TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES:
SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING PROVIDES ONGOING
TEACHER COLLABORATION

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TEACHER COLLABORATION

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Abstract

of

TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES: SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING PROVIDES ONGOING TEACHER COLLABORATION

by

Maria T. Romero

Statement of the Problem

Federal and state policy have emphasized staff development on underperforming schools to foster professional growth having as its ultimate goal improving student learning. Nonetheless, research has continuously revealed a gap between staff development and the transfer of training and implementation of acquired learning (Joyce & Showers, 1996). Some of the factors associated with this gap include: 1) limited ongoing support to teachers after trainings; 2) teacher isolation; and 3) limited research
that defines and characterizes effective teaching methodologies that demonstrate improved student performance.

The research for this study was guided by the following questions:

1) What effect do grade level teams and at large support staff have on teachers’ instructional practices?

2) What are teachers’ perspectives regarding teacher collaboration?

Sources of Data

Sources of data for this study were collected from the current literature available in the area of staff development, state documents showing some of the guidelines for low performing schools, a survey conducted with twenty-three elementary school teachers and an analysis of teachers’ perspectives on teacher collaboration practices in their school site. Data was also collected from informal first hand observations with colleagues.

Conclusions Reached

Participating teachers agree that three forms of teacher collaboration effectively support their instructional practices: 1) grade level teams; 2) reading coach guidance; 3) at large support staff. Teachers are collaborating in their grade level teams at least three times a week. Based on teachers’ perspectives, the benefits of teacher collaboration include an improved student academic performance and adapted instructional practices to meet diverse needs of students. The results of the study indicate that even though collaborating with reading coaches support their instructional practices, teachers
recognize that sometimes there is a lack of teacher input on topics that need to be collaborated on under this practice. Teachers also feel that more of the time allotted for at large staff should be given to collaboration within grade levels. This, they suggest, will provide them the time to prepare, reflect and plan for the things they have collaborated on during at large staff trainings. Based on teachers’ recommendations, three characteristics to improve teacher collaboration resulted:

1) Teacher Input

2) Enough time allotted for grade level collaboration

3) Reading coach support

_______________________________________________, Committee Chair
Peter Baird, Ed. D.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The following research is based upon the experience of teachers in E&M Elementary, a rural elementary school in Northern California, three years after a Restructuring Implementation Team submerged the school in measures involving various efforts of teacher collaboration. In 2007, when the school reached Year Five of Program Improvement (PI) status based on state and federal testing evaluation, it proved necessary that the school district comply with a restructuring action in order to change the course of the school’s underachieving history. The school had not been able to meet the state’s established school proficiency level on the annual Academic Performance Index (API) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), even though there had been slight continuous growth of student performance measured each year since it first was classified as Program Improvement in 2003. In this context, teacher collaboration within grade level teams, reading coach guidance, and at large staff support between grade levels and school administration provided crucial direction to the Restructuring Implementation Plan that was organized by a selected group of teachers, parents, reading coaches and administrators to meet the state guidelines.

Education agencies have recognized teacher collaboration as an effective practice in school settings to deepen teacher learning and improve instructional practices. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC), for instance, suggests that professional development needs to be directed towards acquiring collaborative skills with
shared learning opportunities for teachers. In this manner, they suggest, “organized
groups are created that provide the social interaction that often deepens learning and the
interpersonal support and synergy necessary for creatively solving the complex problems
of teaching and learning” (National Staff Development Council, 2010).

Nonetheless, as stated in the research conducted by Goddard, Goddard and
Taschannen-Moran, there has been a “paucity of research” that focuses on the
relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement (Goddard, Goddard,
& Taschannen-Moran, 2007, p.877). In a study they conducted in the Midwestern United
States, these authors evaluated teacher collaboration in response to this limited research
linking teacher collaboration to student achievement. They concluded that when teachers
collaborate, they share experiences and knowledge that can promote learning for
instructional improvement. In addition, the study concluded that teaching practices
through collaboration related in a positive way to student achievement in the academic
areas they examined. In the current study, teachers’ perspectives of teacher
collaboration are examined via specific programs created by a Restructuring
Implementation Team aimed to increase collaboration at a school that experienced the
impact of federal and state reform.

Currently, the state of California faces a high number of schools which do not
meet the state’s established accountability proficiency. Under the No Child Left Behind
Act (NCLB), accountability of schools is evaluated annually via student performance on
standardized testing. California developed and uses the Standardized Testing and
Reporting (STAR) program to annually track student performance in academic areas
including but not limited to reading comprehension, writing skills, vocabulary, mathematics and science. Schools that do not make AYP and API under NCLB regulations are identified as Program Improvement schools, also referred to as low performing or underachieving schools. Consequently, the state mandates a number of requirements and guidelines for these schools. Often, these guidelines present difficult challenges for schools and their corresponding districts. The California Department of Education (CDE) created a timeline showing NCLB Program Improvement school requirements over the course of five years. It provides guidelines for action, including school improvement, corrective action and school restructuring. Once identified as a PI, a school must cooperate with these guidelines under the guidance of its corresponding district. (California Department of Education, 2008).

Faced with the Year Five transitional stage of NCLB Program Improvement requirements, the school involved in this study enforced a Restructuring Implementation Plan to renew school policy and structure. The initial attempts of the district focused on meeting policy expectations based on the PI requirements timeline, including the replacement of school staff (California Department of Education, 2008). However, the school district did not proceed with these efforts to replace employees. Instead, they formed a Restructuring Implementation Plan. They focused on selecting highly qualified teachers while restructuring the internal organization of the school. Teachers were selected through an interview process.

Teachers that taught at the school prior to the restructuring as well as new teachers were recruited in this process. They needed however, to agree and sign school
assurances to work at the school site. Teachers agreed to work collaboratively in grade level teams and with at large support staff. National reports reveal individual teachers’ perspectives are rarely considered in the decision making process involving school measures at the state and federal level (A Nation at Risk, 1983). Yet, their experiences and perspectives are essential to the functioning of an educational system. In this case, teachers agreed to implement collaborating practices. The design of this research seeks the perspectives of a group of teachers regarding collaboration at their school site.

The school district in this study provided staff development to K-12 teachers twice over the course of the academic year. This occurred before the district was impacted by the 2009-2010 budget deficit in the state of California. In addition, three schools in the district had been receiving Reading First funding that provided additional staff development with reading coach guidance. Although the budget crisis hit the district, the school involved in this study had access to federal Title I funding. Therefore, it continued to offer teachers staff development involving various efforts of collaboration. These forms of collaboration included: 1) grade level pull-outs over the course of the academic year; 2) grade level meetings into the regular work week; and 3) weekly at large staff development of K-6 or K-8 cohorts with administrative and reading coaches’ guidance.

A central focus of teacher collaboration at this school site has been the performance of English Language Learners on determining standardized testing and the district’s formative assessment. The STAR program allows for the disaggregation of data vis-à-vis various demographic groups including African American, Asian, Hispanic
Latino, White, Socioeconomically disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities, and English Language Learners (ELLs). Highly populated with ELLs, this school site has continuously seen this group performing in underachieving rates on both district and state formative assessments. Across the nation there has been research that reveals a gap between ELLs and their English Only counterparts (Chudowsky, Chudowsky, & Kober, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Historically, research has revealed the existing gap between staff development and the implementation of the learning acquired (Joyce & Showers, 1996). A Restructuring Implementation Team at this site attempted to reduce this gap emphasizing staff development to provide teachers with research-based strategies. Researchers like Joyce and Showers state that ongoing assistance to teachers is essential to foster the implementation of acquired learning. Federal and state reform requires professional development for low performing schools. Nonetheless, there are those factors that have been identified that affect school functions on areas of staff development and collaborating practices.

