someone really good, and sometimes it’s not so good...the[se] presenters were of a high caliber.” She compared this to the area’s regional presenters and indicated that sometimes you get someone really good, and sometimes it’s not so good. Elaborating, the candidates shared the following:
Lucy: Bringing in qualified presenters that bring in new ideas and have you look at things a different way. They also offer you the ability to contact them outside of the training sessions for follow-up questions.

Bella: The [facilitators are] very well-versed with their slide shows and presenting. You can tell they have done it before a few times.

In addition to presenters who have credentials, experience, and key knowledge, a good facilitator is one who possesses strong delivery skills and is able to actively engage the participants through body language and an organized delivery. Beth recognized these traits and called attention to them during her first interview:

Beth: I have been really happy with the trainings, the way they have been presented. I like that we have whole group kind of doing the same thing, mini-lessons of things that we all have the big questions on and then you are having the smaller groups of the things you might have specific questions with depending on where you are in your experience with workshop so that was, that was very helpful.

An additional component that originated from Bella beyond the credentials of the facilitators was of their personable and “real” nature. Not only did they connect with the staff, they were physically present, which far surpassed the professional development videos she has used with her staff previously. She stated:

The teachers claim it was very valuable to them. It opened their eyes because obviously they don’t read every page of the Lucy Calkins books or remember everything they have read, and so it is helpful to hear, and see, and having [the facilitators] come in and show and see the videos and stuff like that. They like that because it is more personable than when I bring up a video, say from the teacher’s college, they are like that is staged or you know those aren’t real. (Bella, Interview 2)
Beyond their physical presence during the Summer Institute, Beth noted the extension of the facilitators’ support, indicating, "...the presenters offered themselves if you needed support; there were a lot of materials and resources given as well; [and] at any time you felt you needed to contact them, you could" (Beth, Interview 1).

Adding a final layer of credibility, was that of the local presenters, the reading specialists from across the Partnership Districts. While they were not in front of the staff most of the time, they did provide feedback and support during the training, and provided coaching outside of the Institute hours. Betty had the following to state about them and the hired facilitators:

I think it is just a good opportunity to hear from other reading specialists, not just I mean [Jaco’s Reading Specialist has] great information, but then there are other people like [the Miramar Reading Specialists], and who else having [the lead facilitator] come is wonderful. I think that just getting feedback from all different people who have different maybe strengths and what they know. (Betty, Interview 1)

**The Planning Team.** The final unique secondary theme to the Alajuela Partnership is that of the planning team. Planning teams in general, are necessary for any successful professional development event. What makes this team unique is twofold: the cross-district collaboration and university inclusion in planning which contributed not only to question one, but leads to higher levels of credibility as discussed here for question three. As stated, the Alajuela Partnership relied on its high-quality facilitators and the planning team. The planning team involved highly-skilled individuals including the University representative who specifically specialized in literacy, along with
administrators and reading specialists from each of the Partnership districts. Coupled, the planning partners and presenters led to high levels of credibility in the Institute.

The planning team, consisting of representatives from each district and the university, was recognized by several of the interview candidates for their thoughtfulness in preparing for the Summer Institutes. Bella and Betty specifically made note of all of the "amenities" provided by the planning team including food, water, and supplies. Betty also noted that the Planning Team listened to the feedback provided by the teachers in order to optimize the Summer Institute. Betty further praised the planning team for its proactive and effective communication which allowed her to come prepared for the training.

While the lead contact from the University sat on the planning team and possessed impressive credentials this was not mentioned by any of the interview candidates. Rather, the candidates focused on who they could see, and who they had frequent contact with: the Facilitators. This leads back to the formation of the Partnership; which, while not noted by the teachers, was formed equally by the interests of the university and districts in creating a collaborative opportunity to assist in developing teachers in the area of the Lucy Calkins Readers & Writers Workshop.

**Focused & Sustained**

Equally as significant as the theme “credibility” is the theme of the “focused and sustained nature” of professional development. While there was not a consensus on specifics, Lucy summed it up nicely when she stated that she appreciated the "narrower focus…and to really be able to dig into that, and to spend some time with that," and
tended to be more disappointed when professional learning was "too general." This theme was expressed by other participants as well.

Beth: I have to say our collaboration has more of a focus on how to do that too when we are meeting about certain topics, we are staying on topic and I think that has been a value as well. Sometimes you sit down and you just start talking about everything and meetings kind of goes everywhere. We kind of lose our sense, and especially with the workshop that we had this summer, my colleague, my cohort and I, we really stayed focused on what we wanted to do with each of the units and creating checklists, and things like that and that was all part of this, like keeping our focus on a topic and being better organized and I think that all came from the trainings that we had. (Interview 1)

Beth: …there was a good scope and sequence to what we are doing so, again, it kind of right where we were at and is kind of where we left off, we weren’t starting over again and talking about what is a mini-lesson and we kind of have all been through that. I think, to keep moving forward and to keep again asking teachers where are you at now? What are your needs right now? And I think you did a good job, I think the conferencing was an area we all had concerns about, and so that was a great workshop this summer. (Interview 2)

Betty too, rated the Institute, planned and facilitated by the Alajuela Partnership, higher than other professional development opportunities for two reasons: it was ongoing and it was focused by design. Betty specifically indicated appreciation for the teachers being asked what they needed more support in, which provided choice, and therefore focus, in terms of the sessions they attended.

Betty: …it helped me develop like writer’s notebooks more and how to utilize those in strategy groups. It helped me deepen my understanding of not just doing individual conferring, but also how to reach more kids through strategy groups. Um, this year with writer’s focusing more on those progressions...

I focused on for writing like strategy groups and reading, you know, more the guided reading groups, and just to be able to have some time to, you know, learn more about ways that I can better improve my teaching, and certain areas or aspects of Reader’s or Writer’s Workshop that I wouldn’t really plan to do otherwise (Interview 2)

This is not enough to dictate that the focus of the professional learning was unique to the Alajuela Partnership, however, it was mentioned by multiple candidates, and is therefore
documented as a theme of importance to the participants. Aria’s statements confirmed the focused nature of the professional learning:

Aria: I have focused more on my conferring and my small groups…It was being able to share in areas where you wanted continued growth in such as really focusing on like toolkits and having time to create resources while having the support there. (Interview 2)

…mini progressions we have made and use those and really focus on the goal setting and this year we have really enhanced our toolkits and are excited to try them out.

While Aria and Betty focused on grade level, they also pinpointed the benefits of focusing time on creating tools and resources they could use with their students. Beth, too, focused on the benefit of specific topics addressed. Both she and Lucy appreciated the narrower focus of the professional learning versus a typical training. Beth appreciated the zooming-in on running records, conferring, and developing a toolkit. Lucy specifically referred to learning about working with small groups of students and conferring. She shared, "I have attended a number of local [professional development opportunities], just one day here or there...just a lot of different ones scattered about." Lucy’s comments acknowledge the sustained professional learning, but in particular the reason she felt sustained professional learning was better was due to the narrow focus is stated below:

I think sometimes you don’t know what you are going to get, because I have been to the training, then when I come there and someone is just training with what I have already been trained on, so I really liked what we were trained on today...and talking about the small groups, and the conferring. So that was, I liked that it was a narrower focus. (Lucy, Interview 1)
Going hand-in-hand with this was the issue of a "starting point." Nearly all of the interview candidates indicated that oftentimes they lose interest, or are disappointed, in professional learning opportunities because the professional learning treats each participant as if they need information from the ground up. For example, Lucy stated:

I was a little more disappointed [with the first day of the Institute] it was too general. We have had a tendency in these consortiums to start at step one again. You know it is always like 101, and when are we moving on? But you do have those at the workshop that do need that as well, so, yes, today’s [Day 2 of the Institute] was very good.

Aria verified, "It is extremely hard when everybody is kind of in a different spot on their journey, but being able to dig-in to where we are instead of listening to the overview over-and-over [would be an improvement]." Within comments like this, most alluded to the notion that many teachers do in fact need the beginning concepts, and so professional learning planners must be able to find balance in what is offered.

**Grade Level and Subject Matter.** A subsection of the theme of "focus" was that effective professional development is specific to a teacher’s grade-level or the subject matter they teach. Lucy shared a vignette about her district’s (Limon) practices to demonstrate the benefit of the professional learning offered through the partnership. She indicated that professional development in her district often consisted of someone attending a conference and then:

[Coming back and sharing] with the rest of the staff what they learned, which often did not apply because they might be teaching third or fourth grade...but it might not necessarily apply to seventh and eighth grade. (Lucy, Interview 1)
Aria and Betty also talked about the power of collaborating with other like-grade level teachers. Aria in fact, felt that this was the most positive aspect of being a participant in the professional learning since she did not have other teachers to collaborate with regularly. Aria continued by adding that by being on this journey together, the specific grade level teachers could begin to dig-in to the literacy work they specifically needed to explore. Betty agreed with the concept of like-grade collaboration, but also added that having teachers from other schools and other grade levels was helpful for vertical planning and ensuring consistency among teachers. Betty was also one of the few candidates to talk about how the professional learning opportunity through the Partnership made her feel when she stated, "We [teaching partner and the first grade teachers in the Partnership] collaborate a lot, and it is just fun to create things together...and have things that are exciting."

Lucy shared a specific district-level example involving the Student Information System, in which "a couple people went to learn about it and then they came back and shared that with us." In providing this vignette, Lucy admitted, "I didn’t even go to that session because I already knew what I needed to know for that." While speaking to the nature and design of professional development in her district she indicated that other attempts at professional development had been made in previous years such as book studies, webinars, and external speakers. However, she felt "...a lot of staff members are not interested in [book studies]." Beyond these assumed failed professional development attempts, Lucy indicated that no other professional development opportunities had been offered this year, making the disheartening comment, "I don’t think we have had any Professional Development at Limon this year. None." She shared that other
A collaborative professional learning efforts offered by area districts seemed to be designed for, or focused on, teachers in other grade levels or content areas not relevant to her own:

Each district, we would get together for our math meetings which the first year it was more about the high school, and it really was helpful for eighth grade and getting them, preparing them for the placement test, but before then it was really still more about the high school...Whereas it would just be nice to have the middle school team. (Lucy, Interview 1)

Lucy’s comments summarized the sentiments of the interview candidates in terms of the importance of specificity in professional learning relevance to both grade and subject area. The focus on individualized and differentiated professional learning supports the findings of Guskey (1991), who stated, “... the central focus of professional development activities must be on the individuals involved… To facilitate change it is necessary to... consider the embedded structure that most directly affects the actions and choices of the individuals involved” (p. 241). By doing this, Guskey indicated that professional learning becomes a personal endeavor and empowering process for the individual to work through (p. 241). The subject relevance links directly to the findings of Darling-Hammond as cited by Garet, et al (2001) who commented that “teachers must learn more about the subjects they teach, and how the students learn these subjects” (p. 916), and that the continued deepening of knowledge and skills is an integral part of the teaching profession (p. 916).

In terms of this specific training, Lucy shared that the planning team should, "Continue to focus on the small, manageable pieces, and give us time to work on those, and how we are going to use that in our classroom." She also commented on the
relevance to her position, and added, "As I am teaching language arts, and as I have said I was off for a year so I didn’t do any training on it last year, and so it was nice to get back into it." Each of the interview candidates spoke to the concept that the more focused the professional development, the more successful.

**Lasting Relationships**

In addition to “credibility” and “focused and sustained,” each of the candidates spoke to the rapport that developed among the educators. These relationships were reported to be stronger than those developed in other professional development settings. Aria, who had only been employed by the Jaco district, spoke from the lens of the small district:

I think you get to know that other educators and those people that you are working with and the whole collaboration, whereas the one shot kind of deal is you are just there and you don’t really form really strong relationships with people like I wouldn’t feel as comfortable having them in my classroom and sharing everything that is going on, but I feel like with these past couple of years I feel willing to share the struggles and celebrations that are happening in my classroom and be willing to listen to other teachers and their ideas of what might happen and what they have tried. (Aria, Interview 2)

Aria was not the only teacher to reflect on relationships forged over time. Bella indicated the same stating, "The camaraderie, the feeling that we could call each other if we ever had questions, sharing resources…” This was key, particularly for the Limon District who had only one teacher per grade level. Betty’s comments too, alluded to the
development of relationships and rapport, but also indicated that maintaining
relationships is easier during the summer months and less-so during the school year:

I found people are there because they want to be for the most part and I think
during the school year it doesn’t always carry through when we get together with
other schools, but I feel like in the summer when we are all together we are
hearing about best practices and things that we can try out and teachers are really
open to sharing what they do at their school, you know we exchange emails and
contact information, and I don’t know that it always gets, we say that we will
continue the collaboration throughout the school year with the other schools, but
that doesn’t necessarily always happen. But when we are together in the summer
it is easy because we are all right there, and sometimes too maybe meet, I don’t
know, maybe kind of earlier in the school year, and then later in the school year
you know to see where we are all at with everything would be beneficial too.
(Betty, Interview 2)

What differed between the Partnership and other learning opportunities is that at
least from the candidates interviewed, none mentioned networking or connecting (or
reconnecting) with people they met while at other training sessions. No one mentioned
the ability or desire to discuss best practices or continue the collaboration that occurred
that day when it came to other professional development opportunities. Based on the
candidates' comments, the focused partnerships with a common vision and goal across
districts along with colleagues of a similar mindset, are what the candidates valued. This
cross-district partnership is an aspect of the Alajuela Partnership model. The
relationships that were formed throughout the Partnership were lasting, and had proven to be over a multiyear period.

**Spiraled Professional Learning**

Equally as significant as the theme "lasting relationships" is the theme of "spirling." Although this is a method in which any well-designed professional development opportunity can be designed, it was not mentioned by any of the candidates as a method used in other professional development opportunities. However, this Partnership offered professional learning over two summers, and based the material offered in year two upon the learning that occurred in year one as well as feedback received following the first year of the Summer Institute. Two-thirds of the interview candidates talked about the benefits of longitudinal professional learning over one-shot or single-delivery opportunities. For the purposes of this research, spiraling is defined as the process of continually reviewing what you know while simultaneously learning new material extended over more than a single session. Below, three of the interview candidates talked about the benefits of spiraled professional learning and hearing the material and/or information again, over one-shot or single-delivery opportunities, in terms of their own learning or best practices in teaching.

**Bella:** By it being more inclusive over several years, it is way more beneficial for someone because you usually don’t pick everything up in the one shot deal. Even when you try something, you need to come back to it again and learn a little bit more and talk about the frustrations and what’s not working, or what is working well and kind of fix it until you make the changes and education is kind of changing too so it is so helpful.

**Beth:** This should continue to always be ongoing because there is always changing and always evolving, it’s never done!

**Betty:** I definitely feel like I have been able to improve my, my teaching and I feel like I know more about ways that I can help different types of learners
and I have been able to like feel more confident in understanding the different components of readers and writers workshop, and just to reach more kids...I always feel like even if I have heard it a few times, it is good to hear it again. I’m like, oh yeah, I need to be better about that.

Another comment from Betty originated from her experience in a large district previous to her working in Jaco. This observation was unique to Betty as she was the only interview candidate to have worked in one of the research districts for less than 30% of her teaching career; all other interview candidates had been employed in one of the current districts for at least 67% of their teaching career; two candidate’s sole employment was in their current district. One of the comparisons Betty drew was between the professional learning offered through the Partnership, and the back-to-school in servicing that districts engage in. Many districts choose to kick-off their school year with a large assembly-style presentation. While many assume this to be a good practice, Betty discussed the shortcomings of this type of professional development which was offered in her previous district.

Betty: I have taught in bigger districts like [district name] where we met in the auditorium and there were over 300 people and they had an inspirational speaker...and that is nice but I don't feel like in other districts we get as much work time to actually do anything with it…

Lizzy, shared several reasons about why the sustained professional learning exceeded the outcomes of one-shot professional development. She stated:

- ...there is value, even if it is the same thing. There is value in it (laugh) because you stray further and further away otherwise from the original intent of the program. (Interview 1)

- You just forget and move on or you make a change due to it and move on. But then when you are in an ongoing program, such as this, you keep building on
what you are doing and you keep working on honing your skills and trying to teach the way the whole program is meant to be. You keep working at it. The one and done I always think of it as goose and golf. It’s really not important. Nobody gives it importance because it’s a one time thing. (Interview 2)

- It’s kind of confirming too, to see if you have stayed true to the units of study. (Interview 1)
- Every year, it kind of re-validates that you need to keep trying to do it because it is difficult. (Interview 1)

The Partnership advertised the second Summer Institute to an audience who had some experience with workshop, indicating, "Participants should be familiar with the basic components of the Readers’ Workshop including: the components of a literacy block, mini-lessons, conferring, leveled texts and the workshop environment. The sessions will focus on specific areas of Readers’ Workshop to help lift the level of teaching and learning for those who have some experience with workshop." A venn diagram is used below to denote the topics covered, and therefore the evolution of the Summer Institute below.
Based on the topics she observed being addressed through the Partnership’s Summer Institutes, Betty discussed specific strategies and topics that were explored based upon the previous year’s learning; she also discussed the benefits of coaching, which will be discussed during the credibility section of Chapter 5. What follows is a quote from Betty regarding the benefits of sustained professional learning:

...if you do it each summer, it does change as your needs change, and for me personally...what I learned then was good for me then, and what I learned this summer, it is appropriate for where I am at now with my teaching. So I do like that it continues to change and take into account that some teachers have more experience, and some teachers don’t and just giving us and deciding where we are at with it, and where we comfortable learning more, and you know other teacher’s not getting overwhelmed with learning too much all at once, so I do, I like the
continuum of having it every summer and building off of that. (Betty, Interview 2)

Question 3 Summary

*How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning opportunities they have experienced outside of the partnership?* The focus of this question was to compare the perceived effects of the Alajuela Partnership’s Summer Institute with that of other professional development opportunities. When responding to this research question, the candidates referenced several main aspects of the Institute and Partnership that made this collaboration different from other professional learning opportunities. These aspects were organized into four themes for the reader. The first and third themes, those of credibility and lasting relationships are exclusive to the dynamic created by the Alajuela Partnership. The second and fourth themes, the focused and sustained nature of the Institute and the spiraled nature of the content, relate to the operations of the Institute itself and are thus, not unique to the Partnership, but were of importance to the participants. Lasting relationships were formed by participants in the Alajuela Partnership’s Summer Institutes, as the partnership itself was structured to engage participants in collaborative behaviors. Overall, candidates agreed that those teachers present for the training wanted to be there, and had a desire to learn, as opposed to previous collaborative opportunities in which a lack of professionalism was observed. Second, the Alajuela Partnership professional learning was of a sustained nature, spanning multiple years and spiraling material. Next, being "focused" was reviewed according to grade
level or subject matter, and topic. This specifically impacted the staff members involved and assisted them in making modifications to their classroom and teaching practices. The final theme discussed was credibility. Credibility was addressed by reviewing two subthemes: the credibility of the facilitators and the credibility of the planning team.

**Overall Summary**

This chapter reviewed the Alajuela Partnership through the lens’ of six educators. These educators shared their perspective during two interviews in order to respond to three guiding research questions:

1. How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a partnership model?

2. How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?

3. How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning opportunities they have experienced outside of the partnership?

The six candidates were introduced providing the reader with background on personal and professional characteristics relevant to the research. Then, each research question was addressed by identifying relevant themes that emerged and were supported by direct quotes from the interview candidates. The themes that originated from the interview candidates in terms of the effects of professional development delivered through a partnership model include: administrative leadership (leadership traits, vision, and goal setting), university ties, planning the partnership (teacher inclusion, accountability, and professionalism). The second research question was reviewed
through four themes: collaboration, coaching, skill development, and rejuvenation. The final research question, which asked the candidates to compare and contrast the perceived differences between the Professional Learning Partnership and other professional development opportunities was addressed through four themes: lasting relationships, sustained and spiraling, focus, and credibility. These themes were further identified according to unique attributes of the Alajuela Partnership or those that were observed by the interview candidates but are not unique to the Partnership itself. Finally, references to the relevant literature were incorporated to tie the findings back to leading professional development researchers where appropriate.