Significance of the Study

This is a study that evaluates teacher collaboration within a cohort of teachers in a rural elementary school. Collaboration is defined in this study as an agreement of teachers to work collaboratively with other teachers including grade level teams and at
large support staff between grade levels to achieve the school’s goals. Teachers involved in the study range from beginning to veteran teachers. As a combination of new and experienced teachers, this cohort has diverse professional needs. This study seeks to reveal how teacher collaboration helps this cohort meet their professional needs. The study’s intent is to answer the following overarching questions:

1) What effect do grade level teams and at large support staff have on teachers’ instructional practices?

2) What are teachers’ perspectives regarding teacher collaboration?

This study is guided by the principles of a sociocultural cognitive theory for its focus on communication and collaboration among teachers, but also the embedded process of planning and guiding teacher practices. One of the main claims of the research conducted by theorist Lev Vygotsky gives emphasis to social relations (Santrock, 2000). In this study it helps to understand how people who work together create opportunities for the adaptation and learning of new practices to meet the needs of diverse learners. It is through collaboration that the teachers involved in this study learn and adapt instructional practices.

Definition of Terms

The following terms have been selected to ensure the clarification of this study:

Program Improvement (PI) - Schools identified as not making Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act
Program Improvement schools perform below the proficiency criteria on the state’s standardized tests. Federal Title I funding grant these schools additional money for staff development and other guidelines.

**Title I** - Federal funding assistance to children, schools and communities in need emphasizing school accountability through high academic standards and high expectations for all children. Qualifying schools are those with more than 75% of their population receiving free or reduced lunches. This is proportional to students identified socioeconomically disadvantaged.

**Reading First (RF)** – The No Child Left Behind establishes Reading First as the primary national initiative aimed at improving reading in kindergarten through grade three classrooms. States must apply for the selection of Reading First grant.

**Veteran Teacher** – A tenured teacher with several years of teaching experience in a school district.

**Beginning Teacher** – A certified and credentialed teacher in his/her first years of teaching in a school district.

**Reading Coach** – An experienced former teacher assisting beginning and veteran teachers with curriculum based instruction, teaching strategies, and instructional pacing in Language Arts.

**Grade Level Pull-Out** – A selected day during the school year where teachers in the same grade level pull-out from the classrooms to learn, adapt and evaluate instructional practices and student achievement with reading coach guidance.
*At Large Support Staff* – Teachers across grade levels coming together to learn and adapt instructional practices with reading coach and administrative guidance

*Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR)* – A program created to assess students on academic frameworks created by the California Department of Education used for student and school accountability purposes.

*Annual Accountability Progress Reporting (APR)* – Reports both the state Academic Performance Index (API), and the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Program Improvement (PI).

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* – A statewide accountability system mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which requires each state to ensure that all schools and districts make Adequate Yearly Progress.

*Academic Performance Index (API)* – Measures the academic performance and growth of schools by using student test score and demographic data.

**Limitations**

This is a study that seeks to reflect teachers’ perspectives solely at one school site. Research is needed in schools in general that, impacted by reform, seek to improve student performance through teacher learning. It is not the attempt of the study to triangulate data. Any evidence of student growth as consequence of the teacher collaboration taking place will be based on teachers’ perspectives only and school accountability released by the state’s APR. Nevertheless, the context in which teacher
collaboration is discussed in this study could address a lot of the same struggles associated with teacher learning of schools in general.

Organization

The statement of the problem underlying this study reveals that the attention on current schools’ policies and practices is crucial to understanding overarching decisions behind teacher learning and the impact on student achievement. The research questions focus on the effects of teacher collaboration. It brings out the voices of veteran and beginning teachers regarding their views on teacher collaboration.

Chapter Two will first review literature that provides a snapshot of federal and state policy over the last three decades. Changes in the education system impact school districts’ decisions regarding the structure of schools, particularly those schools showing low performing rates. The first section in the chapter provides a critical review on current school practices involving Program Improvement schools. After that, literature is presented that focuses on principles of professional development. Finally, the last section in this chapter provides a look at how teacher collaboration flows from these staff development practices. Furthermore, it points out factors that affect teacher collaboration and how schools’ structures attempt to respond to those.

Chapter Three lays out the methodology that facilitated this study. It describes the sample involved in the study and the setting in which it takes place. In addition, it explains the design approach that will provide the results for this study. Furthermore, it
provides the reasoning behind this design. Lastly, Chapter Three explains the data analysis procedures to ultimately reach the study’s conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter Four describes the school setting to understand how it connects to the survey used in this study. Next, it explains and describes a self-administered survey distributed to twenty-five teachers in grades K-6. The results from each section of the survey are described and discussed separately. The survey format employs quantitative and qualitative analysis. Themes emerging from an open ended query regarding teachers’ suggestions are examined. After describing and discussing teachers’ survey, this section provides the preliminary conclusions of the study.

Chapter Five presents the major conclusions in the study employed from quantitative and qualitative data. Furthermore it makes recommendations for further action after exploring into the results drawn in this study.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to understand what occurs in California Program Improvement (PI) schools, it is vital to look at the history of school reform in the U.S. The decisions that school districts make in regards to the policy and structure of low performing schools are based strictly on federal and state educational reform guidelines. These decisions have a direct effect on school functions involving teaching practices and student achievement.

The first section in this literature review provides a historical background on how school reform has evolved and some of the implications on teaching practices over the last decades. It explains guidelines of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) towards the restructuring of low performing schools. The second section provides principles of staff development in a time of NCLB. The third area looks at how teacher collaboration flows from these staff development practices.

Reform behind Teaching Practices in Program Improvement School Settings

Over the last few decades, educational policymakers have made a series of intense changes on California’s schools. These changes have followed up federal initiatives towards improving the nation’s public education system. Findings presented by national reports in the early 1980s called for educational reform that addressed the challenges faced in education, in particular the report *A Nation At Risk* (Gardner, et al., 1983). A
continuous achieving gap among schools, low test scores, a shortage of teachers in
certain academic areas, and deficiencies in the academic expectations of students were
among the findings that scholars were bringing to national attention (Gardner et al.,
1983). Consequently, policymakers stressed the need of stiffer state and national
standards and tests for public school instruction (Cohen & Hill, 2001).

With national demands emphasizing the need for more rigorous standards and
assessment, the California Department of Education (CDE) developed and adopted
academic frameworks in the mid 1980s. Between the years 1985 and 1988, CDE adopted
frameworks in Mathematics, Language Arts and Social Science. This decision altered
school functions since academic frameworks initiated a new approach to teaching
curriculum that was more oriented towards explicit teaching practices. It also created a
range of discussions among scholars regarding the implications that the adoption of
frameworks would have on teaching practices. Scholar Patrick Shannon discussed some
of the implications of the new reading frameworks on teaching practices:

Many teachers’ understandings of effective reading and writing instruction
are deemed irrelevant; some of their teaching practices are outlawed, so to
speak, and new standardized understandings and practices are to supplant their
own (Shannon, 2000 p. 65).

When the National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A Nation at
Risk* in 1983, it indicated only the minimal influence of teachers in critical professional
decisions (Gardner et al., 1983). California’s approach in the mid eighties provided
teachers with an explicit and comprehensive paradigm to their daily teaching practices in
contrast to a whole language approach which embedded skills in a broader framework. Scholars Cohen and Hill believed California’s legislators assumed that by changing teachers’ practices including assessment and curriculum, the education system would improve student performance. Thus, these authors affirmed that “effective school reform depends on coherence in policy and practice, and opportunities of professional learning” (Cohen & Hill, 2001, p.1). Later, this literature review will examine how federal and state reform provides opportunities of staff development for teacher learning.