Table 11: Theme Relationship to the Alajuela Partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Unique to Partnership</th>
<th>Observed, but not unique to Partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a partnership model?</strong></td>
<td>● University ties&lt;br&gt;● Mission and goal setting&lt;br&gt;● Planning in a cross-district collaborative</td>
<td>● Administrative leadership&lt;br&gt;● Teacher inclusion&lt;br&gt;● Accountability&lt;br&gt;● Professionalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?</strong></td>
<td>● Collaboration&lt;br&gt;● Coaching&lt;br&gt;● Rejuvenation</td>
<td>● Knowledge and skill development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning</strong></td>
<td>● Lasting relationships&lt;br&gt;● Credibility</td>
<td>● Spiraling and sustained nature of the content&lt;br&gt;● Focus of the Institute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next chapter will discuss the findings and connect them to the literature and research. Specifically, connections between themes and questions will be explored, along with what those connections mean. Additionally, the next chapter will review implications of the study in the context of four scenarios for providing professional development for teachers. Recommendations for how this research can be applied in the future will be discussed. Finally, several options for expanding this research will be defined for the reader.
Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusion, & Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of professional development delivered in a partnership model between several small rural school districts and a small liberal arts college by uncovering, through self-reporting, teacher perceptions of each of the following: effects of the professional development offered through the Partnership; changes in teacher knowledge, skills, and practices; and, if the teachers perceived whether or not the partnership model was a more effective way to deliver professional learning in comparison to other professional programs, and if so, what aspects of the Partnership were most effective.

This interpretive study was conducted through personal interviews with six candidates who worked in the districts studied. Data from the interviews was collected and analyzed to identify themes around the research questions. Several themes emerged that supported or added to the literature. These findings were presented in Chapter 4. This chapter will discuss the major findings in context with the current research literature and theory. In addition, this chapter will discuss the ways in which participants framed each of the themes and the values associated with those themes, contradictory messages from participants, and data specific to developing a deeper understanding of whether or not the Alajuela Partnership was an effective model for delivering professional development. Finally, this chapter addresses the limitations of the study, presents recommendations for future research, and concludes with the significance of the study.
Discussion and Connections to Research

Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey’s research outcomes were the frameworks used to examine and analyze: the Professional Learning Partnership formed by the Jaco and Limon school districts and the San Jose University; the tenets of effective professional development practices; and, the educational partnership and its effect on teachers.

The findings of this study revealed ways in which educators in rural school districts perceived the Partnership Model as an effective model for Professional Learning. To review these themes, the professional development constructs of the leading professional development researchers are juxtaposed below with the findings from this study. The constructs expressed by the teachers interviewed indeed align with the researcher, but not in all cases, and three new areas are introduced.

Table 12: Professional Development Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Constructs &amp; Effective Practices in PD Planning</th>
<th>Darling Hammond</th>
<th>Fullan</th>
<th>Guskey</th>
<th>Alajuela Partnership Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job-embedded practices</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching and Mentoring</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized and Differentiated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Inclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Collaborative Cultures</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backward Planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish long-term PD Goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Alignment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Relevance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained PD</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD in the classroom</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to specific gains in student learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership that promotes student learning, empowers teachers, cultivates a climate for learning, and fosters collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals who have received inservicing</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and assessment of learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lasting) Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Knowledge/Appl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejuvenation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Learning Strategies</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Major Constructs**

From the interview data, several frequently mentioned themes emerge: leadership; application of the skills and knowledge developed through the professional development opportunity; teacher inclusion; university involvement; and coaching and mentoring, goal alignment, and sustained professional development. As evidenced by their self-reported thoughts, each of these themes, originating from the professional development offered through the Alajuela Partnership, had a clear impact on the teachers. In addition to these constructs, three new themes surface. These are: lasting relationships, applied knowledge, and rejuvenation.

**Leadership**

The theme that arose most frequently was leadership. In the table listed above, the concept of leadership is key throughout Fullan’s (2002) work. Fullan’s claims are that effective professional development is built upon leadership that empowers teachers, cultivates a climate for learning, fosters collaboration, and includes teachers. He also finds it critical for principals to be equipped with the skills necessary to support their team of educators.
In reviewing the data for leadership, it became clear that the interview candidates viewed leadership in a much broader and more generalized sense than the definition used by the researcher. That is, they did not make a distinction between leadership within the Partnership and leadership within their school building or district; rather, the interviewees generalized their responses, making it difficult for the researcher to determine exactly which “leaders” were being referenced. Further, the researcher intended to define leadership as a district administrator or superintendent, building principal, or director of curriculum; however, the interview candidates included reading specialists as administrators and often referenced them in their responses. Therefore, when discussing leaders or leadership, the broader, more generalized form of leadership is applied in this analysis.

In this study, leadership was identified repeatedly as either positive or negative, based on district of origin. In the Limon School District, the concept of leadership as both empowering and supportive was lacking; subsequently, great frustration occurred. In direct contrast, teachers from Jaco routinely responded that their administrators provided coaching and mentoring opportunities, supplied them with necessary resources, and empowered them. Their comments asserted that the administration in Jaco was well-versed with what implementing a successful workshop program looked like and could support it. In contrast, the interview candidates from Limon expressed a negative, or neutral-at-best, sentiment of their leadership: too many leaders but no clear direction, and limited communication about the Partnership and the Summer Institute. Having a new superintendent who came to the district after the Summer Institute and did not have a chance to get up to speed, and having a Director of Curriculum who did not seem as
invested in the district or staff, gave the teachers from Limon a common theme to rally behind. The candidates from Limon felt overall that their leaders were not familiar with the Lucy Calkins Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop model and made no effort to become familiar with it. The teachers from Limon all seemed to agree that they longed for leadership, or at least a vision for the district, direction for themselves as teachers, and the professional development they thought would follow. They further felt that leadership from Jaco planned the Institute without them; not being fully inclusive of Limon as a partner-district. When coupled, these impressions of the leaders in the general sense evidenced how critical leadership mattered to, and set the tone within, the Partnership, which was that leadership from Jaco was more invested in and aware of the intended outcomes, thereby also working to set the conditions for a successful Summer Institute run through the Partnership. With local district leadership lacking, the power shifted and the Partnership became the surrogate for leadership and guidance.

Bella indicated that she had not been given direction by her administration to know the ways in which she was expected to participate in the planning process. She discussed how leadership changed their expectations of her role or failed to communicate her role with her. She shared frustration over her inability to act while not knowing what was expected of her, and at the unknown of how she fit into the district she served. Bella seemed to want to do her best, but in not knowing what her role was, and still developing in the methods of Lucy Calkins Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop, she seemed to find it acceptable to “wait and see” (Bella, Interview 2). Her overall impact and connection to the Partnership could have been strengthened had she taken a different
approach to working with the new leadership, or alternatively, had the administration taken a different approach to working with her.

**Leadership summary.** Teachers have indicated through their interviews that leadership is both valued and necessary. The comments on leadership varied by district of origin, with teachers from Jaco reviewing the leadership from Jaco in a positive manner, while the teachers from Limon reviewed the leadership from Limon in a neutral or negative manner. Additionally, one of the candidates from Limon expressed some resentment toward the leadership from Jaco for not utilizing her skills in the planning process. Where leadership was expressed in the affirmative, it endorsed the research of Fullan in terms of effective leadership supporting and developing teachers. However, Fullan also recommended that leaders commit to and encourage the professional learning process, support risk-taking, recognize staff, and set clear expectations and goals. Not all of these occurred during the study, which then leads to the question, is bad leadership better than no leadership? Further, where does leadership originate from, and must it always be “the top?” Additionally, how can leadership be “regained” once it is lost?

**Application of Professional Learning**

The second significant finding from the research was that the teachers were able to immediately apply what they were learning to the development of classroom materials and the implementation of new teaching strategies. Although not unique to the Partnership, this learning and growth was consistently mentioned by all six interviewees spanning all grade levels and school teams. This finding contributed to a deeper understanding of the responses to all three research questions. The teachers expressed appreciation for the collaboration that ensued, lasting relationships that were formed, and
the practical nature of the professional learning. Because three of these concepts were new to surface: lasting relationships, rejuvenation, and the practical nature of professional learning, they will be addressed in a later section.

**Collaboration.** As indicated in the table above, Darling-Hammond cites networking as a basis for successful professional development. Throughout the interview process the terms networking, mentoring, and coaching were used interchangeably by the participants; however, in Chapter 4, these terms were categorized as collaboration and coaching and addressed as separate themes due to their varied level of collaboration and involvement. Collaboration, or creating a collaborative culture, was expressly identified by Alajuela Partnership participants, as well as by all three researchers.

While not unique to the Partnership model, the theme of collaboration surfaced in response to both research questions one and two. Taken in reverse order, question two refers to the ways in which the Professional Learning Partnership impacted their practice, and in particular, their ability to collaborate with other teachers. This collaboration created a culture of professional inquiry that otherwise would not have developed due to the small size and geographic isolation of the districts involved. This collaboration also lends itself to the formation of lasting relationships, acquisition of skills, and rejuvenation, all of which will be addressed later, during the section on new themes that surfaced.

Question one referred to the candidates’ perceptions of the effects of the professional development delivered through a partnership model. In particular, accountability was frequently raised by the interview candidates as necessary to create the conditions for successful collaboration; that is, candidates counted on other educators
being present at the training so that they could fully benefit from the training by sharing ideas, clarifying thoughts, and collaborating on developing instructional tools and strategies. This push for accountability by the teachers was not something that was taken into consideration by the planning committee, but clearly should have been in order to ensure that collaboration is uninterrupted and that full levels of participation were expected.

**Application of Professional Learning Summary.** This theme uncovered through this research comprises four areas: collaboration, lasting relationships, rejuvenation, along with the practical nature of professional learning. The first and last sub themes are not unique to the Partnership. The second and third concepts of lasting cross-district relationships and rejuvenation that developed were significant successful byproducts of the Partnership. The concepts of lasting relationships, the practical nature of professional learning, and rejuvenation will be addressed later on.

The content-specific instructional practices that were targeted as part of the Summer Institute not only supported the research of Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), but also provided specific practices for the teachers to rally-around, collaborate on, and ultimately helped to form the relationships that were established. The candidates not only worked together to build day-to-day teaching practices, they also relied on one another for support, ideas, and sharing the responsibility for creating various tools. The Partnership connections made were of particular importance due to the small size of each independent school district.
Teacher Inclusion

Darling-Hammond recommends including classroom teachers in the planning of professional development. In 2017, she, and co-authors, Hyler and Gardner, endorsed the conducting of "needs assessments using data from staff surveys to identify areas of professional learning most needed and desired by educators" (p. vii), stating that the gathering of "Data from these sources can help ensure that professional learning is not disconnected from practice and supports the areas of knowledge and skills educators want to develop" (p. 6). This research brief concludes by stating that the "well-designed and implemented professional development [will]...bridge to leadership opportunities to ensure a comprehensive system focused on the growth and development of teachers" (p. 7). The Partnership followed the first tenet of this recommendation through the use of surveys to gauge teacher needs and feedback. However, some of the interview candidates did not recall responding to them, or felt that some of the information changed as time went on, and there were no teachers on the actual planning committee. Though the Alajuela Partnership engaged four reading specialists on the planning committee, teachers were not included due to planning team size and timing of meetings; this created discontent among some of the interview candidates.