Explicit teaching practices continued to be at the forefront of state’s educational reform in 1997 when the California Department of Education adopted content standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics. Designed to define the knowledge, concepts, and skills that students should acquire by the end of each grade level, content standards provided a comprehensive program to ensure the highest achievement of all students (California Department of Education, 2010). Content standards intensified the Language Arts Frameworks initiative of the eighties by transforming curricula into a more rigorous and demanding approach to teaching practices. Demands on teachers to implement standard-based curriculum intensified. Later, the CDE continued to adopt content standards in History-Social Science, Science, Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education, Health Education, Career Technical Education, and English Language Development. The state’s public education system thus adopted changes in policy that transformed teaching practices.

The state did not solely embark on rigorous curricula; an emphasis on assessment also prioritized CDE’s meeting agendas. In 1997, the Standardized Testing and
Reporting (STAR) program was authorized by Senate Bill (SB) 376 to measure student knowledge defined by the content standards. In an annual event, teachers started to administer California Standard Test (CSTs) on selected grade levels and selected content areas. The State’s Board of Education selected grade levels 2-8 in elementary and junior high and secondary grade levels 9-11 to be assessed each academic year (Standardized Testing And Reporting, 1998).

The focus on standard-based education shifted to a larger scale when President George W. Bush signed the NCLB act of 2001 into a law. In a point based system ranging from a low 200 to a high of 1,000, schools started to be evaluated on an overall student performance on states’ standardized testing. Annual Accountability Progress Reporting (APR) releases the Academic Performance Index (API) and the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to evaluate schools. AYP is not met until all subgroups meet criteria. These subgroups include English Language Learners (ELLs), Special Education, English Only students, and Economically Disadvantage students among other minorities. Schools not making satisfactory AYP and API are indentified as Program Improvement (PI) schools under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

School policy in California supported NCLB’s call. In an article directed to the Sacramento Bee in 2004, California superintendent of public instruction, Jack O’Connell spoke in regards to the NCLB initiative.

I support NCLB's mission and the goal of all students reaching proficiency by 2014. Well before NCLB, California's accountability system was designed to shed light on the achievement gap and press schools to close it. In California,
a school doesn’t meet its annual growth target unless all subgroups of children, including minorities and economically disadvantaged students, meet comparable targets (O’Connell, 2004).

Superintendent O’Connell referred to the goal that was established in a negotiation between the nation’s Department of Education and the states that 100% of all students will achieve proficiency on state reading and mathematics assessment (STAR) by the year 2014 (US Department of Education, 2010). The state of California stood out from other states in the nation by maximizing academic expectations through rigorous standards, curricula and assessment.

A little over two decades have passed since the state first initiated the movement on standard-based education. Currently, the state of California faces a high number of schools not meeting accountability proficiency. Data on school accountability released by the state indicates a strong connection of low performing schools to a diverse population of minority students. Based on state’s data in the 2008-09 academic year, 2,263 public schools were in Program Improvement. This is a number that has considerably increased over the last years. In the 2005-06 academic year, for instance 1,772 schools were in PI (California Department of Education, 2010).

Due to a continuous growth of school districts entering PI status between school years 2005-06 and 2006-07, policy makers requested the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEERA) to research the characteristics of these schools. Using a descriptive analysis, the group of researchers that was assigned concluded that there are five characteristics of PI schools. In addition, the researchers
emphasized that problems at the district level have been missed at the school level. Therefore, the results of this study are reflected in overall district performance.

1. More districts have moved into program improvement status, and few have moved out.

2. The district accountability system monitored the progress of many students that the school accountability system did not monitor.

3. Districts in program improvement tended to be larger and more urban than other districts.

4. Districts in program improvement had different student demographics than other districts did. (These findings refer to demographics including higher populations of Hispanic, Black, English Language Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students).

5. Districts in program improvement did not meet proficiency targets in multiple areas. (Crane, Huang, Huang, & Derby, 2008, p. 1)

Current educational policy targets rigorous action from districts to restructure the practices of schools showing continuous low performance. In 2004, Superintendent O’Connell released a letter informing school districts of a timeline the Department of Education created that shows PI school requirements over the course of five years. He urged school districts with low performing schools to act accordingly based on this timeline. Stage Five, also identified as Year Three in the timeline, targets a corrective action involving a school restructuring plan; this represents a transitional point for schools. In this stage, districts could take steps including and not limited to the
replacement of teachers and administrators from a school site, and the restructuring of school procedures and structure. These are critical changes that have a direct effect on teacher, students, and administrators. The number of schools exiting PI is considerably small. This means that schools that continue to be in PI are heading towards a school restructuring direction.

As the state continues to face an increase of low performing schools, public concern also increases. Because schools are subject to improvement and corrective action, educational agencies and the media have commented on the restructuring undergone at local community schools (Blume, 2009; Lofing & Reese, 2009). Unavoidable is the fact that these schools serve high populations of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. As more schools fall into PI, the number of students at risk increases. According to the Los Angeles Times, low performing is a tough label for schools servicing high percentages of minority students due to the level of poverty that is associated (Blume, 2009). Current statistics also reveal a high percent of secondary drop-outs and considerably low is the percent of minority students attending higher institutions. According to the statistics presented by the San Francisco Chronicle in 2009, Black students quit school far more often than other groups, about 35 percent. Latinos are next, at 26 percent. About 12 percent of white students drop out, and about 8 percent of Asian Americans do (Asimov, 2009). Alarming national statistics reveal that 1 student drops out of high school every 26 seconds (Shuster, 2010).

Teacher learning plays an important role in students’ educational development. There is minimum concrete data at the state and national level that reveals the
relationship between effective teaching methodologies that demonstrate improved student performance (National Institute for Literacy, 2000). This indicates the need for research to examine teaching learning in relation to student learning. With alarming statistics of low performing schools serving large minority groups, the need is even greater.

The first section of this review has provided a background of federal and state education reform. Research suggests that California’s approach in regards to the education system over the last decades have greatly impacted teaching practices. Scholars call for adequate teacher learning opportunities to create an effective bridge between policy and practice (Cohen & Hill, 2001). The next section in this literature review will look at principles of staff development in a time of NCLB.

**Federal Title I Funding and Staff Development Practices**

Federal funding guidelines require that low performing schools implement staff development to foster professional growth having as its ultimate goal improving student learning. This decision is aligned to national reform that over the last decades has increased expectations of educators to ensure high standards of learning performance. On the other hand, it also responds to a gap between educational research and practice that has been continuously identified by several studies internationally. In the article, *The Gap between Educational Research and Practice: Views of Teachers, School Leaders, Intermediaries and Researchers*, researchers Braak and Vanderlinde conclude that cooperation between researchers and practitioners is necessary in school settings (Braak & Vanderline, 2010). Therefore, they recommend “professional learning communities” to
work towards reducing the gap between research and practice. There are, however, those factors identified in research that correlate to this gap and can affect schools’ direction towards cooperating practices. For instance, in 2007, Goddard, Goddard, and Taschannen-Moran referred to the isolation that has historically affected teachers, especially beginning teachers. “Typically, collaboration is neither taught nor modeled in university coursework, nor do practicing teachers receive substantial support from colleagues or administrators” (Goddard, Goddard, Taschannen-Moran, 2007, p. 878).

How to select effective topics for staff development could be another challenge. According to the findings revealed by the National Institute for Literacy, there is limited research that “defines and characterizes effective teaching methodologies that demonstrate improved student performance” (National Institute for Literacy, 2000, p.20). Without key information on student learning, it is harder for schools to structure effective programs that guide teaching practices. While it is important for research to continue to examine what other factors contribute to the gap between theory and practice, it is also vital to analyze the context in which implementation of practices occurs in schools affected by reform. This could address the needs of these school environments including funding and other resources that could be effectively distributed among schools.