The inclusion of teachers on the planning committee would have allowed for the teacher’s themselves to directly convey their thoughts regarding the professional learning, ensuring its direct connection to, and derivation from, the teacher’s subject matter, classroom instruction, and teaching methods (Darling-Hammond, 1998a), rather than having the reading specialists and administrators infer survey data, indirectly addressing subject matter and classroom instruction. Adding teachers that were also
participants to the planning committee would also have increased their level of involvement throughout the planning process, enhancing the collaborative nature intended by the Partnership and subsequently creating more buy-in and ownership. This further may have cleared-up some of the confusion for the Limon School District—Bella was never really clear about her role and therefore chose passivity to action. Adding teacher voices to the planning team could have helped offset the perception of lack of leadership.

Beyond adding teachers to the planning process, further opportunities for teacher inclusion exist. One example originated from both of Lizzy’s interviews when she mentioned including students from the Limon and Jaco districts in the Summer Institute. Had the organizers included students in the training, additional opportunities for honing conferencing skills would have emerged such as working with students to model conferring. This could be done on a voluntary basis, or by administrator request, either way demonstrates leadership of self, or belief-in the teacher by the administrator.

Additional opportunities to include the teaching staff exist for sustaining the work begun during the Summer Institute. These include conducting classroom visits and walkthroughs throughout the school year and acting as mentors to university student teachers. Participation in classroom visits or walk-throughs could be voluntary or by encouragement or requirement from the building principal. Further opportunities for participation could include signing-up to be the lab classroom, or the classroom that gets observed. By serving as a mentor teacher, or cooperating teacher, to university students, teachers may experience rejuvenation by supporting a pre-service teacher through modeling. Both of these opportunities may lead to lasting relationships. These examples
of increased teacher inclusion target several of the recommendations by the leading professional development researchers including: Job-embedded practices, networking, teacher inclusion, and modeling (Darling-Hammond); building collaborative cultures (Fullan); collaboration, sustained professional learning, and professional development in the classroom (Darling-Hammond and Guskey). Each of these could lead to a stronger model, and also highlight the findings from the research about the effectiveness of lasting relationships, applied knowledge and application, modeling, and active learning strategies for the teachers.

**Teacher Inclusion Summary.** Including teachers in the planning process and leadership roles could have strengthened the model in multiple ways. First, adding teachers to the planning process could increase ownership or buy-in as well as recognition for being a part of the group that organizes the training. Second, though surveys were used to determine the topics and skills that teachers felt would assist them in their teaching practices and delivery of classroom instruction, including teachers in the planning process would have been a direct way to select the topics and areas they felt were in need. Third, including teachers would extend the research of Darling-Hammond and Richardson who indicated that professional development must be related to a teacher’s specific curricula, and recognize Darling-Hammond’s call for professional development that meets the needs of the individuals being served by it. Fourth, beyond the work of Darling-Hammond, including teachers in the planning process extends Fullan’s (1992) advice indicating, "Schools improve when they have, or come to have, a shared purpose, norms of collegiality, norms of continuous improvement, and structures that represent the organizational conditions necessary for significant improvement.
Adding to the rationale for including teachers in the planning process, his later, 1994, research also suggests “people learn what they need to learn, not what someone else thinks they need to learn” (p. 71), and “teachers must work in highly interactive and collaborative ways, avoiding the pitfalls of wasted collegiality, while working productively with other teachers, administrators…” (p. 81), and, “They must push for the kind of professional culture they want, sometimes in the face of unresponsive principals…” (p. 81). Fifth, extending the inclusion of teachers beyond the planning phase to the school year through modeling teaching strategies for peers, or participating in peer visits, either through being the teacher observed, or a teacher observing, or serving as a cooperating- or mentor-teacher create further opportunities for teacher inclusion. These extensions relate to the recommendations of Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey alike, and also support the findings from the research specific to the Alajuela Partnership in terms of lasting relationships formed, applying knowledge, rejuvenation in teaching, modeling for peers, and actively participating in the learning process.

**University Involvement**

The value the University contributed to the Partnership was plentiful in the eyes of the researcher, but held limited value to the interview candidates. While gaining credit was recognized as useful by several, it was only capitalized on by one of the interview candidates. While Wohlstetter and Smith (2006) noted that School-to-University partnerships can bring expertise and knowledge, the other areas that the researcher expected to hear in terms of the increased value the University brought to the project included: credibility, recognition and acknowledgement, and prestige of the University
for the Partnership. None of these aspects were raised as important to the teachers during the interview process, with one interview candidate going as far to say that the University’s involvement did not impact her at all.

The option for credits was a unique part of the Partnership, and was of value to some. However, due to changes in licensure requirements by the state during the summer of 2018, and the intrinsic motivation of those interviewed, the credits were of less value than the intellectual growth and improved teaching practices attained through the Partnership. Over the two years studied, 36 out of a possible 62 teachers registered for the seminar course at San Jose University. At 58% participation, the credit option was valued by over half of the participants, and appears fairly significant. However, in comparing the participation rates between the first and second year of the Summer Institute, the participation rate dropped by 43% which adds questions regarding, why? Were the credits not as significant a draw as anticipated? Or, was it a matter of being able to earn the credits necessary for license renewal in year one, and not requiring further credit work the following year? Or, was the work not valuable, and so participants did not seek out additional opportunities? (According to information learned from Betty and Bella throughout the interview process, the last option seems least likely, as, according to them, the coursework, which involved coaching, had a direct impact on their teaching or the teaching of those they supported.)

The prestige that the researcher expected would be associated with partnering with a University did not matter to the interview candidates. In addition, planning contributions, presenter arrangements, and hiring made by the University were never mentioned. As previously noted, the teachers did not recognize the University’s
contributions to this professional learning outside of the opportunity for credits. Further, the only comment made about the University’s involvement was how it was lacking. While reported in a negative manner, if implemented, Lizzy’s suggestion, which follows, may have helped the University become a more visible player in the Alajuela Partnership.

Though Lizzy seemed disinterested in being a part of the study, she is the sole participant to mention a way to further engage the University in the Partnership model. Lizzy recommended that the University include their pre-service teacher programs learning "our K–12 practices so that new teachers entering the field are coming trained with what our schools are using." Her suggestion partners the University in a unique way, and would not only assist pre-service teachers in understanding the thought processes and theories of teaching practices currently used, but also expands the coaching and mentoring from reading specialists-to-teachers, to that of teachers-to-pre-service teachers. This concept supports the 2017 research of Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner which recommends developing teachers to become mentors and coaches who can then support the learning of other educators (p. vii).

This, additionally, could create a potential pipeline for placement and hiring. Researching this future possibility could showcase a Partnership that serves not only to provide teachers with high quality professional learning, but also truly provides high-quality instruction and mentoring from pre-service teachers to teachers. In addition to working with pre-service teachers, a cooperative model between the university and districts could result in sharing information regarding best practices and encourage collaborative research and learning.
**University Involvement Summary.** Aside from the credit option that was available to the teachers, there was no compelling evidence that collaborating with the University to host the Summer Institute was effective or necessary. However, while the teachers interviewed did not find it to be of importance, the research was only designed to validate the teachers' thoughts, and therefore we do not have enough information to know if the University’s role contributed in ways that were not obvious to the teachers. For example, University credibility and name recognition, and prestige of hiring the highly-rated presenters, and involvement in planning were all of value to the researcher, the administration, and the school boards.

Additional opportunities for university involvement could include the University learning from its K12 educational partners regarding best practices in teaching, by partnering their student teachers with cooperating- or mentor-teachers who would then help model the teaching and learning strategies that are in place. This could have further implications, helping to frame summer professional development for the districts and the curricula covered at the university level for pre-service teachers.

**Coaching and Mentoring, Goal Alignment, and Sustained Professional Development**

The remaining constructs of coaching and mentoring, goal alignment, and sustained professional development, were mentioned by most, if not all interview candidates. Much like leadership, candidates addressed these themes at the more basic, district level first, and then in some cases extended their thinking to address the Partnership. This may have been the result of the researcher not prompting or defining each term at the onset, even though this lack of information was intentional, so as not to skew the data. In the first example, coaching and mentoring, the teachers from Jaco felt
that a well-developed system was in place, whereas the teachers from Limon felt that coaching was neither a priority nor was their reading teacher equipped to coach them as she herself was learning about the workshop.

Goal alignment seemed to exist in one district but not the other district, and was not referenced in terms of the Partnership. Perhaps this was because the educators interviewed in Jaco were happy with their leadership and felt goals were aligned, so relating goal alignment to the Partnership was not necessary, whereas teachers were less positive about the Limon School District and could not separate their district from the Partnership. While literacy was stated as a general goal, comments from the interview candidates alluded to the fact that with consolidation they were unsure of where they were headed as a district. When taken individually, these comments seemed to provide a positive outlook for Jaco and a negative view of Limon, however, when viewed through the lens of the Partnership, educators from both districts commented on the benefits of working together, with one teacher from Limon going as far to state that without the Partnership, "I’m afraid of what’s going to happen if we are on our own" (Bella, Interview 2), due to her having the sense that her district did not have a planned, or intentional direction, and needed the Partnership to provide professional learning opportunities that were meaningful to teachers and their classroom practices.

Finally, the theme of sustained professional development was noted to be significant by four interview candidates. This was framed as spiraled and sustained in chapter four. Each time this theme was referenced it was used in contrast to previous professional learning opportunities experienced outside of the Partnership. Constructs that were not addressed by the interview candidates included: backwards planning, long-
term professional development goals, professional development in the classroom, and
evaluation and assessment of learning.

**New Constructs**

As stated at the beginning of the *Discussion and Connections to Research* section, three new themes surfaced as critical to the success of the Alajuela Partnership. They are: lasting relationships, application of skills, and rejuvenation.

**Lasting Relationships**

Collaboration requires individuals to cooperate for a moment(s) in time, yet it does not require anything further. In this study, participants clearly articulated the benefits of forming relationships that surpass mere collaboration. They referred to the development of trust, sharing, and being vulnerable. The participants also talked about the ability to remain in contact throughout the year; these relationships were not dependent on the Summer Institute. The concept of "lastling relationships" takes the current body of research to a new level and adds interesting insight into the development of sustainable professional relationships.