Because California’s schools in Program Improvement reflect a trend of demographic diversity, federal Title 1 funding is given to these schools serving economically disadvantaged communities to improve their academic achievement (US Department of Education, 2009). The distribution of the funding to schools is based on the percentage of poor students at the school site. If the school serves at least 40%
economically disadvantage students, then the school can implement a general program to upgrade the instructional program for the whole school. But if the percentage is less that 40%, then the school has the option to target qualifying students who are at risk of failing the content standards and offer targeted assistance programs.

Under the umbrella of NCLB, Title I funding requires staff development to upgrade instructional practices. This is important to school functions since it encompasses teachers’ preparation programs that ultimately create an impact on student learning. In California, schools entering First Year of PI must use 10% of Title I school funds for staff development (California Department of Education, 2008). Cohen and Hill emphasized the importance of professional development for effective policy implementation. However, they recognized the lack of opportunities for teachers to learn the practices that policymakers proposed (Cohen & Hill, 2001). It is a challenge for districts to choose effective programs because research that defines and characterizes effective teaching methodologies that demonstrate improvement on student performance is limited.

Researchers recognize that staff development is imperative for teacher training. Therefore, educational institutions have developed principles to enhance staff development practices. In 1994, the U.S. Department of Education Professional Development Team suggested that a high quality professional development:

1. Focuses on teachers as central to student learning
2. Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement
3. Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of individuals within the school community

4. Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership

5. Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, and technology

6. Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement

7. Involves collaborative planning

8. Requires substantial time and other resources

9. Is driven by a coherent long-term plan

10. Is assessed by its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning (US Department of Education Professional Development Team, 1994).

Nonetheless, scholar Hill’s research reveals that only a tiny fraction of the nation’s schools offer high-quality professional development programs. She addresses the importance of teacher learning and provides her own three characteristics of professional development:

1. It must last several days or longer

2. It must focus on subject-matter-specific instruction

3. It must be aligned with the instructional goals and curriculum materials in teachers’ schools (Hill, 2007, p. 111).
In addition to Title I funding, districts serving children from families with incomes below the poverty line can qualify for a Reading First grant (California Department of Education, 2009). The expected outcome from this initiative is that districts put into practice scientifically based reading. The attempt is to reduce the existing gap between research and practice. Districts that seek for this grant need to present a program that is directly tied to research based practices in order to be considered for eligibility. Federal Title 1 funding and Reading First grants require staff development in an effort to support increased professional development and to ensure that all teachers have the skills they need to teach the curriculum effectively.

When adequate funding is available, a school has greater opportunities to provide various school programs to foster teacher or student learning, particularly if the funding is designed for specific purposes. Before funding can be distributed two fundamental questions need to be answered. Who is involved in staff development practices? Who should be involved in staff development practices? As Sparks and Hirsh suggest, staff development practices go beyond certified staff. They state:

As school staffs strive to function as teams and as schools seek to become learning organizations, learning must be an ongoing responsibility of all school employees. Everyone who affects student learning must continually upgrade his or her skills (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997, p. 91).

The wide spread of research demonstrates the complexity of staff development in school settings. This section stated the efforts of federal funding to provide staff development in low performing schools. Furthermore, it looked at the factors affecting
staff development. It also presented principles of staff development proven to be effective by educational institutions. Lastly, Sparks and Hirsh point out that staff development should not solely fall on the teacher. The next section of this literature review looks at how teacher collaboration flows from staff development practices and the role it plays.

A Look at Teacher Collaboration in Low Performing Schools

The previous section stated some of the guidelines established by federal and state funding programs emphasizing staff development in an attempt to foster teacher learning. Funding programs such as Reading First and Title I facilitate the implementation of staff development practices in California’s low performing schools to meet highly qualified staff requirements. Nonetheless, educators recognize that ongoing assistance following staff development is crucial to the implementation of the learning acquired. Researchers and educators, Joyce and Showers state, “given adequate training conditions, teachers consistently are able both to ‘fine-tune’ existing skills and to learn new ones” (Joyce & Showers, 1982, p. 163). But, because they also recognize initiatives that follow up any training are fundamental they have done a series of studies focusing on coaching as a way to continue to provide teachers with an ongoing support that ensures the implementation of acquired learning (Joyce & Showers, 1980, 1982, 1996). The authors suggest:

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 (Joyce & Showers, 1996, p. 16).

Reading First facilitates the hiring of reading specialists or reading coaches, in an effort to support teachers with research-based instructional practices. According to The International Reading Association (IRA), literacy coaching in the middle and secondary grade levels focuses on highly targeted professional development: 1) grounded in inquiry and reflection; 2) participant driven and collaborative, involving knowledge sharing among teachers within communities of practice; and 3) sustained, ongoing, and intensive (International Reading Association, 2008). In the primary grade levels, a reading coach focuses on providing professional development for teachers by providing them with the additional support needed to implement instructional practices. In this manner, reading coach and teacher practices interrelate creating a form of collaboration that follows staff development.

*Reading Today* released a series of letters from educators showing supportive statements of this initiative. Among these supporters are educators that argue that a Reading First environment provides staff development and ongoing support in areas such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, oral language, comprehension, and vocabulary (Matrinko & Sprague, 2009). In addition, they argue Reading First initiatives increase the collaboration between teachers and school administrators. Nonetheless, these educators are also concerned with the lack of funding that would deprive or limit schools of the ongoing support that currently takes place. For schools in general, the funding is
limited and not every school has the resources or organized structure that could play a key role to provide ongoing support.

Many researchers across the nation recognize that staff development bridges the gap between research and practice. In 2001, a group of researchers from Southern Florida conducted a study that sought to find the extent to which a group of teachers implemented instructional strategies after a year-long of staff development sessions. The authors state that one of the critical elements in successful professional development is collaboration (Klinger, Arguelles, Hughes, & Vaughn, 2001). The study served as a follow up to look at all the teachers in two elementary schools who learned, implemented, modified, and sustained three instructional practices (partner reading, making words, and collaborative strategic reading). These practices had been taught to eight teachers only, three years prior to their study. The researchers sought to explore if teachers in general implemented any of the practices. They were also interested in the embedded process of transferring the learning acquired to other teachers. This, they believe, could help to better understand how to bridge the gap between research and practice.

Indeed, the results showed teacher collaboration took place regardless if teachers had been a part of the eight in training or not. Of the ninety-eight teachers who completed a survey, ninety-two reported that they had used at least one of the instructional practices. Eighty-nine teachers identified being influenced to implement the practices by at least one of the eight teachers previously trained. The study concluded that teachers continued to use the instructional practices, mainly because they saw that
their students were learning from those practices. The results show that teachers continued to use the practices and had shared with others in a collaborative basis.

More recently, in 2008, Beecher and Sweeny released an article demonstrating the efforts of an elementary school in the state of Connecticut to improve student achievement. Their research concluded that curriculum differentiation on research based instructional practices and collaboration between teachers, parents, and administrators helped to develop enriched instruction at their school site. They emphasized staff development as the means to improve instructional practices to support student achievement. Through coaching, professional training, and time allotted for planning, this school site sought to integrate new ideas to differentiate instruction. During their collaboration, teachers contributed to develop curriculum-based practices to increase student achievement. The results of this study showed that staff development followed by teacher collaboration improves the learning conditions of students showing underachieving rates on standardized tests.

In the same year, 2008, The Institute of Education Sciences released a guide titled, *Turning Around Chronically Low-Schools* (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, & Redding, 2008). In this guide, the authors compiled four recommendations that seek to turn around low-performing schools. One of the four recommendations is maintaining a consistent focus on improving instruction. By doing so, teachers must collaborate on instruction and instructional planning (Herman et. al, 2008). Once again, teacher collaboration proves to be an effective practice which provides teachers with ongoing assistance and support.
Summary

The literature review presented in Chapter Two has provided a background on public education reform to understand current teaching practices in California Program Improvement schools. It examined NCLB requirements that explain the attempts of school districts to offer opportunities of staff development at school sites impacted by reform. Research was presented that showed some of the factors affecting staff development practices. In addition, it presented examples of how teacher collaboration flows from staff development practices. There is a high demand on teachers to produce better academic outcomes for students. Nevertheless, the state funds are limited and not every school has a structured system that implements all the attempts of federal and state decisions. In this study, a group of teachers will show their perspectives on teacher collaboration topics in a school experiencing its first year out of Program Improvement.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The data that drives this research was drawn from teachers in grade levels K-6 who volunteered to complete a survey on their teacher collaboration. Three years prior to the study, the school went through a restructuring process due to mandated state reform. One of the main components in the restructuring agreements was to offer teachers opportunities for staff development followed by teacher collaboration. Teachers were required to agree to this structure in writing in order to continue or start employment at the school site.

Participants in the current survey range from beginning to veteran teachers in primary (K-3) and intermediate (4-6) grade levels. Five teachers taught for five years or less while six teachers taught between six years and ten. The remaining ten taught for more than ten years. Two veteran teachers have taught for twenty-five years or more. The majority of these teachers came to the school after the restructuring plan had been implemented.

The participants come from a school experiencing its first year out of Program Improvement. The school is located in the western United States. Characterized as rural, this school site services over 75% student population receiving free and reduced lunch, indicating that three quarters of the students are socioeconomically disadvantaged. A significant portion of students are English Language Learners (ELLs). Many are also
migrant students whose families are seasonal farm workers and return to Mexico between the months of November and March when there is no field work available.

Part of the school’s annual plan includes the collaboration of teachers to offer the migrant student population an extended school calendar which allows them to receive mandated instructional days. This is done in an attempt to reduce the number of missed instructional days when they leave to Mexico. Teachers from all grade levels are expected to participate in ongoing intersession programs during the summer for this population of students. Two teachers are assigned to each grade level to teach a session that takes place three weeks in the end of the school year and two more teachers are assigned to teach three weeks before the beginning of the school year. Because the percentage of students in poverty is higher that 75%, Title I funding is granted. Title I funding is a key source to facilitate collaborating practices throughout the school year including grade level teams, reading coach guidance, and at large support staff across grade levels.

Design of the Study

Teachers in this study completed a self-administered survey consisting of closed and open ended questions. The survey consists of seven questions.

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. Have you worked at a school besides the one you currently work?

3. Have you taught at a school that was not in Program Improvement?

4. Did you teach at this school before 2007-2008 school year?
5. How often do you collaborate with your grade level team?

6. Check the box that best expresses your views for the following statements.

Question 6 consisted of 8 statements arranged using a four-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from strongly agrees to strongly disagree.

a. Collaborating with my grade level team supports my instructional practices.

b. Teacher collaboration with my reading coach supports my instructional practices.

c. Teacher collaboration helps me to adapt my instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students.

d. My school uses effective methods to support teacher collaboration with my grade level team.

e. I find teacher collaboration to be an effective use of my time.

f. My school uses effective methods that support teacher collaboration between grade level teams.

gh. I am supportive of my school’s efforts to implement teacher collaboration.

h. Teacher collaboration has positive effects on my students’ academic performance.

Based on teachers’ response from letter h, they were asked to check one or more areas in which they believe teacher collaboration has had a positive effect on students’ academic performance. The academic areas included reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing, language development or other. The last question was an open-ended query.
7. What suggestions do you have that would improve teacher collaboration at your school?

The first five questions were designed to obtain the participants’ information on their teaching background and the extent to which they collaborate in their grade level teams. Question 6 consists of eight statements regarding various forms of teacher collaboration and effects on instructional practices from the teachers’ perspective. Finally, the survey asks for teachers’ suggestions on improving collaborating practices by responding to an open-ended query. These responses are grouped and analyzed in chapter four along with the rest of the survey.

Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to obtain teachers’ perspectives regarding various opportunities to collaborate, including grade level teams, reading coach guidance and at large support staff. The survey was distributed to twenty-five teachers in grade levels K-6 during their regular grade level meetings. Of the twenty-five surveys that were distributed, twenty-three surveys were completed and returned to the researcher voluntarily and anonymously. The data obtained from teachers was aggregated. Teachers’ responses were evaluated and average percentages were calculated to reflect them.
Data Analysis Procedures

The design of the study employed quantitative and qualitative analysis from open and closed ended questions from a teacher survey. Data from the survey was analyzed to find themes that emerged to understand teachers’ perspectives on ways to improve teacher collaboration in their school site. Each question was explained and described in the context in which teacher collaboration takes place in the school. The data that results from each section in the survey will be analyzed question-by-question in Chapter Four.
Chapter 4

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Findings

The research questions underlying this study have sought to look at teachers’ perspectives on various efforts of teacher collaboration at a school experiencing its first year out of Program Improvement (PI) status. Furthermore, it sought for teachers’ perspectives on teacher collaboration involving students’ diverse needs and their academic performance. The first section in this chapter provides school’s accountability results over the last five academic years that explains the reasoning behind the district’s decision to implement a Restructuring Implementation Plan at this school site. The next section describes three forms of teacher collaboration targeted by the Restructuring Implementation Team. The last section describes and examines a survey distributed to twenty-five teachers in grade levels K-6 consisting of close and open ended queries regarding their teacher collaboration. The analysis includes the development of data summaries and displays. Collectively, teachers’ responses formulate the preliminary conclusions to this study, drawn from quantitative and qualitative data.

Undergoing Major Changes in Policy and Structure

In California, schools not meeting annual AYP and API are subjected to reconstructing action. When E&M Elementary was impacted by NCLB PI requirements during the school year 2007-2008, there were changes that it had to undergo as explained in detail in Chapter Two. As the number of years in PI increased, the school’s
requirements to reconstruct its policy and structure also intensified. The data that drives this study is drawn from teachers’ perspectives on teacher collaboration, one of the main components targeted in the reconstruction of E&M Elementary. Adequate federal and state funding along with administrative and reading coach guidance facilitated teacher collaboration practices in this school site.

Table 1.

API for E&M Elementary Over the Course of Five Academic Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>API</th>
<th>AYP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>678 (Growth Target: 7 Growth: 18) Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>682 (Growth Target: 6 Growth: 4 ) No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>719 (Growth Target: 6 Growth: 39 ) Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>757 (Growth Target: 5 Growth: 39) Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>782 (Growth Target: 5 Growth: 23) Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the school accountability released by the Annual Accountability Progress Reporting (APR) over the course of five academic years. In order to exit PI status, schools must meet both AYP and API for two consecutive years. Because E&M
Elementary made API and AYP in school years 2007-08 and 2008-09, it currently experiences its first year out of PI status.

A Focus on Teacher Collaboration

Three forms of teacher collaboration were fundamental to the functioning of E&M Elementary: grade level teams, reading coach guidance and at large support staff between grade levels. (1) Grade level teams allow teacher collaboration within grade level teams. Teachers come together on a regular basis to plan, adapt and evaluate instructional practices during the school year. In addition, school guidelines instruct teachers to collaborate to plan intervention sessions for struggling students. (2) A reading coach guides teaching practices in the primary and intermediate grade levels. A reading coach is an experienced teacher assisting new and experienced teachers with curriculum based instruction, teaching strategies, and instructional pacing in Language Arts. Analysis of student achievement of various subgroups, learning and adapting research-based instructional practices are both examples of what implies to meet with a reading coach. Meetings within grade level teams and meetings with a reading coach take place during the regular school hours, after school hours, or during grade level pull outs throughout the school year.