The concept of forming lasting relationships was discussed extensively in question three, and was also observed as part of collaboration and rejuvenation, which were discussed in question two. The ability of the educators to form lasting relationships with teachers across districts was an important component of the Partnership, particularly the relationships between teachers at the same grade level or teaching the same subject.

Through these relationships, teachers began to trust in and share with each other. This, in turn, created camaraderie that extended beyond the Summer Institute itself, allowing for teachers to continue their learning and growth throughout the school year.
This opportunity for teamwork and collaboration was of particular importance since all Partnership districts were small, and all of the teachers from Limon were singleton teachers, or the only person who teaches a specific grade level or subject. These feelings, coupled with rejuvenation are critical for teacher development and retention.

Applied Knowledge

The second new concept noted by the Alajuela Partnership participants is that of applied knowledge. Darling-Hammond discusses this when she notes subject relevance, job-embedded practices, active learning strategies, and modeling (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, 2017). The applied knowledge noted by the interview candidates is so specific, it confirms what the research is telling us, but also increases the focus. Therefore, I have added this as a stand-alone category titled, "Applied Knowledge/Application," as well as including this in other constructs and practices. This is inclusive of items such as the "toolkits," noted by the interview candidates; items that are created during their professional learning and used in the teachers’ planning.

Research question two specifically asked the teachers to identify the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice. In all cases, teachers identified the development of “toolkits” as their primary area of knowledge and skill development. Anchor charts and journaling were also noted as areas of learning that were developed (often in a collaborative manner) during the Summer Institute, along with an understanding of how to successfully confer with students and move through the Lucy Calkins curriculum guide at appropriate rates.

The teachers’ desire for the opportunity to collaborate and create is not unique. Darling-Hammond and Guskey both refer to the power of collaboration in professional
learning experiences. Beyond this, Darling-Hammond discusses the recommendations for active learning strategies, which are teaching methods that involve student participation in a meaningful way. When extending this to the work of the teachers during professional learning opportunities, it makes sense to apply the same recommendations while adapting them for adult learners. In this sense, engaging the teachers using strategies that will help them when they return to the classroom is ideal.

With all of the preparation necessary to effectively teach using the workshop model, this active learning is specifically extended to include the creation of toolkits and other make-and-take items which help take their conceptual learning and make it into something concrete that they can take back to their classrooms. This is so specific and important to the teachers that it is listed individually.

**Rejuvenation**

The third and final new concept recognized by the Alajuela Partnership participants is that of rejuvenation. Rejuvenation, according to participants in this study, surfaced as an effect of the Partnership on teacher practices. This theme was discussed in tandem with, or as an extension of, collaboration and coaching, and adjacent to the concept of changes in knowledge and skill development due to the Partnership. In reviewing the literature for rejuvenation, this topic was not addressed in the context of how a partnership may impact the teachers’ outlook on teaching or their changes in attitude toward practice. Professional development itself was, however, noted as one of the main reasons for teacher exhaustion and attrition.

During the interview process, candidates shared how they felt rejuvenated, reenergized, and motivated by their peers and the learning gleaned during the Summer
Institute that was organized by the Partnership. It is important to note that in this Partnership, the teachers interviewed shared similar stories regarding their positive experience and how this changed their outlook on teaching and their practices. When professional development has often been associated with teacher burn-out, the sense of rejuvenation these teachers felt is critical as it changes how they approach not only their learning, but their application of skills when back in the classroom.

According to Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005) happy individuals are better at decision-making (p. 831), networking (p. 833), and are able to complete complex mental tasks and recall information (p. 839), because of the skills they have learned and resources they have accumulated due to their positive approach (p. 843). When approached through the lens of positivity as researched by Shawn Achor (2010, 2011), who shared that positive people generally had higher levels of productivity, accuracy, and were goal-oriented, these personal characteristics lead directly to how teachers will apply what they have learned, which positively impacts their skill and knowledge development and application.

**Implications**

While all leaders of school districts must find ways to provide effective professional development, rural school leaders face funding, geographic, and personnel challenges. This study attempted to discern whether or not a collaborative professional learning partnership would assist rural systems in navigating these challenges, and did so through the eyes of teachers participating in the professional learning opportunities. After reviewing the interpretive data, five models have emerged that could possibly serve the needs of rural districts: individual districts operating in isolation, a partnership such as the
Alajuela Partnership that includes a university and multiple districts, a partnership between districts and a governmental or community partner, a partnership of multiple districts and no university partner, or a hybrid model. Each scenario will be reviewed to discuss how it interacts with the data learned from the interview candidates and the research from Darling-Hammond, Fullan, and Guskey. A recommendation will then be made regarding which model is most likely to support the tenets of effective professional development while meeting the needs of the educators in small, rural school districts.

**Individual District Professional Development**

Individual district professional development can be administered either through internal means or hiring a facilitator. Districts can choose to professionally develop their staff in a content area or support the roll-out of a new system or technology. Collaboration among teachers may be a part of this type of training. In this specific scenario, due to its small size, the Limon School District would not have been able to provide for collaboration or lasting relationships, across the same grade level or subject matter, that were frequently mentioned by the participants during this study. The district of Jaco, while not much larger, would only have two teachers per grade level at the elementary grades, and no collaborative opportunities for middle school teachers. In addition, teaching specialists such as music, art, physical education, world language, or even special education teachers or school counselors, may be the only educators within their content area in the entire school, or district. This status not only makes collaboration difficult, it also makes providing quality professional development for these specialty areas near impossible without either outsourcing or partnering, both of which can be costly. Removing the opportunity for cross-district collaboration eliminates
Darling-Hammond’s call for networking and Fullan’s belief in building collaborative cultures.

In addition to the two major values of professional development for teachers, collaboration and networking, there are also implications to the districts themselves. Individual districts operating in isolation would be limited in the monetary and personnel resources required to deliver professional development. As stated above, providing quality professional development to teaching specialists who often operate as the only individual in their content area in small districts is difficult for several reasons. First, priority for professional development is typically granted to core content areas, making specialty areas a lesser priority. Next, unless building or district level administrators possessed this teaching background prior to moving into administration, they may be unfamiliar with how to best support or grow these educators. This leads to the need to collaborate, partner, or use a third-party professional development provider. These can be risky due to differences in goal alignment or philosophy, but additionally, the money and resources needed to professionally train these educators can come with a high price tag, especially if professional development is not local, and the educator must travel. This causes many districts to create professional development conference rotation schedules, which create equity, but also mean that staff members are not growing professionally each year.

Although professional development done on an individual district basis can often be less cost effective, there are times when it is both relevant and appropriate. There were several circumstances noted by the Limon teachers, which when referencing an inservice on a new computer system, indicated that “…our in-services have been… mostly [about]
the new systems that we have had in place” (Bella, Interview 1). These typically revolve around skill training, which may involve a very specific need or may need to be personalized to the district, and where nothing of instructional value is delivered. Addressing a specific concern through independent professional learning can be beneficial, however, in the case of Limon, this was viewed negatively as it was the only professional development the teachers were receiving.

In contrast, Jaco too, held professional learning opportunities for teachers as an independent district. These were conducted weekly, and were based on instructional topics that were identified by the Curriculum Director and facilitated by selected teachers, for their peers. In this facet, topics for professional learning were rotated, based on need, and due to the facilitation methods, most staff bought in. The small-scale efforts allowed Jaco to act nimbly and respond proactively to the specific needs their district faced.

**Partnership Between University and Districts**

This type of partnership is demonstrated through the collaborative efforts of a university and school districts and is the model employed by the Alajuela Partnership. This type of partnership meets all of the requirements necessary to incorporate the themes raised by the teacher candidates and the recommendations made by the educational researchers: leadership, teacher inclusion, collaboration, application of learning, lasting relationships, and rejuvenation. While the Partnership with the University was nearly invisible to the six interview candidates, beyond credits and some promotion of the events, perhaps the collaboration was valuable in ways that this research was not able to uncover, to the School Board, administrators, or parents due to name recognition,
credibility, prestige, acknowledgement, staff empowerment when serving as adjuncts, and community accountability. It is difficult to determine the level of planning, coordination, and expertise the University contributed and its subsequent value to the Partnership.

According to some of the interview participants, the involvement with the university should have been more transparent, or more visible. The teachers’ lack of involvement in the planning process may have added to their feelings of uncertainty surrounding the university’s contributions. The teachers already felt like they were not fully included in the planning process, and the involvement of the University may have contributed to this feeling of exclusion, particularly since university employees were an active part of the planning team while teachers were not. In other words, some teachers may have felt that they lacked influence and power in helping to make decisions and effect change. They may have preferred to be heard and make a difference, versus having the University possess that authority. Additionally, it was noted by Lizzy that the University’s involvement should have been one of learning from the school districts, rather than being involved as a planning partner, particularly since the University did not contribute to the financial costs of the Partnership (its financial contributions were more affordable graduate credits for participating educators). In this manner, the University could benefit from the Partnership by having their pre-service teachers work with the Partnership School teachers to complete a student-teaching experience that was content-focused, incorporating active learning strategies through collaboration, modeling, coaching, and feedback. This would lead to an incredibly rich experience supported by each of the professional development researchers’ data, as well as this data.
Partnership Between Governmental Agency/Community Partner and Districts

A third model that presents itself is a partnership between the regional CESA and district(s). Nationally, there are over 550 educational service agencies in 45 states, which equates to just over 12 per state. The state in which this research occurs is right at this average with twelve CESAs. CESAs began operating in the research state during the 1960s as a replacement to county systems. CESAs work to provide programs and services to educational institutions, both public and private K12 and university systems, and local governments. They develop services to meet the needs of their customers, and as such are able to provide these services in both an economic and efficient manner. In addition to providing services, CESAs also take the lead in joint projects, with each CESA specializing in specific areas, such as: personalized learning, purchasing, science and engineering, scheduling, communication and public relations, data tracking and analyzing, continuous improvement, facilities maintenance, teacher licensure, and finance. The CESA that services the region that the Alajuela Partnership is within is strong and specializes in communication and public relations, such as website creation, but also has a focus on professional development and Educator Effectiveness. This CESA serves 39 public school districts across eight counties, in rural, suburban, and urban contexts.