(3) Another form of collaboration is the at large staff support between grade levels. It is a form of collaboration offered to teachers at E&M Elementary on a weekly basis during the regular school hours. Every Wednesday morning, teachers from grade levels K-6 or K-8 come together to participate in sessions involving instructional
practices. The topics are facilitated by reading coaches, school administrators including the principal, vice principal and program coordinator and vary based on the needs of the school functions.

Survey Analysis

This section provides a description of teachers’ responses to a self-administered survey about these key areas of teaching collaboration. The survey was distributed to twenty-five teachers in grade levels K-6. Of these twenty-five teachers, twenty-three teachers returned the survey back to the researcher, a 92% return rate. Each question is displayed and explained separately. The data is structured along survey questions. The purpose of the first five questions is to provide teachers’ background on their teaching experience. This part of the survey indicates new and veteran teachers, teachers who remained at the school site after the school restructured and teachers who came new. Question six consists of eight statements where teachers evaluate teacher collaboration in relation to their instructional practices. School decisions to facilitate collaboration, the time allotted to collaborate, and student academic performance are some of the specific areas in which teachers are able to reflect. Teachers’ responses to the statements in question six are organized using a four point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agrees to strongly disagree. Averages of teachers’ responses are calculated and shown in their corresponding charts and graphs. A discussion on each question will include an interpretation of the results. Examining teachers’ suggestions on an open ended query resulted in the emergence of three principal themes.
Question 1: How long have you been teaching?

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Teaching</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-24 years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+ years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first question shows the number of years that participating teachers have been in the profession. This information provides a background of participating teachers based on their term of service. The results show a combination of beginning and veteran teachers. Of twenty-three teachers who completed the survey, five teachers taught from five years or less, seven teachers taught between five and ten years, nine teachers taught between eleven and twenty-four years and only two taught for twenty-five years or more. Over half of the teachers have been teaching for less than ten years. On the other hand, the number of teachers with teaching experience of twenty-five years or more consist only of two. The results from question one indicate a diversity of teaching experience.
and therefore a diversity of teacher professional needs based on the number of years that participating teachers have taught.

Question 2: Have you worked at another school besides the one you currently work?

Table 3.

Prior Teaching Experience at other Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of twenty-three teachers completing the survey, seventeen teachers had prior teaching experience at a school other than E&M Elementary. Only six teachers have teaching experience solely from this school site. The number of teachers who said they have worked at other schools is higher.
Question 3: Have you taught at a school that was not in Program Improvement?

Table 4.

Prior Teaching Experience at other PI Schools

This question provides a background on the experience of participating teachers in PI schools. The results are that fourteen teachers had experience in a school not in PI and nine teachers have only worked in a PI school. The majority of the teachers thus obtained teaching experience in a school that has not been PI.
Question 4: Did you teach at this school before the 2007-2008 school year?

Table 5.

Teachers Working at the School Before and After the Restructuring Plan of 2007-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yes, 10
No, 13

Teachers experienced a school restructuring in the 2007-2008 school year. Question four sought to indicate how many teachers stayed at the school site after the restructuring plan. The results are that thirteen teachers came to E&M Elementary after the school restructured and ten teachers stayed at E&M after the school restructured. The results reveal that more than half of the teachers surveyed did not teach at this school before the school year 2007-2008. These teachers came to E&M when the school had undergone a Restructuring Implementation Plan, or possibly after.
These results also indicate that approximately half of the teachers who worked at E&M Elementary before the restructuring plan moved from this school site. Further exploration is needed that explains why only less than a half of the teachers stayed after the school restructured.

Question 5: How often do you collaborate with your grade level team?

Table 6.

Grade Level Team Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice a week</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three + times a week</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because one of the main components of the school restructuring was the emphasis on teacher collaboration in grade level teams, question four sought to explore the amount of time that teachers devote to collaboration within their grade levels. The results are: a) sixteen teachers meet with their grade level team three times of more throughout the
week; b) five teachers meet with their grade level two times a week; c) three teachers marked “Other”; and d) zero teachers indicated no grade level collaboration. Overwhelmingly, teachers are collaborating in their grade level teams three times or more throughout the week. Of the three teachers that marked other, two teachers stated they meet daily and one teacher stated as needed. The results above reveal that one of the most frequent forms of teacher collaboration implemented at this school site is through grade level teams.

Survey Question # 6: Check the box that best expresses your views for the following statements.

The next chart provides teachers’ responses to eight statements found on question six of the survey. Using a four-point Likert scale, the chart reveals the number of teachers stating their level of agreement on collaborating practices at their school site. In the end, the average of teachers’ responses is calculated based on the percent of teachers who are in agreement of the statements. Table 3 provides a visual representation of the results.
Table 7.

Result of Likert Scale Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>STONGLY AGREE</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
<th>STRONGLY DISAGREE</th>
<th>Percent in Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with my grade level team supports my instructional practices</td>
<td>18 = 78.26%</td>
<td>5 = 21.74%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>94.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher collaboration with my reading coach supports my instructional practices</td>
<td>18 = 78.26%</td>
<td>5 = 21.74%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>94.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher collaboration helps me adapt my instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students</td>
<td>17 = 73.91%</td>
<td>6 = 26.09%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>93.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school uses effective methods to support teacher collaboration with my grade level team</td>
<td>15 = 65.22%</td>
<td>8 = 34.78%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>91.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find teacher collaboration to be an effective use of my time</td>
<td>14 = 60.87%</td>
<td>9 = 39.13%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>90.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school uses effective methods that support teacher collaboration between grade level teams</td>
<td>12 = 52.18%</td>
<td>7 = 30.43%</td>
<td>4 = 17.39%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>83.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am supportive of my school's efforts to implement teacher collaboration</td>
<td>17 = 73.91%</td>
<td>6 = 26.09%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>93.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher collaboration has positive effects on my students' academic performance</td>
<td>17 = 73.91%</td>
<td>6 = 26.09%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>0 = 0%</td>
<td>93.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Two shows the distribution of teachers’ perspectives using a four-point Likert scale. The results are: a) eighteen teachers strongly agree that collaborating with their grade level team supports their instructional practices and five teachers only agree; b) eighteen teachers strongly agree that teaching collaboration with a reading coach supports their instructional practices and five teachers only agree; c) seventeen teachers strongly agree that teacher collaboration helps them adapt their instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students and six teachers only agree; d) fifteen teachers strongly agree that the school uses effective methods to support teacher collaboration within grade level teams and eight teachers only agree; e) fourteen teachers strongly agree teacher collaboration is an effective use of their time and nine teachers only agree; f) twelve teachers strongly agree the school uses effective methods that support teacher collaboration between grade level teams, seven teachers only agree and four disagree; g) seventeen teachers strongly agree they are supportive of school’s efforts to implement teacher collaboration and six only agree; and h) seventeen teachers strongly agree that teacher collaboration has positive effects on students’ academic performance and six only agree.
The findings above reveal the average of teachers’ perspectives based on how strongly they agree to eight statements pertaining to teacher collaboration.

Overwhelmingly, teachers agree that teacher collaboration supports their instructional practices. A slight drop in agreement appears to exist when teachers were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of school’s methods to support teacher collaboration within grade level teams. More significant is the drop in agreement of teachers who think the school uses effective methods that support teacher collaboration between grade level teams.
teams. Overall, the majority of the teachers support school’s efforts to implement teacher collaboration.

Survey Question 6h: Based on your response for letter h, check one or more areas in which you believe teacher collaboration has had a positive effect on your students’ academic performance:

Table 9.