Because of the large membership and available resources, our CESA has hosted regional professional development events that have been inclusive of a variety of presenters, some with high name recognition, information that is valid and reliable, and has boasted high amounts of participant choice in terms of the number of available sectional offerings. In addition to receiving professional development at the regional
professional development events, opportunities for networking are available, and time is built in throughout the day to network with educators outside of your district. While these aspects of CESA professional development meet the constructs of Darling-Hammond (networking) and Guskey (participant choice), the large regional event is only one day and is not sustained, which is the opposite of what Darling-Hammond (1998a, 2005), Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017), and Fullan (1994) recommend.

This does not mean that all professional development offered by a CESA is a single-occurrence event. In fact, a new addition to the regional CESA is networking groups for district- and building-level positions that don’t typically have multiples, such as networks for administrators including: superintendents, curriculum directors, elementary and secondary principals; and networks for non-administrative positions such as human resources and public relations. These meet monthly with the goal of engaging in collaborative conversations about topics in their area of expertise. These half-day sessions allow for networking and are sustained, both recommended by Darling-Hammond, but choice in topics is limited in scope in part due to everyone’s needs being slightly different, and attempting to generally meet the needs of all participants. Furthermore, the accountability piece is missing, as not all individuals participate on a regular basis. This leads to potential issues for collaboration on specific areas of need as well.

Looking beyond professional development opportunities created by CESA to instead, a partnership between the CESA and districts, it could possess the same characteristics as that of a partnership between the districts and University or among the
districts themselves. The CESA however, is a non-profit member-driven organization with its own areas of expertise and direction, and therefore the goals may not be customized to the needs of the district(s), and the economy of scale benefit may not be passed along to districts. Specifically looking at the quality of presenters, in the Alajuela Partnership the presenters were handpicked by the Partnership members to provide the teachers of the Alajuela Partnership with the full gamut of information necessary to properly implement the Writers’ and Readers’ Workshop. By working with a CESA, selecting the presenters may be limited to their staff members. In this case, some presenters are of high quality, while others may not be, thereby potentially limiting the credibility of the professional learning. Further, in this study, the partnership involved districts that were geographically linked, whereas partnerships with a CESA may involve districts that are geographically removed from each other due to the sheer size of the CESA. This would decrease the plausibility of forming lasting relationships and decrease the likelihood of sustained professional learning.

**Partnership Among Districts**

The fourth model is similar to the model used for the Alajuela Partnership, without the inclusion of the university or CESA. This partnership allows for any number of small, rural or suburban districts to pool their resources, namely personnel and fiscal, taking advantage of economies of scale. Due to the geographic size of the Alajuela Partnership as well as the size of the actual districts involved, the implication is that this would be for districts that are geographically close and small in size (less than 1,000 students). If they are not, this model is possible, but may not experience the same outcomes. This type of partnership recognizes each of the components that were valued
by the teachers interviewed, such as: lasting relationships, applied knowledge/application, rejuvenation, modeling, active learning strategies, job-embedded practices, networking, coaching and mentoring, teacher inclusion, building collaborative cultures, collaboration, subject relevance, and leadership that promotes student learning and empowers teachers.

If the planning team were to be restructured to include teachers’ concerns related to ownership, buy-in, influence and authority would be addressed.

Beyond developing cross-district collaborative relationships, this model of partnership could become the impetus to develop teacher leadership and capacity. The main professional development strategies endorsed by the leading educational researchers could be fulfilled in this model. Teachers would be included throughout the process (Darling-Hammond), coaching and mentoring would be fully developed and implemented to fidelity (Fullan), coaching and mentoring would lead to individualization (Guskey), and designing and basing this collaborative partnership on a vision would ensure that long-term goals are both agreed-upon and fully-supported (Guskey).

This style of partnership would continue the collaboration that was heavily mentioned by the teachers, while eliminating the University involvement that was met with limited success. Additional areas of focus that could be improved based on teacher feedback include mentor relationships across the partnership, which was noted with mixed-results in this study based upon employing district; grow relationships and collaboration beyond teacher-to-teacher to include teacher-to-specialist, and teacher-to-administrator; create an accountability system that is supported by and enforced-in-part by teachers; and ensure that the learning that occurs is applicable, practical, and relevant.
Beyond updates to the focus areas, in order for a model of this type to be successful additional areas would need to be addressed. This includes ensuring that both participation and contributions are balanced. From the comments from some of the interviewees from Limon, it is important to note that they recognized, for whatever reason, their district was not as actively involved with the planning. Equally, teachers from both districts valued and recognized the need to have balanced participation—that is, participation across the grade levels, and districts, in order to develop collaborative and long-lasting relationships. Without these, professional learning may not be as effective. Further, strong leadership is necessary. This leadership includes establishing a district vision and alignment to the partnership vision, developing leadership in district and school teams, and ensuring accountability. As noted with the Alajuela Partnership, if the alignment isn’t present results may not be as positive as desired or may be skewed by district of origin.

**Hybrid Model**

In reviewing the data from this study, it became evident that neither the research questions nor the questions asked of the informants provided insight into the specific role the university played in the partnership. Rather, it exposed the need for a fifth model, a hybrid model that combines a partnership between a university and a single district with a partnership of multiple districts. By adding this fifth model to the literature, future research could add to the understanding of the complex dynamics that exist between participating districts as well as between the districts and the university, thereby making a determination about the relationship between the university and the districts and that of
the districts, and revealing the value each might bring to a professional development partnership.

**Recommendations**

This research will inform the education community in the area of professional development in several ways, some that are unique to the Partnership model, and others that simply validate previous research regarding effective professional learning. The findings from this study were not conclusive in terms of utilizing a Partnership model between a university and districts. While the teachers interviewed did not see the value of the University, the manner in which the research was conducted did not return enough conclusive evidence regarding the role the University played in planning, organizing, and promoting the Summer Institute. In other words, all of the “behind-the-scenes” planning that was done, the administration, or the connections available through the University were not visible to the teachers who were interviewed. If the University’s “behind the scenes” role in the Partnership was essential to shaping, guiding, or determining the overall success of the Partnership, then additional research is needed to confirm this.

What can be said however, is the importance of cross district collaboration when delivering professional development in small rural educational communities. This could potentially be done through any of the four scenarios presented. Specifically, it is the partnering across districts that is particularly helpful in small, rural school districts. To be determined is whether having a University partner is advantageous to the planning and implementation of a successful professional development opportunity. Particularly given the changing licensure requirements in the state where the research was conducted, the most valuable visible asset of the University Partnership, contributed by the University,
was that of credits. Once that was no longer a necessity for licensure, the need for University involvement was devalued according to the interview candidates. The most critical aspects of the Partnership in the eyes of the interview candidates revolved around the collaborative learning across districts, the lasting relationships, and the application of learning; none of which visibly required the involvement of the University. In order to determine conclusively about the effectiveness regarding university involvement, future research should focus on what the university contributions were. Future research holds the key to understanding if and how the University contributed to the success of the professional development, such as contributions in planning, administration, promotion, and a connection to the presenters.

In practice, the Partnership model was an effective way to provide professional learning opportunities for the educators in this consortium. However, after reviewing all of the data, the teachers overall held little value for the university involvement, so a model for professional development that includes a partnership with a university may not be the most effective. Rather, according to the teachers, a model that accounts for: networking, coaching and mentoring, collaborative cultures, and lasting relationships; job-embedded practices, subject relevance, and active learning strategies; teacher inclusion, modeling, and rejuvenation; and leadership that promotes student learning and empowers teachers is what is necessary. In this capacity, cross-district partnerships are important as they provide these opportunities, while also accounting for economies of scale with both fiscal and personnel resources. The design of the research did not reveal whether or not having a university is a pro, con, or neither to designing and implementing professional development. Given the dearth of information and research design, until
future research is completed, the data points to a Partnership of small districts as being the most effective vehicle for achieving the desired results according to the teachers interviewed. A partnership composed of small districts would lend itself well to meeting the constructs identified by all three educational researchers and the Alajuela Partnership participants.

In addition to the design change, it would also be remiss not to mention the necessity of strong leadership both in the individual districts and also for the Partnership. The data from this study supported the findings of Fullan, who avidly supported leadership that promotes growth in both teachers and students. Strong district- and building-level leadership will create clear goals and alignment for professional learning. Having leadership inclusive of district- and building-level administration as well as teacher leaders, from each district, will create consistency and continuity. It will also help obtain teacher buy-in, increase clear communication, and ensure that all districts are working to meet the same goal in the same manner.

**Future Research**

Five areas for future research related to models for successful professional development in small rural educational communities have been identified. The possibilities for future research follow below:

1. **Monitor a partnership of school districts only, no university involvement, to determine if the same results are noted by the teachers involved, and compare to a university model.** This will afford the researcher the opportunity to determine if the results are replicable and if economies of scale can be met. Further, interviewing teacher candidates will determine if the professional development
constructs and effective practices in professional development previously identified are still valued, and if they are observed in this type of model.

2. Monitor a partnership for outcomes in which a university has a dual-capacity involvement: both assisting with offering high-quality professional development and mentoring pre-service teachers through the Partnership. By monitoring a partnership that echoes the original dynamics of the Alajuela Partnership, the researcher will be able to determine if the results transcend future partnerships. By incorporating the feedback received during this research and including teachers in the planning process, the researcher can monitor for outcomes that differ than the original research, and determine if predictions made about teacher involvement validate Fullan’s research as well as the findings from the Alajuela Partnership. By adding the component suggested by Lizzy, that of mentoring pre-service teachers through the Partnership, the research can be extended to new outcomes and effectiveness can be determined.

3. Include one or more of the following as interview candidates: representative(s) from the University, or member(s) of the School Board and/or Administration, a community member, parent, or an educational partner. This will provide alternative, as well as additional perspectives not gathered from the original interview candidates, and allow for insights important to the various roles. It will also help to expand the results beyond the scope of the classroom teacher to determine the perspective gleaned from different members of the educational community.
4. Gather statistical data at the onset to determine a baseline and again at the end of the study to determine if the professional learning gained through the Partnership had an impact on student academics, thereby applying Guskey’s fifth level of evaluation. Researchers pursuing this method should set a control and isolate variables as possible, in order to ensure accuracy and fidelity of data collected.

5. Finally, the questions may have limited the scope of answers that the researcher was able to attain. Different questions, or ensuring that interview candidates fully understood what was being asked may have helped fine-tune responses. For example, had the researcher framed the questions surrounding the University’s involvement more directly so as to better inform the interview candidates they may have perceived the University’s value differently. Such as, the University contributed “x,” how do you feel this impacted the outcome of the professional learning attained through the Partnership model? Or, the University offered, “y and z,” what more could they have contributed that would have led to the success of the Partnership? Or, the University participated in this manner, how would you have changed this, if at all?