Number of Teachers Stating the Benefits Teacher Collaboration Has on Student Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Comprehension</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Language Development</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Math (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phonics/Decoding (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Results based on 23 teachers who completed the survey

Table 10.

Average Percentage of Teachers Stating the Benefits that Teacher Collaboration has on Student Performance

Areas in which teachers believe collaboration has had a positive effect on student performance
After exploring the data above, teachers agree that teacher collaboration has a positive effect on students’ performance on several academic areas. Based on their teaching experience, an overwhelming ninety-six percent of the teachers show agreement. The results are: a) eighty-seven percent agree teacher collaboration has a positive effect on student performance in reading comprehension; b) eighty-three percent agree teacher collaboration has a positive effect on student performance in vocabulary; c) ninety-one percent agree teacher collaboration has a positive effect on student performance in writing; and d) nine one percent agree teacher collaboration has a positive effect on student performance in English Language Development. Teachers were given the option to identify any other applying academic area. Based on this result, one teacher agreed teacher collaboration has a positive effect on student performance in math. Another teacher agreed that teacher collaboration has a positive effect on student performance in phonics/decoding.

Themes to Improve Teacher Collaboration

The first two sections in the survey employed quantitative data that reveals teachers’ perspectives on collaborating practices. The last part of the survey consists of an open-ended query allowing qualitative discussion of what teachers believe can improve teacher collaboration in their school site. Eleven teachers provided written suggestions to the last part of the survey. This is close to half the participating teachers. Nine teachers provided written suggestions to improve teacher collaboration and two
teachers commented collaboration is effective as it is. Teachers’ suggestions are compiled in the following table:

Table 11.
Teachers Suggestions for Improving Teacher Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>“continue to have reading coaches”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>“allow more time to independently collaborate”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>“I feel the collaborative ‘Wednesday’ time should have more teacher/grade choice and time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>“teacher input on topics”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>“more time ‘built’ in for collaboration”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>“I believe teachers need more time to prepare, reflect upon and plan for the things that have been collaborated on”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 7</td>
<td>“teachers need to have more of a voice in collaboration; sometimes it’s heavily by coaches or coaches decisions deadlines can be asked without reasonable timelines in the normal function of the school day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 8</td>
<td>“having more of a guide line to follow”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 9</td>
<td>“teachers would have more time to collaborate with each other on lesson plans etc. (Possibly allotting Wednesday sometime during the year or on a monthly basis)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 10</td>
<td>“none, I think it is effective already”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 11</td>
<td>“none”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three themes emerged from teachers’ suggestions on how to improve teacher collaboration at their school site: 1) time to collaborate within grade level teams; 2) teacher input on topics; and 3) reading coach guidance. While the majority of the teachers support the school’s effort to facilitate teacher collaboration, several teachers
suggested time should be built in to “independently collaborate.” For example, one teacher stated, “I feel the collaborative Wednesday time should have more teacher/grade level choice and time.” Another teacher also suggested, “I believe that teachers need more time to prepare, reflect upon and plan for the things that have been collaborated on.” It is apparent that the school has created an environment of collaboration. Most importantly, most teachers support school practices. Nonetheless, teachers have the concern that not enough time is given to collaborate with each other on topics that pertain to their grade level. One teacher suggested “allotting Wednesday sometime during the year or on a monthly basis” to collaborate solely with their grade level. Teachers recognize teacher collaboration with their grade level team is effective and therefore want to see more time embedded in the regular working hours, particularly on Wednesday mornings already set aside for staff development.

The second theme addresses a lack of teachers’ input on topics when they collaborate. According to a teacher, “teachers need to have more of a voice in collaboration.” Another teacher suggested having more teacher or grade level choice. These teachers’ insights provide important information to the school site. On one hand, teachers are involved and support collaboration including grade level teams, reading coach guidance, and at large support staff. However, on the other hand teachers suggest there should be more professional input of teachers on collaborating topics. While teachers demand more teacher input on topics, they also recognize the effectiveness of collaborating with a reading coach.
The third theme that emerged refers to reading coach support to teachers. The results from Table 2 show that eighteen teachers strongly agree that teacher collaboration with a reading coach supports their instructional practices and five teachers only agree. This means 95.5% of the teachers are in strong agreement. There is no teacher in disagreement. One teacher suggests the school should “continue to have reading coaches.” Clearly, reading coaches have played a fundamental role at facilitating teacher collaboration and in this manner support teachers’ instructional practices. The research literature on staff development has identified coaching practices as an effective method to provide teachers an ongoing support on their instructional practices (Joyce & Showers, 1982). In this school site, weekly grade level meetings, collaborative Wednesdays between grade K-6 or K-8, and grade level pull-outs are forms of collaboration often facilitated by reading coaches. Although only one teacher offers this suggestion for school improvement, reading coaches play an important role and this should not be overlooked.

Summary

Chapter Four presented the data collected for this study. It explained and described teachers’ responses to a self-administered survey regarding their teacher collaboration. It is clear that the majority of the teachers support the school’s efforts to implement teacher collaboration, yet their suggestions for improvement reveal that their voice has not been sufficiently heard at the school site. Teachers recognize their collaboration positively affects student performance. Teachers’ perspectives provide meaningful insights
regarding teacher collaboration in relation to instructional practices. Chapter Five will present the conclusions drawn from this study and make recommendations for further action.
Chapter 5
CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

In this study I sought to determine what teachers’ perspectives are three years after a Restructuring Implementation Team submerged the school into reconstructing measures involving efforts of teacher collaboration in 2007. The organization of the survey used in this study resulted in teachers’ perspectives on three forms of collaboration that were established. Indeed, I found that teachers agree grade level teams, reading coach guidance, and at large support staff effectively support their instructional practices. Yet, teachers’ suggestions show there are areas in which teacher collaboration could be improved at their school site. In these processes, characteristics of teacher collaboration stand out that support teachers’ instructional practices and also provide areas in which improvement could be made.

The first characteristic that stands out refers to the time devoted to grade level meetings. Teacher collaboration with grade level teams is implemented very frequently over the course of the week. The fact that teachers are meeting at least three times during the week means that they are practicing ongoing supportive teams. The research conducted by Joyce and Showers emphasize the collaborative planning for organizational change efforts (Joyce & Showers, 1996). This is imperative since it is through collaboration that the teachers involved in this study create a relationship with other colleagues to adapt existing skills and learn new ones. This is done with the purpose of transferring the knowledge acquired to student learning. Even in those instances where teachers reported frequent grade level meetings, they would like to see more time
embedded to build on it. Thus, enough time to collaborate between grade levels teams is an effective way to support teachers with instructional practices.

The second characteristic refers to reading coach guidance. The research literature on staff development presented earlier has identified coaching practices as an effective method to provide teachers an ongoing support on their instructional practices (Joyce & Showers, 1982). One teacher stated that continuing to have coaches is important to school improvement on teacher collaboration. Teachers recognize the effectiveness of collaborating with a reading coach to support their instructional practices. Based on teachers’ responses, it appears that reading coaches play a key role at facilitating the topics for collaborating purposes. On the other hand, they suggest more teacher input on topics pertaining to teacher collaboration. Teachers call for more input on topics, particularly those pertaining to their grade level teams. Even though teachers reported reading coach guidance supports their instructional practices, they expressed dissatisfaction with how much their input is taken into account.

The third characteristic that stands out refers to the at large support staff. In this study, teachers suggest there should be more time for grade level collaboration. While most of the teachers support the school efforts to provide at large support staff, there is a small portion of teachers that see room for improvement when it comes to collaborating with other grade level teams. A few teachers suggested allowing more of this at large staff support time to collaborate with their grade level teams. They felt that increasing grade level collaboration can provide teachers with more time to prepare, reflect upon what they have collaborated on, and to plan for instructional practices.
Teachers’ perspectives in this study reveal the benefits of teacher collaboration. First, teacher collaboration allows teachers to adapt instructional practices to meet the diverse needs of students. When teachers were asked to identify the academic areas in which teacher collaboration has a positive effect on student performance, every teacher identified at least three areas. The majority of the teachers agree teacher collaboration has a positive effect on students’ academic performance including reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing and language development. Over half of the teachers believe teacher collaboration is an effective use of their time and support the schools efforts to provide collaborative practices. These create positive teacher input in collaborating areas including coaching guidance and at large support staff.

On the other hand, teachers’ perspectives also reveal some obstacles that limit their collaboration including the time allotted to collaborate in their grade levels and their input on topics. When *A Nation At Risk* was released in 1983, it revealed the limited teachers’ voice in school decisions. Teachers’ perspectives in this study show that while the majority support school efforts to provide teacher collaboration, some teachers still feel their voice has not been sufficiently heard.

Recommendations and Conclusion

E&M Elementary School is now in its first year out of Program Improvement status. The school is no longer considered low performing due to an increase of student performance on standardized testing during two consecutive years. For the school district involved in the study, the outcome represents an achievement for the efforts put into the
school reconstruction. A Restructuring Implementation Team established various components that helped E&M Elementary shape into a model. Of these components, staff development and teacher collaboration were emphasized to improve the quality of teaching learning. In a time of No Child Left Behind, there is a great focus on staff development to provide opportunities of teacher learning. Research presented in Chapter Two revealed that only a tiny fraction of the nation’s schools offer high-quality professional development programs (Hill, 2007). Efforts that seek to explore the effectiveness of staff development practices should not be overlooked, particularly if it involves teacher perceptions. The evidence presented on funding programs targeted to low performing schools shows a focus on staff development to foster teacher learning. However, as one teacher in this study suggests, “having more of a guideline to follow” could improve teacher collaboration.

Further Research

Further research is needed that investigates specific topics that facilitate teacher collaboration. This study emphasized three forms of teacher collaboration: grade level teams, reading coach guidance, and at large staff support. Identifying key topics to collaboration practices could address the needs of schools in general. This study does not provide statistical data that correlates teacher collaboration to student performance, which could be beneficial. This study also began to explore teachers’ perspectives on teacher collaboration at one school site. It is important to continue to seek out teacher input to empower them as educators so that they may take on a more active role in the decision
making process. It is teachers who are on the front lines of student education and have daily interaction with students who are the future.
Protection of Human Subjects Consent Cover Letter to Participants

Research Study Consent Form  
California State University, Sacramento

My name is Maria Romero and I am a graduate student at the California State University, Sacramento. I need your help to complete my final stage of a Master’s in Multicultural/Bilingual Education.

I am conducting a survey in which you are invited to participate. It focuses on elementary school teachers that implement various efforts of teacher collaboration. The intent of this research is to look at the effects of teacher collaboration to learn and adapt instructional practices to meet the diverse needs of students and the effectiveness of collaboration practices in a school in Program Improvement. The survey consists of seven questions that will take 15-20 minutes to complete. No risk is anticipated from your participation in this research. The survey will be distributed to 25 teachers in the primary and intermediate grades during a collaboration meeting and will be returned to the researcher in a sealed envelope. The consent and survey forms obtained in this research will be stored in a secured and locked file cabinet.

This survey is anonymous and the school’s name will also be kept confidential. No one else will view your survey but the researcher. Your answers will not be shared with any other individual at your school or any other site. Any information obtained will solely be used to understand effects of teacher collaboration in a teacher’s perspective. Furthermore, this research will not single out individual surveys. Only group results will be reported.

You may decline to answer any question or choose not to participate in this study. By signing below you indicate you have read this letter and agree to participate in this research. If you have any questions at any point during the completion of this research do not hesitate to contact me, Maria Romero, at mtromero12@gmail.com or my advisor, Dr. Baird, at pbaird@csus.edu.

________________________________  _____________________
Signature of Participant    Date
APPENDIX B

Teacher Collaboration Survey

1. How long have you been teaching?
   1-5 years  6-10 years  11-24 years  25+ years

2. Have you worked at another school besides the one you currently work?
   yes    no

3. Have you taught at a school that was not in Program Improvement?
   yes    no

4. Did you teach at this school before the 2007-2008 school year?
   yes    no

5. How often do you collaborate with your grade level team?
   once a week  twice a week  3+ times a week  other: ______

6. Check the box that best expresses your views for the following statements.

   a. Collaborating with my grade level team supports my instructional practices.

   b. Teacher collaboration with my reading coach supports my instructional practices.

   c. Teacher collaboration helps me to adapt my instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students.

   d. My school uses effective methods to support teacher collaboration with my grade level team.

   e. I find teacher collaboration to be an effective use of my time.

   f. My school uses effective methods that support teacher collaboration between grade level teams.

   g. I am supportive of my school’s efforts to implement teacher collaboration.

   h. Teacher collaboration has positive effects on my students’ academic performance.

   Based on your response for letter h, check one or more areas in which you believe teacher collaboration has had a positive effect on your students’ academic performance:

   Reading  Vocabulary  Writing  Language Development  Other

7. What suggestions do you have that would improve teacher collaboration at your school?

_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

NCLB Program Improvement School Requirements
Requirements over a five year period

Number of Years School Does Not Make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Year One
Did not make AYP

Year Two
Did not make AYP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement</td>
<td>School Improvement</td>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
<td>Restructuring</td>
<td>Restructuring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Educational Agency (LEA):</td>
<td>LEA continues:</td>
<td>LEA continues:</td>
<td>LEA continues:</td>
<td>LEA continues:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides technical assistance to PI school</td>
<td>Technical assistance</td>
<td>Technical assistance</td>
<td>Technical assistance</td>
<td>Technical assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notifies parents of PI status of school and school choice</td>
<td>Parent notification of PI status of school, school choice, supplemental services</td>
<td>Parent notification of PI status of school, school choice, supplemental services</td>
<td>Parent notification of PI status of school, school choice, supplemental services</td>
<td>Parent notification of PI status of school, school choice, supplemental services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets aside minimum 5% for professional development to meet highly qualified staff requirements</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides choice to attend another public school in the LEA that is not PI (LEA is responsible for transportation costs.)</td>
<td>School choice</td>
<td>School choice</td>
<td>School choice</td>
<td>School choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishes peer review process to review revised school plan</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Supplemental services</td>
<td>Supplemental services</td>
<td>Supplemental services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA adds:</td>
<td>LEA identifies school for corrective action and does at least one of the following:</td>
<td>During Year 4, prepare plan for alternative governance of school. Select one of the following:</td>
<td>LEA and School add:</td>
<td>LEA and School add:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Replaces school staff</td>
<td>Implement alternative governance plan developed in Year 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>School continues:</td>
<td>Implements new curriculum</td>
<td>Reopen school as a charter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revises school plan within 3 months to cover 2-year period</td>
<td>Plan implementation</td>
<td>Decreases management authority at school level</td>
<td>Replace all or most staff including principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses 10% of Title I school funds for staff professional development</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Appoints outside expert</td>
<td>Contract with outside entity to manage school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implements plan promptly</td>
<td></td>
<td>Extends school year or day</td>
<td>State takeover</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Restructures internal organizational structure of school</td>
<td>Any other major restructuring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LEA informs parents and public of corrective action and allows comment. LEAs may provide direct technical assistance to school site councils in developing school plans.</td>
<td>LEA provides notice to parents and teachers and allows comment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School continues:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration with district to improve student achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(California Department of Education, 2008)
REFERENCES