The findings then, did not fully explain, or adequately reveal, how the teachers perceived a Professional Development Model that included a university. What it did show was that teachers indeed care about professional learning: they felt their skills, relationships, and collaboration improved. While no statistical data was part of the study, the teachers self-reported that their students were performing better following the Summer Institute they participated in.
Summary

This research was designed to shed light on teachers’ perceptions of, and impact on, a professional development partnership model, the Alajuela Partnership, that included three rural school districts and a university. The first question, *How do teachers in a rural school district describe the effect of professional development delivered through a Professional Learning Partnership model?*, revealed that the addition of the University as a member of the Partnership was nearly invisible and inconsequential to the teachers aside from the credit option teachers were offered. Second, in the absence of district leadership, leadership at the Partnership level provided direction, vision, and goals for the collective group. Third, teacher inclusion was insufficient and needed to be taken to the next level to both empower staff and to compensate for lack of district leadership. Finally, higher levels of accountability and professionalism should be expected. These findings confirmed what the literature suggests for successful professional development.

The second research question, *How do teachers describe the effect of the Professional Learning Partnership on their practice?*, revealed that the direct relationship between the goals of the Alajuela Partnership and the applicability to the participants’ practice was significant and led to high levels of satisfaction and increased confidence. Second, meaningful collaboration across districts, grade levels, and subject matter emerged as essential to teachers working in small districts, often as the only teacher at a grade level. Finally, a surprising effect of the Professional Learning Partnership was the frequent reference to feelings of rejuvenation and positive energy. These feelings were coupled with statements of recommitment and dedication to the hard
work of teaching. Again, these findings confirmed the findings in the current literature while adding a new construct—rejuvenation.

The third research question, *How do teachers perceive the effects of the Professional Learning Partnership as similar or different than other professional learning opportunities they have experienced outside of the Partnership?*, revealed that the most significant difference between other professional learning opportunities and the Alajuela Partnership was that the participants developed strong, lasting professional relationships. In addition, the intentional design of a learning opportunity that was focused, sustained, and spiraled separated the Alajuela Partnership from other professional development experiences. The addition of “lasting relationships” as an element of professional development is new to the literature and suggests when planning professional development one needs to be cognizant of creating a supportive culture.

In summary, this study provided a foundation for future researchers interested in exploring the effectiveness of a Professional Learning Partnership and its impact on rural educators. In particular, and of great interest to this researcher, was the teachers’ perceived role of the University. Perhaps it was the way the research was designed, or the questions asked (or not asked), that resulted in an incomplete picture of the role of the university and whether or not the university was important to the success of the Alajuela Partnership. However, given the results of this study, the recommendation for future leaders of small, rural districts, looking to plan meaningful, collaborative professional development opportunities is to join together with other geographically close, small districts, and intentionally plan to create a culture of collaboration leading to long-term
relationships, focused on learning together through job-embedded practices, active learning strategies, and teacher inclusion from the onset.
Epilogue

Since this study, the Partnership is planning its fifth year of the Summer Institute. All of the original districts continue to be active members, and one additional district has joined due to another consolidation in the area. While my home district still retains a relationship with the University, the University is no longer an active part of the Partnership. The model has been expanded and mathematics is the focus for the upcoming summer. Our district has followed a hybrid of the four models-- we are partnering with a state organization and while we are the only district fully involved, two local districts, one which has direct contact with our district, have sent teachers to participate in our professional learning.

San Jose University continues to work with the presenters and is now offering the workshop training model throughout the state.
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Appendix A: Definition of Terms
Definitions of Terms

The following terms provide clarity to the discussions presented in the study.

These terms include:

**Effectiveness.** As it refers to professional development is operationally defined as: to enhance, influence, increase, develop, or improve the teachers’ knowledge and skills, attitudes, or teaching ability.

**Great Teaching.** According to the 2014 work of Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major: Great teaching is defined as that which leads to improved student progress.

Effective teaching [is] that which leads to improved student achievement using outcomes that matter to their future success...In order of how strong the evidence is in showing that focusing on [these components] can improve student outcomes: (Pedagogical) content knowledge (Strong evidence of impact on student outcomes); Quality of instruction (Strong evidence of impact on student outcomes); Classroom climate (Moderate evidence of impact on student outcomes); Classroom management (Moderate evidence of impact on student outcomes); Teacher beliefs (Some evidence of impact on student outcomes); Professional behaviours (Some evidence of impact on student outcomes). Good quality teaching will likely involve a combination of these attributes manifested at different times; the very best teachers are those that demonstrate all of these features (pps. 2–3).

**Professional Development.** In 1965, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) defined professional development as a "comprehensive, sustained and intensive
approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement," (p. 1). Fast forwarding to the year 2009, the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) adopted this definition in whole with one small exception: changing the word "principals" to "administrators." In education, this term is used to reference the, "...wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness" (Abbott, 2013, p. 1). This encompasses an extremely broad range of topics and formats. These experiences may be funded by various sources, range in length of time, delivered through a variety of means, or facilitated by a variety of personnel. No matter the above, professional development is the vehicle that schools and districts use to help educators continuously learn and improve their skills over time (Abbott, 2013, p. 2).

Following the signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015, the definition of professional development received a face lift. The table below provides clarity on professional development under each of the two acts, first under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), then by ESSA. The table begins by defining professional development, and then defines the content areas in which educators should be provided professional development programs. The last column is a position statement provided by authoring agency, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), regarding personalizing professional development for educators.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Teacher and Leader Effectiveness</th>
<th>No Child Left Behind Act</th>
<th>Every Student Succeeds Act</th>
<th>ASCD Position</th>
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| Defines professional development as activities that improve teachers’ knowledge in the subjects they teach, enable them to become highly qualified, are aligned with content standards, and advance understanding of instructional strategies, etc. | Updates the definition of professional development to ensure personalized, ongoing, job-embedded activities that are  
- Available to all school staff, including paraprofessionals,  
- Part of broader school improvement plans,  
- Collaborative and data driven,  
- Developed with educator input, and  
- Regularly evaluated.  

Creates new teacher, principal, and school leader academies to help meet the need for effective educators in high-need schools.  

Creates new teacher residency programs to enhance clinical training opportunities for teachers. | All educators should receive a stepped induction into the profession, time to reflect on and refine their practice, and personalized professional development that recognizes their strengths and allows them to grow. |
| Requires states to provide scientifically based professional development for teachers of core academic subjects. | Expands access to professional development under Title II to include teachers of all subjects, not just core subjects as under NCLB, as well as school leaders, administrators, and other school staff.  

Replaces the requirement that professional development programs and activities be scientifically based with a requirement that they be evidence based. |

ASCD (2015) p. 6
Professional Development Constructs. As defined by Franey’s 2015 research, effective professional development factors in the "individual needs and developmental levels of the teachers" (p. 2). Further clarified, this type of professional development practice includes: collaboration between teachers and professional learning communities, job-embedded practices, coaching and mentoring, study groups, and networking. Effective professional development practices therefore shift the focus of professional development to the needs of the involved individual and the subsequent goals of teachers and schools or districts. (Franey, 2015, p. 2)

Rural School District. School district located within a census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), classified under Census Local Code 41, which is rural fringe. Fewer than 600 students in average daily attendance, or be located in a county with fewer than 10 people per square mile, and have all schools located in communities with fewer than 2,500 residents (McClure, 2006). "If you bus students in from a country setting you are rural. About 70% of our state's school[ ] districts are considered rural" (K. Kaukl, personal communication, December 4, 2015).

Small School District. A school district with a total student enrollment between 100 and 2500 students.
Appendix B: Interview Questions
Interview 1

1. Age range
2. Gender
3. Race
4. What is your teaching background?
5. How long have you been teaching at this school?
6. Have you always been in the same grade level at this school?
7. What professional development have you participated in related to literacy?
8. What is the culture of your school?
9. Before this professional learning opportunity, how did you feel about collaboration among your colleagues?
10. What is the focus of your school? (mission/vision/goals)
11. What support systems are in place?
12. What impact do teachers have on student learning?
13. Describe what professional development looks like in your school?
14. Describe leadership in your school?
15. Did you take the PD for credit hours?
16. What did you see as the purpose of the partnership?
17. Did this meet your needs?
18. What were some of your goals for the professional development being studied?
19. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) how would you rate the effectiveness of the professional development and why?
20. How did the professional learning exceed your expectations?
21. What is an example of how this professional learning failed to meet an expectation of yours?
22. What is the most positive aspect of being a participant in this professional learning?
23. What was the most frustrating aspect of the professional learning?
24. What are your ideas for improving the professional development offered through the partnership?
25. Has this professional development impacted the work of your team and how you teach in the classroom?
26. If you could give advice to the planning team about how to prepare for the next professional development opportunity within the partnership framework, what advice would you give? OR What would have made the professional development more effective?
27. How does this professional development compare to those you have participated in in the past?
28. What was your experience in the collaborative?
29. How did you perceive the professional development? In terms of:
   a. Writers
   b. Readers
   c. Mentorship
   d. Coaching
30. Was the partnership transparent?
31. In what ways if any, was this professional development different (better/worse, effective/not effective) than activities done in the past?
32. Have you changed your practices in reading and writing?
33. Have they observed other teachers?
34. How was the PD relevant to you
35. In what ways, if any, did this PD align with your building or district goals?
36. Evaluation of the PD: review the first three levels of Guskey’s evaluation.
Interview 2

Follow-Up Questions first. Then:

1. Do you feel as though your professional growth was supported by the partnership’s professional development? Expand.
2. What value did you note from the partnership?
3. Has the professional development changed your teaching, and if so, in what ways has it changed your teaching?
4. Has your personal behavior or the behavior of your colleagues changed since participating in this professional development. (Guskey)
5. Has the partnership changed the culture of your building? If so, how? (In what ways?)
6. Did the partnership design - which includes both the university and other schools...how valuable was that, in what ways did it affect your practices, your collaboration with others...
7. Have you changed your practices in reading and writing?
8. How did teachers help form the PD, included in planning? (If they don’t bring up the survey, remind them about it. What types of questions should we be asking? What input should we seek?)
9. Is this professional development worth continuing?
10. Is this something you are eager/not eager to continue?
   a. (Incentives to participate? What if there were no incentives to participate— i.e. no stipends, salary— would you still do it?)
11. How do you compare PD that is designed over several years (sustainable) versus one that is a one-shot deal
12. In what ways, if any, do you see the leadership in your building (principal/reading specialists/DA) cultivate a positive climate around this PD?
   a. Did you feel cultivated and empowered through this PD?
   b. Did you feel empowered by your district’s leadership team through this PD, and throughout the year?
   c. Do you feel goal alignment and leadership worked to develop and create an organic learning opportunity that met the needs of the organization, through this PD? If so, how? If not, what could be changed to achieve this?
13. Darling Hammond - job embedded practices, networking, sustainability
   a. Do you feel like this Professional Development has come back into your work and has been embedded in your job so that way you have been prepared to be a better teacher?
   b. And then looking at the opportunity for networking. Do you feel there was networking at the workshop itself? What about afterwards/ongoing networking? Is this both within/external of your district? Is the networking valuable?
   c. Sustainability of PD-
      i. What do you think about using this model of PD to expand into other areas? If supportive, what areas, if not supportive, why not?
14. Fullan - teacher inclusion, Fullan
   a. Thinking about teacher inclusion, are there things that you either really liked about teacher inclusion in this process throughout the three years, or things that you would like to see improved?*

15. Kirkpatrick’s research suggests four levels of evaluation:
   a. Reaction, Learning, Behavior, Results Question

16. Share any changes/shifts in your knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations and behaviors? What about of your colleagues?

17. Reflect on the impact of the partnership on behavior change, improved job performance, and/or improved student achievement.
   a. **Impact Evaluation Examples**
      i. Documented Results of Action Plan Implementation
      ii. Logs to record actions at the job site or classroom level
      iii. Interviews
      iv. Observations in the Classroom or at other job site
      v. Artifacts of Student Work
      vi. Student Data: Standardized, Criterion-referenced or Classroom Made Tests
      vii. Portfolios

18. Guskey - sustainability
   a. Tom Guskey’s brief article on Backwards Planning
   b. How would you rate the _______ of the staff development?
      i. Context
      ii. Process
      iii. Content
   c. Five levels of evaluation
      i. **Guskey Level 1**
         1. Do you feel the PL will have a positive impact on your practice? Explain.
         2. Do you feel the PL will have a positive impact on your students? Explain.
      ii. **Guskey Level 2: did you learn what was intended**
         1. Quick Review:
            a. Are you implementing the new practice in your classroom? How?
            b. How are you making the new practice fit within the context of your classroom?
            c. How is the new practice affecting your teaching?
            d. Are you seeing the new practice positively affecting your students?
            e. Are you receiving the appropriate amount of support (coaching, feedback, sharing?)
            f. What do you see as your next steps in implementing the practice?
      iii. **Guskey Level 3**
1. To what extent did the school community support new learning?
2. To what extent did teachers become invested? To what extent did the PL contribute to a culture of deprivatization (sharing)?
3. To what extent did the partnership contribute to changes in knowledge? How did the workshop(s) contribute to professional growth?
4. To what extent did the PD/PL (committee) meet the needs of the learners? What conditions made that possible?
5. To what extent did leadership provide the resources needed to support the implementation of the new learning?

iv. **Guskey Level 4**
   1. If one of your evaluators walked into your classroom, would they see you facilitating better and higher quality implementation of new or more effective practices due to this partnership training?
   2. Are you implementing the new practice in your classroom? How?
   3. How are you making the new practice fit within the context of your classroom?
   4. How is the new practice affecting your teaching?
   5. Are you seeing the new practice positively affecting your students?
   6. Are you receiving the appropriate amount of support (coaching, feedback, sharing?)
   7. What do you see as your next steps in implementing the practice?

v. **Guskey Level 5: was there a change in student learning outcomes**
Appendix C: ISLLC Standards
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISLLC Standard</th>
<th>Community Development Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning</td>
<td>How will the district or school leader gain the input and continuous support of key community leaders in setting and sharing the vision for student learning at the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth</td>
<td>How will the district or school leader encourage all school staff to become actively involved in the community as a means of professional growth for improving instructional effectiveness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment</td>
<td>How will the district or school leadership collaborate with community organizations to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for all students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources</td>
<td>What collaborative process will the district or school leader use in identifying community development needs that mutually accomplish goals of the school and community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner</td>
<td>How will the district or school leader demonstrate integrity and fairness in collaborative community development activities that involve parents and multiple community organizations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural context</td>
<td>How will the district or school leader seek to understand the local rural culture in ways that influence positive school-community collaboration?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Harmon and Schafft (2009), p. 7
**The Four Domains of the Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument, 2013**

**Instructionally Focused Edition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Planning &amp; Preparation</td>
<td>Effective teachers plan and prepare for lessons using their extensive knowledge of the content area, the relationships among different strands within the content and between the subject and other disciplines, and their students’ prior understanding of the subject. Instructional outcomes are clear, represent important learning in the subject, and are aligned to the curriculum. The instructional design includes learning activities that are well sequenced and require all students to think, problem solve, inquire, and defend conjectures and opinions. Effective teachers design formative assessments to monitor learning, and they provide the information needed to differentiate instruction. Measures of student learning align with the curriculum, enabling students to demonstrate their understanding in more than one way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Classroom Environment</td>
<td>Effective teachers organize their classrooms so that all students can learn. They maximize instructional time and foster respectful interactions with and among students, ensuring that students find the classroom a safe place to take intellectual risks. Students themselves make a substantive contribution to the effective functioning of the class by assisting with classroom procedures, ensuring effective use of physical space, and supporting the learning of classmates. Students and teachers work in ways that demonstrate their belief that hard work will result in higher levels of learning. Student behavior is consistently appropriate, and the teacher’s handling of infractions is subtle, preventive, and respectful of students’ dignity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Instruction</td>
<td>In the classrooms of accomplished teachers, all students are highly engaged in learning. They make significant contributions to the success of the class through participation in high-level discussions and active involvement in their learning and the learning of others. Teacher explanations are clear and invite student intellectual engagement. The teacher’s feedback is specific to learning goals and rubrics and offers concrete suggestions for improvement. As a result, students understand their progress in learning the content and can explain the learning goals and what they need to do in order to improve. Effective teachers recognize their responsibility for student learning and make adjustments, as needed, to ensure student success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Professional Responsibilities</td>
<td>Accomplished teachers have high ethical standards and a deep sense of professionalism, focused on improving their own teaching and supporting the ongoing learning of colleagues. Their record-keeping systems are efficient and effective, and they communicate with families clearly, frequently, and with cultural sensitivity. Accomplished teachers assume leadership roles in both school and LEA projects, and they engage in a wide</td>
</tr>
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</table>
range of professional development activities to strengthen their practice. Reflection on their own teaching results in ideas for improvement that are shared across professional learning communities and contribute to improving the practice of all.

(Danielson, 2013b, p. 5)
Appendix E: Writers’ Workshop Walkthrough Tool
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer’s Workshop Walkthrough Tool: Full Implementation</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Classroom Environment**                             | ❑ Whole group meeting area is established  
|                                                       | ❑ Anchor charts used to support learning  
|                                                       | ❑ Student and teacher writing evident in the classroom  
|                                                       | ❑ Mentor texts available  |
| **Use of Teacher Manual**                             | ❑ Teacher manual is used as a resource rather than a script.  
|                                                       | ❑ Teacher chooses the aspects of the lesson that will move their students forward according to the progressions/rubric.  |
| **Mini Lesson**                                        | ❑ Components of mini lesson are linked together  
|                                                       | ❑ Connection  
|                                                       | ❑ One explicit teaching point  
|                                                       | ❑ Active engagement  
|                                                       | ❑ Guided practice  
|                                                       | ❑ Link to future learning  
|                                                       | ❑ Timing of the minilesson is appropriate (10 minutes or less).  |
| **Teaching Point**                                     | ❑ Teacher selects a teaching point based on student data in light of pacing and end-of-unit rubric goals; clearly explains the goal and procedure.  |
| **Independent Writing**                                | ❑ Teacher is using an ongoing formative assessment tool (record keeping log, observation notes, list of children needing follow-up)  
|                                                       | ❑ Students are engaged in independent writing  
|                                                       | ❑ Students can identify their personal writing goal and/or teaching point/goal.  |
| **Mid Workshop Teaching**                              | ❑ Teacher uses ongoing formative assessment to drive mid-workshop teaching.  
|                                                       | ❑ Mid Workshop teaching is no more than 5 minutes  
|                                                       | ❑ Mid-workshop teaching extends and enhances learning  
<p>|                                                       | ❑ Teacher may use student  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conferring</th>
<th>Teacher conducts conferences and follow a chosen conference structure based upon student need.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research-Decide-Compliment-Teach</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compliment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment/Research</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strategy Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Teacher engages students in whole or partner sharing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linked back to teaching point</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reinforce previous learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote book selection</td>
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Appendix F: Readers’ Workshop Walkthrough Tool
## Reader’s Workshop Walkthrough Tool: Full Implementation

| Classroom Environment | ❑ Whole group meeting area is established  
| ❑ Anchor charts used to support learning  
| ❑ Class library created and organized to support student book selection |
| Use of Teacher Manual | ❑ Teacher manual is used as a resource rather than a script.  
| ❑ Teacher chooses the aspects of the lesson that will move their students forward with a clear teaching point. |
| Mini Lesson | ❑ Components of mini lesson are linked together  
| ❑ Connection  
| ❑ One explicit teaching point  
| ❑ Active engagement  
| ❑ Guided practice  
| ❑ Link to future learning  
| ❑ Timing of the minilesson is appropriate (10 minutes or less). |
| Independent Reading | ❑ Teacher is using an ongoing formative assessment tool (record keeping log, observation notes, list of children needing follow-up)  
| ❑ Texts selected for independent reading are just-right and show evidence of choice  
| ❑ Students are engaged in independent reading  
| ❑ Students can identify their personal reading goal and/or teaching point/goal. |
| Mid Workshop Teaching | ❑ Teacher uses ongoing formative assessment to drive mid-workshop teaching.  
| ❑ Mid Workshop teaching is no more than 5 minutes  
| ❑ Mid-workshop teaching extends and enhances learning  
<p>| ❑ Teacher may use student work/example to model desired outcomes |</p>
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<td></td>
<td>- Goal Setting</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small Group</th>
<th>Teacher uses a variety of small group instruction types based upon student needs.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Guided Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Strategy Group</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Phonics/Word Study Small Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Shared Reading</td>
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